



Media Release

World AIDS Day 2023: Inclusion. Respect. Equity
1 December 2023

Australia has committed to the virtual elimination and transmission of HIV by 2030, with the declaration of 'leaving no one behind'. Whilst there is a disproportionate burden of other blood borne viruses (BBVs) and sexually transmissible infections (STIs) in our communities, rates of HIV are comparable to that of non-Indigenous Australians.¹

There were 580 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV, and only 17 new notifications reported in 2021. New diagnoses have declined over the past 10 years, however HIV testing also declined throughout and post the COVID-19 pandemic. This may impact the overall figures.

The Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector has been relentless in their efforts to test, treat and educate their community about HIV and other BBVs and STIs. Their hard work helps ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV have access to treatment to enable viral suppression, which means they have no risk of transmitting the infection to a sexual partner.

Australia is a world leader in the elimination of HIV, in part due to our successful approach to community partnerships and collaboration, which aligns well with the World AIDS Day 2023 theme, '*Inclusion. Respect. Equity*'.

Dr Jason Agostino, NACCHO's senior medical advisor and member of the HIV Taskforce states "It has been great to see the recent declines in new HIV cases among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Virtual elimination of HIV is in reach for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The HIV Taskforce Report outlines the key actions to get there along with continued shared decision making and investment in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector."

Complex social factors including, intergenerational trauma, poverty, lack of access to health services, low health literacy, high incarceration rates, and ongoing stigma around HIV continue to affect the elimination of BBVs and STIs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.

Donnella Mills, NACCHO Chair, says, 'to achieve the goal of eliminating HIV transmission in Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this year's World Aids Day theme *Inclusion. Respect. Equity*. couldn't be more critical. Stigma around people with HIV and HIV itself is really concerning. Ultimately, the impact of stigma increases rates of infection because people are too afraid to talk about HIV and afraid of getting tested.'

'To truly make a difference, we've got to put an end to HIV stigma, increase our prevention programs and up our game in the HIV care processes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means not only ensuring access to treatment but providing the support necessary for individuals to achieve viral suppression. It's time for all levels of government to step up and work in a coordinated way with stakeholders across the sector.'

NACCHO works with partners to continue advocating for the elimination of HIV and the disproportionate rates of sexually transmitted diseases and blood-borne viruses among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To build awareness and engage our communities in conversations around HIV, NACCHO hosts the popular HIV Awareness Week Virtual Trivia. This year, it will be held on Thursday 7 December 2023. The event brings people working in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community together, to reduce stigma and mobilise grassroots action.



You can [register here for the HIV Awareness Week virtual](#) trivia, which will be held on Thursday 7 December and is open to all ACCHO staff and organisations supporting ACCHOs.

World AIDS Day marks the beginning of HIV Awareness Week, which builds on the original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HIV Awareness Week, that launched in 2014 by Prof. James Ward ([UQs Poche Centre for Indigenous Health](#)) and [SAHMRI](#).

NACCHO is the national peak body representing 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) across the country on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO is the third largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, with over 3,500 out of the 6,000 staff working in ACCHOs being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. Many NACCHO members have almost 50 years of experience in the delivery of comprehensive primary health care. Services are delivered through fixed, outreach and mobile clinics operating in urban, rural, and remote settings across Australia.

¹ https://www.kirby.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/Annual-Surveillance-Report-2022_HIV.pdf

² <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/06/fifth-national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-bloodborne-viruses-and-sexually-transmissible-infections-strategy-2018-2022.pdf>

