

# NEEDS OF WOMEN FROM AFRICAN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA WHO ARE LIVING WITH HIV

## Authors:

Shafeeu N<sup>1</sup>, Mugwagwa H<sup>1</sup>, Boughey A<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Positive Women Victoria

<sup>2</sup> Australian Breastfeeding Association

## Background:

Increasingly, women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Australia are either living with undiagnosed HIV or being diagnosed late. Positive Women Victoria (PWV) is specifically funded to support women living with HIV (WLHIV). African-born women make up approximately 30% of WLHIV in Victoria, but remain under-represented in PWV's membership cohort. This research aimed to identify barriers to HIV clinical services and community support access for African-born WLHIV in Victoria.

## Methods:

Two participant groups - African-born women who are members of PWV, and service providers of Victorian HIV clinical and community services, were invited to take part in individual, semi-structured interviews. Interviews with women explored their experiences when accessing support services, and service provider questions focused on experienced and perceived barriers to service provision for their clients. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis.

## Results:

11 women and 16 service providers were interviewed from May-December 2017. Women were aged 35-55, born in South, East or Central Africa, and varied with respect to marital and employment status and carer responsibilities. Multiple barriers affected women's ability to access care as well as providers' ability to fulfil duty of care. Fear was an overarching barrier shared by all women due to previous experiences of stigma, discrimination and unwanted disclosure from services, and from their communities. Unwanted disclosure by non-HIV specific clinical services was an important barrier identified by the women only.

## Conclusion:

Results highlight a necessity for increased HIV knowledge and awareness within non-HIV specific clinical services, particularly with respect to women's experiences. Raising awareness in African communities about HIV testing and treatment options in Australia is essential to address misconceptions and reduce stigma and discrimination. Results identify opportunities for meaningful engagement with CALD communities, to inform culturally appropriate and accessible service provision within the Australian HIV response.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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