







# Even Me? Reframing HIV prevention

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# Why?

## Recent WA data shows...

- Since 2020, the number of HIV cases in people born overseas has continued to rise.
- While men who have sex with men are still the most represented in notifications, there is still a proportion of HIV transmission through heterosexual contact.
- **This does not suggest people born overseas are carriers of HIV. Rather, it highlights health inequities affecting some groups more than others.**

## What community told us...

- Some believe HIV and AIDS don't exist in Australia at all.
- Pathways in healthcare are confusing (e.g., GP referral or bulk billing).
- Conversations about sexual health and HIV can be taboo. HIV may be linked to shame, or seen as a result of immoral behaviour like sex or drug use.
- There's also an assumption that if HIV was something to worry about, a doctor would bring it up, so people don't ask about it.
- Mainstream public health messaging is ineffective. There is a need for community-led activities.



# The 'Even Me' Concept



# Delivery

- **Webpage:** On WAAC website, campaign assets and information.
- **Video assets:** Shared via WAAC social media (n=5).
- **Print assets:** 100 A3 posters were displayed at licensed venues, Edith Cowan University Joondalup Campus, and shopping centers in the Perth metro area. An additional 100 were posted to organisations across the state. Trackable QR code scanned (n=431).
- **Audio assets:** One published by UDUB radio, co-presented with an international student, and one published by Health Equity Matters.
- **Articles:** Published in Medical Forum, AMA's Medicus Magazine, WAAC's HIV Today.
- **Legacy media:** One week of print advertising (n=60,000) and four weeks of online advertising in the Examiner newspaper.
- **Presentations to WA and national workforce** (n=5)
- **Presentation to community:** Belmont Multicultural Women's Friendship Group (n=14).
- **Suite of graphics:** shared for blog posts.
- **Social media:** to be shared to community groups.







## It's time to rethink HIV

The need for inclusive and culturally safe healthcare

**Karina Reeves**  
Health Promotion Coordinator, WAAC

The landscape of HIV transmission in Australia is shifting. While HIV was historically concentrated among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, recent data shows a growing proportion of diagnoses among heterosexual individuals – particularly adults from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds.

Figures from the WA Department of Health indicate that HIV notifications increased from 68 in 2023 to 77 in 2024. Between January and June 2024 alone, 28 new diagnoses were reported, with the majority involving individuals born in South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. People from CaLD backgrounds continue to be recognised as a priority group under both the Western Australian Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Strategy 2024-2030 and the Ninth National HIV Strategy 2024-2030.

This shift highlights deeper social and structural issues that extend far beyond individual behaviour. Historically, HIV has often been wrongly framed as a consequence of "immoral" behaviour, reinforcing harmful narratives that drive stigma and discrimination. In the context of CaLD health, this moralistic framing compounds the real drivers of HIV transmission: structural inequalities, social exclusion, migration-related challenges, limited access to culturally appropriate healthcare, and ongoing stigma.

For many people from CaLD backgrounds, navigating a new healthcare system can be overwhelming, especially when services are not culturally safe or accessible. These barriers heighten HIV risk not because of personal behaviour, but because the systems designed to protect health often fail to reach or support everyone effectively. However, when services adapt to meet the needs of CaLD communities, this enables greater engagement and trust, which is essential to reduce sexual health stigma and improve access to HIV prevention, treatment and care.

WAAC's 'Even Me?' campaign was co-designed with CaLD community members and stakeholders. It raises awareness of HIV prevention, with an emphasis on pre-exposure prophylaxis and routine testing. The recommendations in this article are a result of the community consultations.

Did you know that in Australia...  
**Anyone can access medication to prevent HIV.**

**Even me!**

[www.waac.com.au/learn/hiv/even-me](https://www.waac.com.au/learn/hiv/even-me)

### The role of healthcare professionals

Healthcare professionals are at the frontline of reshaping how HIV is understood and addressed in Australia. Importantly, their role goes beyond clinical care.

#### Some practical ways to support equity in HIV:

- Avoid making assumptions about a patient's HIV risk based on background or appearance. Proactively initiating conversations about HIV prevention including HIV testing, condom use, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) with all patients is critical. Many people may assume they are not at risk if a healthcare professional does not raise the topic. Clinical guidance on prescribing PrEP is available through the ASHM National PrEP Guidelines, while community-focused information and translated patient resources are available via the WAAC website.
- Provide culturally safe services. This involves respecting diverse experiences and acknowledging the impacts of migration, trauma, and systemic discrimination. Practical steps include using professional interpreters, offering translated health information, maintaining confidentiality, and understanding cultural perspectives around sexual health and HIV. WAAC offers free training for healthcare professionals on inclusive practice to support this work.
- Normalising sexual health discussions as a routine part of healthcare is another important step. Framing sexual health as integral to overall wellbeing helps reduce shame and taboo, particularly among CaLD communities where sexual health topics may carry additional stigma. Stigma prevents individuals from seeking the care they need. To combat this, healthcare professionals must approach these conversations with understanding, respect and empathy. Discussing behaviours such as sex and drug use as normal aspects of human life is key to dismantling harmful stereotypes and improving access to prevention, testing and treatment services for all communities.

When healthcare settings are welcoming and inclusive, individuals are empowered to make informed choices about their sexual health, protecting not only themselves but also their families, partners and communities. ■

References available on request.

JUN-JUL 2025 MEDICUS

CPD VERIFIED

## Reframing HIV prevention for WA's diverse communities

HIV cases are increasing and health practitioners have a role to play in preventing the spread and encouraging the use of PrEP, writes Karina Reeves, Coordinator of Health Promotion at WAAC.

GUEST COLUMN



Recent data from the WA Department of Health show HIV notifications increased from 68 in 2023 to 77 in 2024. Between January and June 2024, 28 new diagnoses were reported, with the majority involving individuals born in South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are a priority group under both the Western Australian Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Strategy 2024-2030 and the Ninth National HIV Strategy 2024-2030.

Community consultations have revealed widespread gaps in knowledge about HIV risk, prevention, and treatment, particularly among migrants from Asia, Africa, and South America.

WA's early HIV prevention success largely stemmed from community-led campaigns targeting gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. These efforts were culturally relevant and resonated with the target population.

However, as HIV demographics shift to include more heterosexual individuals and those from CaLD backgrounds, prevention strategies must evolve accordingly.

The changing nature of HIV transmission highlights the importance of inclusive, adaptive approaches that address the specific needs of emerging at-risk groups.

#### Misconceptions of HIV Prevention

Stigma remains a major barrier, especially around sexual health and HIV. Misconceptions persist in CaLD communities – such as the belief that PrEP is only for men.

These misunderstandings are sometimes reinforced by healthcare professionals, who may not perceive women in heterosexual relationships as being at risk.

A 2024 scoping review found many providers were unsure about prescribing PrEP to cisgender women, emphasising the need for improved education and awareness.

PrEP is highly effective when taken as prescribed, preventing sexual transmission and reducing the risk of acquiring HIV from a partner who injects drugs.

For women, it offers a way to take control of their sexual health without relying on their partner's choices. Regular testing is also crucial, as delayed diagnoses lead to poorer health outcomes and increase the risk of further transmission.

#### The role of healthcare providers

Healthcare practitioners play a pivotal role in dispelling myths and initiating HIV-related conversations. In many cultural settings, patients expect providers to raise health concerns, including those related to HIV.

However, research shows clinicians may avoid such discussions for fear of offending patients from migrant backgrounds.

The Migrant and Refugee Blood Borne Virus Survey – a 2021 national study – found that most respondents would not be offended if offered an STI or BBV test by a doctor or nurse.

Notably, only 41% of respondents knew that HIV is not automatically included in routine blood tests. This misconception can result in people wrongly believing they've already been tested.

When healthcare providers avoid

HIV discussions, opportunities for prevention and early detection are missed, further entrenching health disparities.

#### Overcoming barriers

Language barriers, stigma, and limited healthcare engagement contribute to lower HIV testing rates in CaLD communities.

Addressing these requires promoting routine HIV testing – especially for women in high-risk situations or with partners from high-prevalence regions.

Early diagnosis and prompt pre-treatment are essential to stopping transmission and improving health outcomes. It's also critical to engage women of childbearing age to prevent vertical transmission to children.

Encouraging providers to initiate conversations about HIV risk, PrEP, and testing will help close the gap in service access and understanding. This proactive approach supports better health outcomes for CaLD women and ensures more equitable care.

#### Closing the knowledge gap

Creating an environment where sexual health, HIV risk, and prevention are regularly discussed in clinical settings is essential to inclusive care.

The ASHM Decision Making in HIV tool and National PrEP Guidelines offer resources for clinicians.

ED note: WAAC's 'Even Me?' campaign aims to empower CaLD communities with the knowledge and tools to prevent HIV and improve public health outcomes for all Australians.

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## Parents encouraged to say no to car drop offs on Friday

Primary school children across Australia will face up their mothers this Friday, May 16, for National Walk Safely to School Day. "Now in its 26th year, the national initiative encourages students, families, and carers to ditch the car and walk instead. The goal is to promote healthier lifestyles, safer streets, and cleaner air, one step at a time."

Led by the Australian Council of Australia, the campaign highlights the benefits of walking and other forms of active transport. It also calls attention to road safety, public transport use, and the importance of reducing traffic congestion around schools.

"Until they are 18, children must always hold the hand of an adult when crossing the road," Helen Kinsley, Chairman and CEO of the Australian Council of Australia said. "The initiative also links physical activity to better learning outcomes."

Walking, even for a few minutes a day, can improve a child's focus and academic performance. At part of the day, parents, teachers and carers are urged to give their cars and walk instead this Friday for the National Walk Safely to School Day.

Did you know that in Australia...  
**Anyone can talk to their doctor about HIV and ask for an HIV test.**

**Even me!**

Even me!

Even me!

Even me!

Even me!

Even me!

## Canning pioneers recall when it was all bushland

Highway. We used to ride our bikes from one house to the next in Canning Park, I can't imagine young people doing that today. The City of Canning was certainly a great place to grow up. Residents who have lived in Canning for more than 50 years can express interest in attending next year's Pioneer Day by calling 1300 422 66 or emailing [events@canning.wa.gov.au](mailto:events@canning.wa.gov.au).

It was a trip down memory lane for one of the City of Canning's oldest residents as the City paid tribute to its long-standing outdoorsy past Wednesday. Honouring the community's pioneers with a heartfelt acknowledgment as the Canning Exhibition Centre.

More than 200 residents attended the annual Pioneer Day on Wednesday, each having lived in the City for at least 50 years. Together, they've watched Canning grow from quiet bushland into a suburban and commercial centre.

Ninety-eight-year-old Edna Hoady, who has lived in the area for 96 years, said she could still recall a time when the Canning area was little more than a narrow road called Swan Street. "It's so different now, with the wide highway and the new train line,"

"I remember in the old days riding my bike up Ashby Highway past the old Parkers' Greenhouse," he said. "Back then we just had the other side of Ashby."

Volunteers across the City of Canning are being celebrated this week for the vital role they play in building a stronger, more connected community.

As part of National Volunteer Week, from May 19 to May 25, the City is honouring the thousands of people who give their time to support programs, and services across the area.

"We are very fortunate to have such a strong network of volunteers who work tirelessly to deliver positive outcomes for our communities," explained the City of Canning Mayor Patrick Hall. "Volunteers are the backbone of our community and deserve to be recognised and celebrated for all that they do. National Volunteer Week is an opportunity to acknowledge the selfless efforts of our community."

More than 100 volunteers currently work alongside City staff, but Mayor Hall said the full circle of local volunteers extends far beyond these numbers.

Residents interested in getting involved can reach out to their local community groups or visit the City's Volunteering Opportunities page.

Vaping and e-cigarettes are now banned in all WA workplaces

Vaping and e-cigarettes are now banned in all WA workplaces, including having a clear policy in place and using designated outdoor areas. They are also encouraged to consider specific workplace risks, such as children being present.

The updated Work Health and Safety Regulations now treat vaping the same way as tobacco smoking in WA workplaces. The intent is to give workers clearer protection from exposure to potentially harmful vapours while on the job.

Until now, employers were required to minimise exposure to hazardous chemicals, but the law did not specifically mention the risks of e-cigarettes. The revised rules now close the gap and apply to both general workplaces and mining operations.

The definition of e-cigarettes has also been expanded to include "novelty devices" and "heated tobacco" products, which have recently entered the market.

Employers are expected to manage vaping in the same way they manage smoking.



Edna Hoady has lived in the City of Canning for over 96 years. She is pictured alongside other pioneers of the Pioneer Day and local historian, Geoff Hoady.

















# EVEN ME

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## HIV

- Even Me

Stigma And Discrimination

PrEP

U = U

## SAFE AND RESPECTFUL SEXUAL HEALTH CARE IN WA

Did you know that in Western Australia, everyone, including people from diverse backgrounds, can access safe, respectful, and confidential sexual health care?

Whether you're visiting a **doctor (also known as a general practitioner or GP)** for a check-up, asking questions about **HIV testing**, or learning about **STI prevention** methods like condoms or **PrEP**, you have the right to be supported without judgement.

**Sexual health is part of your health and wellbeing.** No matter your age, visa status, language, or whether you're currently sexually active, it's always okay to ask questions and seek information.







Did you know that in Australia...

**Anyone can talk to their partner about sexual health.**

**Even me!**



To learn more about protecting your health and your community, scan the QR code or visit: [waac.com.au](http://waac.com.au)



Did you know that in Australia...

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Did you know that in Australia...

**Anyone can get treatment for HIV.**

**Even me!**



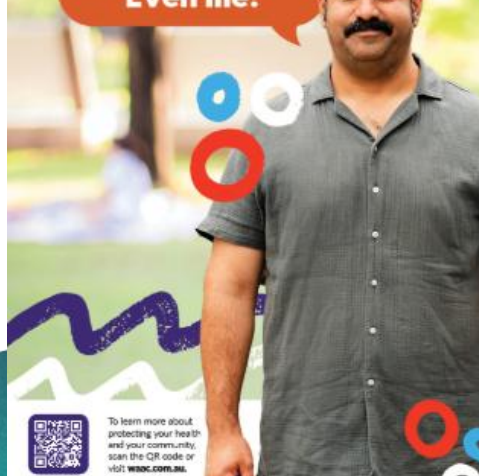
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Did you know that in Australia...

**Anyone can talk to their doctor about HIV and ask for an HIV test.**

**Even me!**




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Did you know that in Australia...

**Anyone can talk to a doctor about sexual health and HIV.**

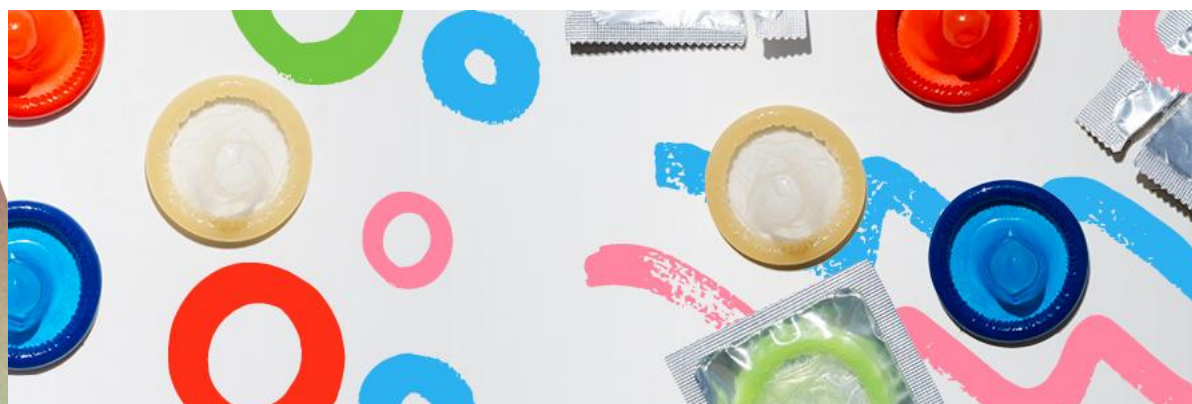
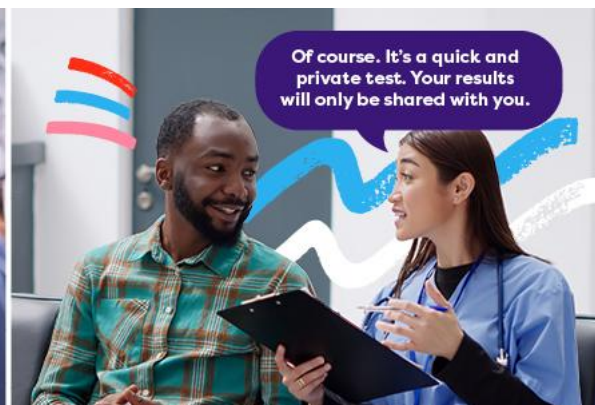
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# Key learnings

- Early evaluation shows strong community resonance and acceptability.
- Engagement observed throughout the process – a sign of meaningful progress.
- This approach challenges the broad use of the term ‘CaLD’ as a homogenising, colonial framework.
- Future phases to focus on specific populations defined by their own cultural identities (e.g. South-East Asian women).
- One single initiative cannot drive lasting change. The project represents progress towards HIV transmission elimination. Sustained, inclusive, community-led strategies are needed.

