

YOUNG + POSITIVE: WHERE ARE YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV LOCATED ON THE AUSTRALIAN CASCADE OF CARE?

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Background: Little research has focused on where young people are located on the HIV cascade, and the different psychosocial issues they face, which can influence capacity and willingness to access care and support. We described the HIV cascade among young people, examining barriers and facilitators to care by each stage.

Methods: This analysis drew on data from the mixed-methods, community-based *Young + Positive* study, the first in Australia to document accounts of young people (aged 18-29) living with HIV, including both those with perinatally and horizontally acquired HIV. We used survey data (n=59) to characterize the cascade (retained in care, on antiretroviral therapy, virally suppressed), and qualitative interviews (n=23) to deepen understanding of what complicates and facilitates access to care and support. This is the largest quantitative sample of young people with HIV in Australia.

Results: Survey participants were mostly male (93%), identified as LGBTIQ+ (73%) and were diverse in cultural identities. Overall, 93% were retained in care, 96% were on antiretroviral therapy, and 90% were virally suppressed. Despite doing well clinically, 80% reported wanting/needing social support at the point of HIV diagnosis. Young people's narratives elaborated on the psychosocial challenges they face in adjusting to an HIV diagnosis, including disclosing to family and sexual partners and successfully engaging with social (less so clinical) support. They also demonstrated resilience to remain engaged in care despite financial, mental health, and other social stressors.

Conclusion: Young people are doing better at each stage of the HIV cascade than the general population, yet many continue to struggle to have their psychosocial needs and preferences met in relation to living with HIV. In a political context focused on treatment and prevention, there is a need for increased peer-driven research and support to address the social aspects of living happily (not just healthily) with HIV.

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