

THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO AN INCREASE IN HIV NOTIFICATIONS AMONGST ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS IN WA

Authors:

Minas B¹, Bacon M¹, Bevan J¹, Coci M¹, Wilshin C¹

¹Communicable Disease Control Directorate, WA Department of Health
No authors are of Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Background:

In 2022 there were 59 Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) notifications reported in Western Australia (WA), a 31% decrease compared to 2013. In contrast, 9 HIV notifications were reported in Aboriginal people in 2022, the highest number of annual cases in that population since 2003. This analysis describes the current epidemiology of Aboriginal HIV notifications in WA and the WA Department of Health public health response.

Methods:

HIV notifications data for the 2013 to 2022 ten-year period were extracted from the WA HIV Database and analysed by Aboriginal status, gender, risk exposure, place of residence and stage of infection. The public health response to these data was also examined.

Results:

In 2021 and 2022 there were a total of 14 HIV notifications reported in Aboriginal people, representing 37% of Aboriginal HIV cases notified in the past 10 years. Of the 14 cases, the majority were male (n=12), most were diagnosed with late-stage infection (n=8) and equally distributed across the metropolitan and rural areas (n=7). Risk factors included injecting drug use (IDU) (n=6), men that have sex with men contact (n=3) and heterosexual contact (n=5). In contrast, only three Aboriginal HIV cases reported IDU between 2013 and 2020.

In response to the increase in Aboriginal HIV cases, public health activities were enhanced across the six priority areas of the Western Australian HIV Strategy 2019-2023 aiming to increase opportunistic testing, undertake workforce development supporting rapid commencement of treatment and expand access to needle and syringe programs.

Conclusion:

WA has seen recent decreases in the number of HIV notifications; however there was an increase in HIV notifications among Aboriginal people. Notifications highlight the need for an equity approach to ensure prevention efforts are successful across all population groups, particularly those that experience intersectionality that has compounding effects on people's risk of HIV.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No disclosure of interests.