

Title: Demographic characteristics and time to treatment First Nations peoples diagnosed with HIV: The Australian National HIV Data Linkage Study

Authors: Ward J¹ Miller A², McManus H², McGregor S² on behalf of the Australian National HIV Data Linkage Study

¹UQ Poche Centre for Indigenous Research; ²The Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney

Background

Data linkage is important to identify gaps in programming, policy and health care not identifiable in any single data set. The National HIV Data Linkage Study links four national administrative data assets: HIV registry data, Medicare Benefits Scheme, Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and National Death Index. This analysis describes treatment coverage, including time to antiretroviral therapy (ART) initiation among First Nations peoples in Australia.

Methods

HIV notifications from the National HIV Registry among people diagnosed between 1997-2023 were linked by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare linkage team, using a stepwise probabilistic approach with name-code, sex, and date of birth as the matching variables. A sub-analysis of time to treatment was calculated on the 2014-2023 cohort, based on the number of days from date of HIV diagnosis to first ART prescription, using multivariable Cox regression.

Results

Overall, 95% of First Nations HIV notifications recorded in the National HIV Registry were linked to the administrative datasets, comprising 2.6% of the full linked national cohort; similar to the 2.4% for the full 1997-2023 cohort. In the linked cohort (N=639) the median age was 33 years; 79% were male, 56% were from urban areas, 29% regional, 14% remote, and 31% were diagnosed late.

Between 2014-2023 the proportion of First Nations peoples initiating ART within 6 months of diagnosis increased from 66% to 95%. For the 5-year period 2019-2023, treatment initiation in 4 weeks decreased from 58% to 52%, and initiation within 6 months increased from 92 to 95%, with no further increase at the 12-month time point.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates the feasibility of national data linkage and provides a large, nationally representative cohort of First Nations people ever diagnosed with HIV in Australia. The analysis identifies gaps in rapid treatment initiation but equity in treatment initiation within 6 months of diagnosis.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This study is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) RG210141. SM is the recipient of an NHMRC EL1 Investigator Grant.