Goals of session

• Workshop participants come away with a current understanding of HIV as it affects women in Australia

• Encourage a strategic approach to addressing the needs of women living with HIV in the peer-based HIV services
Overview

• The visibility of women in the Eighth National HIV Strategy 2018-2022

• National services and programs

• State and Territory services and programs

• Synthesis and conclusion

Strategy goals

• Sustain the virtual elimination of HIV among sex workers, among people who inject drugs, and through mother-to-child transmission

• Eliminate the negative impact of stigma and discrimination

• Minimise personal and social impacts
Applying a gender lens

The Strategy does not identify women as a ‘priority population’, but points out that

…women are recognised across most other priority populations. Women, both those with HIV and those at risk of HIV, have unique challenges and experiences that are not easily addressed solely on the basis of risk. It is important to apply a gender lens to all aspects of the HIV response to ensure women’s needs are considered and addressed.

(Commonwealth of Australia 2018: 18)

Advocacy for women

- National round table to discuss ways to increase visibility of women in the national strategy
- Recognition of the unique impacts of stigma
- Finding measures of success that can track the progress of the strategy against the needs of women
- Issues: increase testing among women, reduce the gap in late dx compared to gay men and MSM
- Diversity of populations of women affected by HIV
Strengthening the gender lens

• Making sure women are more visible in the next iteration of the Strategy

• Stronger focus on access to care for PLHIV who are not Medicare eligible – a key issue for many WLHIV who have a migrant or refugee status
• Finding ways to increase rates of testing

National programs and services

• Estimated 3,000 WLHIV in Australia, around 10% of all people living with HIV. Estimates of 400-500 women potentially undiagnosed.

• Worldwide 18 million women have HIV, making them the largest global demographic (Gordon 2018).

• National Day of Women Living with HIV Australia – the fifth is of these is held at venues throughout the country in 2020.
Women living with HIV in Australia: Overview of current issues and services

Nationwide

Services and resources that have a nationwide reach with respect to WLHIV include:

Nationwide: Advocacy

- PATSIN (Positive Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Network)
  - Of a membership of nine, three must be women
  - Current convenor is a woman

- Femfatales, the National Network of Women Living with HIV
  - Recent Femfatales work: paper leading to an ASHM review of the national breastfeeding guidelines
Women living with HIV in Australia: Overview of current issues and services

Nationwide: peer and community

- Peer-based HIV organisations/services: NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, Tasmania
- LGBTIQ community health services/AIDS Councils
- Positive Women Victoria (the only funded peer-based service specifically for women)
- Online: TIM Women [https://theinstituteofmany.org/projects/tim-women/](https://theinstituteofmany.org/projects/tim-women/)

Additional considerations

Other services of relevance for women:

- National and local HIV initiatives and services that focus on heterosexual people and families
- Initiatives such as Australian National Guidelines for Cervical Cancer, and their impacts on WLHIV (Samodurov 2018)
- Research – a recent study discussed next
Research of note

A recent large-scale study (n=484) explored the barriers to linkage and retention in care for WLHIV in Australia (Giles et al 2019).

Key findings:

While women are well linked to, and retained in, HIV care, the challenge lay at the first step: getting tested.

HIV Futures Women

Key findings:

• 10% of respondents (approx. 87)
• More culturally diverse (31% born outside of Australia)
• Somewhat less likely to have undetectable viral load at last test (81%)
• Longer period from exposure risk to diagnosis
• Over half reported recent financial stress: lower incomes and rates of home ownership.
Women from African communities

Qualitative research conducted by Positive Women Victoria

Key findings:
- Self-reported experiences of stigma, discrimination or privacy breaches in health services: fear and reality
- Service providers recognised barriers including language, culture and trauma
- Diagnosis is often outside high caseload clinics, with lower levels of knowledge
Summary of services

Services and programs the states and territories can be summarised as:

- Sexual health and HIV medicine
- Peer support networks and programs
- Community services, including outreach and case management
- Specialist services

New South Wales

Women in NSW can draw on a range of programs and services in all four clusters
NSW – sexual health and HIV medicine

• In terms of HIV medicine, the overall response of the NSW Department of Health occurs through the HIV Support Program (HSP)

• Local Sexual Health Services throughout NSW and may be the first point of call for many women

NSW – Peer support networks and programs

All services of Positive Life NSW are available to WLHIV, including:

• A Treatments Officer, who offers one-on-one support about HIV treatments for PLHIV, partners, family and friends
• The Social Club – a social support group for all PLHIV who identify as heterosexual
• Peer Led Partner Notification
• Housing Support for PLHIV
• Silver Warriors, supporting PLHIV 45 years and over
• Peer Navigation program – peer support to navigate the health and social services system
• A 2020 campaign – ‘Hidden in plain sight’ – challenges conceptions that PLHIV cohorts, such as women, are ‘emerging’ or ‘hard to reach’ – https://www.positivelife.org.au/
NSW – Community services
Pozhet Heterosexual HIV Service

- Offers news and information about HIV for heterosexual people at risk of HIV, including the latest on testing and prevention and campaigns on the risk of contracting HIV
- For heterosexual people with HIV, Pozhet offers information, support and referral to key services; as well as opportunities to meet others to share stories and experiences
- For health professionals, Pozhet offers advocacy, advice and training to support services to work better with heterosexual PLHIV

NSW – Other programs and orgs

- The Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service (MHAHS) focuses on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ADAHPS is the state-wide service for people with diagnosed or suspected HIV-related cognitive impairment and complex needs
- NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)
- Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP)
Victoria

- Victoria is well resourced in all four clusters of services, and has a range of specific programs focusing on women

- We'll look at peer support and peer-run services in particular

- ...but also briefly focus on HIV and sexual health services and specialist services

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Victoria – peer support

- Positive Women Victoria (PWV) is funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services: peer support, health promotion and advocacy

- Living Positive Victoria (LPV) has a range of programs for women and heterosexual men (merged with Straight Arrows in 2016), including peer navigation, Phoenix for Women, Positive Leadership Development Institute

- Supports Positive Women Victoria through shared premises, program support for peer support, and joint events
Victoria – HIV and sexual health services

Alfred Health, the Victorian HIV Service, is a national leader in HIV clinical care, and also provides leadership in national HIV policy development.

Other services include:

- an ASHM s100 Prescribers List of General Practitioners who have been trained in HIV care
- Equinox, a peer-led Trans and Gender Diverse health service (Thorne Harbour Health)
- Positive Living Centre (pantry, client services)
- several sexual health clinics, Melbourne Sexual Health Service

Victoria – specialist services

Services for culturally diverse people in Victoria include:

- The Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health (CEH)
- The Multicultural Health and Support Service, which has a strong focus on HIV prevention.
- Resources on HIV for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and health services across Australia, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HIV Awareness Week (ATSIHIV)
Queensland – peer support

Queensland Positive People is the state-wide peer-based HIV organisation, affiliated to NAPWHA, QPP auspices – https://www.qpp.org.au/?s=women:

- Positively Women Social Group and Women's Connection Circle
- Events in connection with the National Day of Women Living with HIV in Australia
- Positively Women and Heterosexual Men’s group
- Peer navigation and outreach
- Peer and outreach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services

Queensland – specialist

Amongst the sexual health services throughout the state is the Men's, Women's and Sexual Health Program based in far northern Queensland which includes Indigenous Health Workers
Western Australia

It should be noted that HIV notifications in 2019 among heterosexual men overtook those for men who have sex with men for the first time.

NAIDOC week is particularly important in WA, and is often used by the WA AIDS Council to highlight the work of Aboriginal role models and to promote sexual health.

Positive Organisation of WA (POWA)

• Peer support and education
• Formed in 2017 to represent the peer-led voice in WA and strengthen MIPA
• Volunteer peer support program
• Community events, PSB training
WA AIDS Council

- The WA AIDS Council Champions Peer Education Project recruits community leaders and members from South-East Asian and Sub-Saharan African communities who want to make a difference.
- Diversity of epidemic in WA: heterosexual, culturally diverse
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs/services
- Mothers and babies support group

South Australia – community services

- The HIV Women's Health Program, auspiced through Relationships Australia, supports and assists women from all cultural backgrounds who are living with, or affected by HIV. Referrals, Women's Lounge
- The HIV Women's Peer Support Service was developed by the HIV Women's Health Program and the PEACE Multicultural Services team in collaboration with culturally diverse women living with HIV.
- The Indaba HIV website https://indabahiv.com.au/ offers practical information and resources for women living with HIV in South Australia, and for their service providers.
- SAMESH (SA Mobilisation and Empowerment for Sexual Health) offers peer support for people living with HIV, and peer-led workshops (PHOENIX) for recently diagnosed men and women.
SA - health

• The Women's HIV Clinic is located at the Royal Adelaide Hospital and is staffed by a specialist Sexual Health physician, with expertise in HIV care and management, and an HIV specialist nurse.

• MOSAIC Blood Borne Viruses Support Services focuses on the health and emotional wellbeing of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, hepatitis & blood borne viruses.

ACT

• The AIDS Action Council provides a variety of services to people impacted by HIV and AIDS, including
  ➢ peer support
  ➢ case management
  ➢ social support
  ➢ financial assistance through the Trevor Daly Fund.

• The council organises specific events for Positive Women.
Tasmania

TasCAHRD

- Services include
  - individual case management and support
  - information about treatments
  - testing, transmission and prevention
  - advocacy and referrals.

Positive Lives Tasmania: relatively new positive voice organisation

Northern Territory

- The Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council monthly support group for positive women
  - one-on-one support for positive women that require emotional and social support
  - information about PrEP
  - harm reduction, NSP
  - the Sex Worker Outreach Program (SWOP NT): unique issues include newly-arrived sex workers
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services
  - Clinic 34 sexual health service
Some strategic issues

- Testing and diagnosis: entry point is often sexual health services, antenatal services low caseload GPs
- Improve knowledge and referrals at point of care through partnerships
- Diversity: cultural, language, life experience, experience of HIV, trauma, state population patterns
- Ageing well for women: unique challenges linked to financial wellbeing, stigma and how HIV affects women as they age
- Breast feeding: current engagement
- Equity in achieving 95:95:95 targets
- Potential for the peer-based organisations to collaborate strategically on a women’s workplan with specific short- and medium-term policy outcomes

Finally

NAPWHA has an important role in drawing together the strands of services

National stigma focus:

- bring Australia as a whole up to date with the developments in HIV prevention, treatment and management since the mid-1990s
- provide an understanding in the general community of U=U
Thank you!

References

- Giles, M.L., MacPhail, A, Bell, C. et al., 2019, The barriers to linkage and retention in care for women living with HIV in an high income setting where they comprise a minority group. AIDS Care, 31(6):730-736.
References


