

# HOW WELL TARGETED IS HIV TESTING OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN SINCE COVID-19 IN AUSTRALIA? RESULTS FROM NATIONAL HIV BEHAVIOURAL SURVEILLANCE, 2019-2023

## Authors:

Bavinton BR<sup>1</sup>, Broady TR<sup>2</sup>, Smith AKJ<sup>2</sup>, Mao L<sup>2</sup>, Chan C<sup>1</sup>, MacGibbon J<sup>2</sup>, Wilcock B<sup>3</sup>, Rule J<sup>4</sup>, Holt M<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney, <sup>2</sup> Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney, <sup>3</sup> Health Equity Matters, <sup>4</sup> National Association of People with HIV Australia

## Background:

HIV testing was impacted by COVID-19. We examined whether gay and bisexual men (GBM) at higher risk of HIV have returned to testing after the pandemic.

## Methods:

Data were from HIV-negative/untested participants in national HIV behavioural surveillance surveys (2019-2023) recruited at events, venues and online. We examined trends in annual and higher frequency HIV testing with logistic regression, stratifying by PrEP use and condomless anal intercourse with casual partners (CLAIC).

## Results:

Among 38,190 HIV-negative/untested participants, median age was 35 years, 81.7% identified as gay, and 69.3% were Australian-born. 89.5% had ever tested for HIV and 33.1% had used PrEP in the previous 6 months. 71.0% had tested for HIV in the last year in 2019, dropping to 57.0% in 2022, then increasing to 66.5% in 2023 ( $p<0.001$ ). Almost all PrEP-users had tested annually (2019=98.9% to 2023=96.8%) without much effect of COVID-19. From 2019 to 2023, annual HIV testing decreased from 54.2% to 38.9% among non-PrEP-users not reporting CLAIC ( $p<0.001$ ), and from 81.8% to 66.7% among non-PrEP-users reporting CLAIC ( $p<0.001$ ). Overall, 47.5% reported having 2+ HIV tests per year (2019=53.9%, 2021=39.7%, 2023=50.7%;  $p<0.001$ ). This decreased among all groups during 2019-2023: from 94.9% to 88.8% among PrEP-users ( $p<0.001$ ); from 31.2% to 18.3% among non-PrEP-users not reporting CLAIC ( $p<0.001$ ); and from 62.8% to 42.9% among non-PrEP-users reporting CLAIC ( $p<0.001$ ). Of all participants reporting 2+ tests per year, 62.7% were PrEP users, 24.0% were non-PrEP-users not reporting CLAIC, and only 13.3% were non-PrEP-users reporting CLAIC.

## Conclusion:

While HIV testing has almost recovered post-COVID-19, it is highly concentrated among PrEP-users. Less than half of GBM most susceptible to HIV acquisition – non-PrEP-users reporting CLAIC – had 2+ tests in the previous year. Most GBM do not test at the frequency recommended by guidelines. Encouraging frequent testing (and PrEP use) among non-PrEP-users engaging in CLAIC remains vital.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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