

Improving our understanding of HIV notifications among people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds in Australia

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Background:

Australia has a large culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population with 30% of the population born overseas and 22% speaking a language other than English at home. People born overseas are contributing increasingly to notifications of HIV. We analysed data from the National HIV Registry to determine trends in HIV new diagnoses in Australia among people from CALD backgrounds.

Methods:

We defined people from CALD backgrounds as 'people who were born in non-main English-speaking countries AND/OR spoke non-English language at home'. We analysed HIV notifications data between 2013-2022, and described demographics, HIV exposure risk, CD4+ count, HIV subtypes, stages of HIV and time between year of arrival and HIV diagnosis for the CALD population.

Results:

The number of HIV notifications among people from CALD backgrounds declined by 21% over the study period, however the decline between 2019 - 2021 was likely to be influenced by restrictions due to COVID-19. The proportion of HIV notifications were highest among people born in Southeast Asia (40%) and attributed to exposure risk category of men who have sex with men (MSM) (61%), during the study period.

The percentage of notifications diagnosed late (CD4+ count <350cells/μL at diagnosis) among people from CALD backgrounds increased from 35% in 2013 to 46% in 2022. The proportion of late diagnosis increased in both exposure risk categories: MSM (from 27% in 2013 to 38% in 2022) and heterosexual exposure (from 48% in 2013 to 60% in 2022).

Conclusion:

This is a novel analysis of HIV notifications among people from CALD backgrounds in Australia. During the study period, HIV notifications among people from CALD backgrounds have slightly declined in Australia, however late diagnosis has increased especially among people reporting heterosexual exposure as risk category, suggesting a lack of services targeting people from CALD backgrounds and initiatives to raise awareness about HIV testing.