

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF HIVST ON SEX WORKERS

Chandrasena U<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Policy Officer, Scarlet Alliance Australian Sex Workers Association

**Background:** Sex workers in Australia enjoy world renowned low rates of HIV despite the perpetuation of laws that criminalise, stigmatise and discriminate against sex workers. The exceptionally low rates of HIV among sex workers has been attributed to the success of peer education, outreach services, and the distribution and uptake of safer sex information and practices. The introduction of HIV self-testing (HIVST) in the varying legal environments sex workers are working within presents a new set of challenges for sex workers.

**Method:** Scarlet Alliance, the peak sex worker organisation in Australia, consulted our member organisations and individual sex workers on potential implications of HIVST. An online survey was distributed to our membership, our sex worker-only E-list, individual member email list and our member organisation contact list

**Results:** Although sex workers generally welcome HIVST as one tool within the suite of testing options, sex workers were concerned that there are no assurances that HIV will not be used to pressure sex workers to test in a work environment - as part of mandatory testing regimes or clients presenting with self-tests requesting unprotected services. Additionally, the risks involved in HIVST is compounded in jurisdictions in which sex workers living with HIV are criminalised as HIVST would mean that sex workers are potentially criminalised upon receiving a 'reactive' result. This risk is compounded for sex workers because, as a 'low prevalence' population, sex workers are more likely to receive false reactive results.

**Conclusion:** Barriers that undermine sex workers human rights, such as mandatory testing and criminalisation, also undermine sex workers' capacity to fully enjoy technological advances in HIV prevention. As a result, sex workers require specific supports in the case of a 'reactive' result to a HIVST.

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