

Telehealth for HIV care and management among people living with HIV in Australia

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Background:

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, many sexual health clinics and hospitals introduced telehealth consultations for routine check-ups and monitoring for people living with HIV. The aim of this study was to evaluate patient acceptability and experiences of using telehealth for routine HIV care with the secondary aim of identifying preferred models of HIV routine care for the future.

Methods:

We conducted an anonymous, online survey in English among people living with HIV throughout Australia between November 2021-December 2022. The survey was advertised by posters and postcards with a QR code. This survey asked about experiences of using telehealth since COVID-19, preferences for future consultations, and suggestions for enhancing telehealth consultations.

Results:

89 participants (80 males, 8 females and 1 non-binary person) were included in the study. The majority of participants were recruited from Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (50, 56.2%), were between 36-55 years old (49, 55.1%), spoke English at home (74, 84.1%) and had been living with HIV for more than 5 years (68, 76.4%). Among the participants, 69 had a telehealth consultation since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The aspects of telehealth most liked by participants were: 1) the convenience of not leaving home or work for the consultation; 2) less travel time; and 3) avoiding contact with other people. The three most disliked aspects of telehealth were: 1)not being able to be screened for STIs and/or have a physical examination at the same time; 2)the perceived impersonal nature of the experience; and 3)difficulties discussing other health concerns. Participants preferred future consultations have a mix between in-person and telehealth (40, 44.9%), however nearly a quarter prefer in-person consultations only (20, 22.5%).

Conclusion:

Telehealth consultations for routine HIV care and in conjunction with in-person consultations are acceptable for a majority of people living with HIV in Australia.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis & Sexual Health Medicine recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.

No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.