

Approaches to providing care for overseas-born gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men living with HIV

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Background:

Overseas-born gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBM) living with HIV are a priority population in Australia's HIV response. Tailoring care to their needs is crucial to ensuring overall wellbeing, retention in care, and treatment adherence. We developed a practice guide for healthcare providers who provide care for overseas-born GBM living with HIV.

Methods:

To inform the practice guide, we conducted two focus groups with overseas-born GBM living with HIV ($n=14$) and two with HIV services providers ($n=10$) between October and November 2024. Focus groups explored experiences of Australian health services, approaches to providing care for overseas-born GBM living with HIV, and how sexual, cultural, and ethnic identities impacted HIV care.

Results:

Many participants indicated that the impact of an HIV diagnosis on migration opportunities was a key concern, although some participants living with HIV. Participants living with HIV also stressed the importance of service providers using non-technical medical terms, particularly when conveying information about the role of an undetectable viral load in preventing onward HIV transmission. While interpreters can play a role in communicating medical information, participants living with HIV expressed a degree of uncertainty as to the accuracy of the information conveyed. Some participants living with HIV indicated that peer support services were better able to help understand medical information about HIV, helping them adjust to living with HIV, and navigate Australia's healthcare system.

Conclusion:

We recommend clinicians recognise additional complexities surrounding migration with HIV, refer to specialist HIV migration and peer services early, and emphasise that many people living with HIV are successful in attaining permanent residency. Reflecting World Health Organization guidelines, clinicians should also use language such as "zero risk of onward transmission" to ensure the preventive benefits of attaining an undetectable viral load are easily understood.

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