
HIV treatment uptake figures far too low, warns NAPWA

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Figures show that nearly half the Australian HIV positive population is not taking HIV treatment, even though doing so would improve their quality of life and reduce the risk of disease progression.

Red tape, high costs and a lack of awareness about new, well-tolerated treatments—as well as the health benefits of starting them early—mean that only 54% of Australians living with HIV are on HIV treatment, according to Phillip Keen from the National Association of People Living With HIV/AIDS (NAPWA).

“There is a growing consensus that starting HIV treatment early can have significant health benefits,” said Keen. “But the latest data suggests that there is often too big a gap between when people are diagnosed with HIV and they begin treating it.”

In a presentation today at the Australasian HIV/AIDS Conference in Melbourne, Keen said that red tape is one of the biggest barriers to treatment uptake. In most states, people with HIV can only get their HIV treatments from hospital-based pharmacies, not community pharmacies. Dispensing fees can also be a major barrier for people on lower incomes.

“Many people living with HIV simply don't know about the latest medical advances,” said NAPWA's Executive Director, Jo Watson. “We're encouraging people to start a conversation with their doctor to get all the info about starting treatment and benefits to their health. Also, taking treatment is much easier today due to more potent and better tolerated treatments that have been developed.”

The report also shows that for the majority of people with HIV, treatment is delayed until well after their white blood cell (CD4) levels have fallen below the point where treatment is recommended by current guidelines.

The latest guidelines from the US, that Australia traditionally follows, recommend that all people with HIV treat, regardless of CD4 level.

NAPWA is a signatory to the Melbourne Declaration, a call to action from Australia's peak HIV/AIDS organisations. The Melbourne Declaration calls for a greater government response on issues like early treatment and rapid testing in order to reach Australia's obligation of a 50% reduction in new infections under the 2011 UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

Media – to arrange interviews with or for more information, call Alex McClintock 0432 108 837 who is at the conference or Feehan Communications 02 9267 2711

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