

SOCIAL NETWORK DISTRIBUTION OF HIV SELF-TESTS AMONG MSM IN AUSTRALIA: A PROSPECTIVE, NON-RANDOMISED TRIAL

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Background:

HIV testing uptake among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Australia remains suboptimal, highlighting the need for innovative approaches. This study evaluated uptake and acceptability of HIV self-testing (HIVST) distributed through social networks.

Methods:

In this non-randomised trial, HIV-undiagnosed MSM aged ≥ 18 years were recruited online (January 30–April 28, 2025). Participants were classified as test promoters (initial recruits who received kits for personal use and distribution) or recipients (received kits from promoters). Each promoter received four kits—one for personal use and three for distribution. Participants completed an online survey within three months. Recipients who completed the survey could enroll as second-wave test promoters and receive additional kits. The primary outcome was HIVST use within 7 days of receipt; secondary outcomes included use within 24 hours, ease of use, and willingness to reuse. Associations with uptake were analysed using Poisson regression.

Results:

Ninety-one test promoters received 364 HIVST kits; all used their own kit and completed follow-up (100%). Among first-wave recipients, 245 kits were self-reported as used. Eight recipients subsequently enrolled as second-wave promoters, distributing kits to 15 secondary recipients. Overall, 351 participants completed follow-up surveys, with 280 (80%) reporting use within 7 days and 181 (52%) within 24 hours. Use within 7 days was higher among those without Medicare (aRR 1.16, 95% CI 1.05–1.28; $p=0.004$), those with less recent or no HIV testing (3–6 months: 1.22 [1.02–1.45], $p=0.026$; 7–12 months: 1.36 [1.16–1.60], $p<0.001$; >12 months:

1.30 [1.11–1.53], $p=0.001$; never: 1.31 [1.11–1.55], $p=0.002$), and those spending little (1.36 [1.10–1.68], $p=0.004$) or no time (1.33 [1.06–1.66], $p=0.015$) with LGBTQ+ peers. Most participants found HIVST easy to use (99%) and would reuse it (88%).

Conclusion:

Social network-based HIVST achieved high uptake and acceptability among MSM, supporting more equitable access to HIV testing.

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