

Tracking the Progress 2021:

National HIV Strategy



UNSW
SYDNEY



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The years for comparison in this report are from the end of 2016 to the end of 2020 unless focus is given to the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, where the years for comparison are 2016 to 2019, and 2019 and 2020.

Sources of data are provided in the data dashboard on the Kirby Institute data site.

Acknowledgement is given to the many contributors helping report progress against the National HIV Strategy. The full list of contributors can be found on the Acknowledgement page of the Kirby Institute data site.

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Tracking the Progress 2021: National HIV Strategy

The goals of the Eighth National HIV Strategy are to:

1. Virtually eliminate HIV transmission in Australia within the life of this Strategy
2. Sustain the virtual elimination of HIV transmission among people who inject drugs, among sex workers and from mother to child
3. Reduce mortality and morbidity related to HIV
4. Eliminate the negative impact of stigma, discrimination, and legal and human rights issues on people's health
5. Minimise the personal and social impact of HIV

The National HIV Strategy has nine targets that provide specific focus for the efforts made towards achieving the goals of this Strategy. Each target has corresponding indicators that measure progress towards attaining the target. The full list of the targets and their indicators are listed in Appendix i.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in restrictions of access to healthcare, including testing and treatment. These restrictions likely impacted on progress against many indicators between 2019 and 2020. For this reason, the years for comparison in this report are from 2016 to 2019, and 2019 to 2020.

Target 1

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Increase the proportion of people with HIV (in all priority populations) who are diagnosed to 95%

- Between 2016 and 2020, the estimated proportion of people who were living and diagnosed with HIV increased from 88% to 91%. Despite the increase, more work is required to meet the target of 95% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) are diagnosed.
- The proportion of gay and bisexual participants in the Gay Community Periodic Survey (GCPS) who reported being tested for HIV at least once in the previous 12 months increased from 68.2% in 2016 to 74.3% in 2019. Between 2019 and 2020 this proportion declined from 74.3% to 68.4%. The decline in the proportion reporting testing in 2020 is likely due to a decrease in testing rates related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. By comparison, the proportion of participants tested at least three times in the previous 12 months increased from 32.9% in 2016 to be 50.9% in both 2019 and 2020.
- From 2016 to 2019, among gay and bisexual men attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion who had been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months remained stable, between 90.6% and 91.8%. Between 2019 and 2020, this proportion declined from 90.1% to 87.8%.
- Among female sex workers attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion who had been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months increased steadily from 87.8% in 2016 to 92.0% in 2019, and then declined to 87.4% in 2020.
- Among heterosexuals aged from 16 to 29 years attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion who had been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months increased by 13% from 52.2% in 2016 to 61.9% in 2019, and then declined to 58.7% in 2020.
- In the same period, among people who inject drugs attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion who had been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months remained stable from 2016 to 2019 (between 74.7% to 77.4%). Between 2019 and 2020 this proportion declined from 77.4% to 72.0%.
- CD4+ T-cell count at HIV diagnosis can indicate how long a person has had HIV before being diagnosed. Late HIV diagnosis is defined as a CD4+ cell count of less than 350 cells/ μ L at diagnosis where there is no evidence of recent infection. Among HIV notifications attributed to male-to-male sex, the proportion diagnosed late increased from 29.3% in 2016 to 40.5% in 2020. Among HIV notifications attributed to heterosexual sex, the proportion diagnosed late increased from 42.1% in 2016 to 57.7% in 2020. For full data and breakdowns by all exposure classifications, please see the [Kirby Institute data site](#).
- Among participants of the GCPS, the self-reported HIV prevalence among gay and bisexual men increased from 7.3% in 2016 to 8.2% in 2019 and then declined to 7.3% in 2020.
- Among participants in the Australian Needle and Syringe Program Survey (ANSPS), between 2016 and 2020, the laboratory confirmed HIV prevalence fluctuated between 1.4% (in 2017) and 2.5% (in 2020).
- *Data relating to **Indicator 1i: Prevalence of HIV among people in custodial settings** are in development and will be presented in future reporting.*

Target 2

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Increase the proportion of people diagnosed with HIV on treatment to 95%

- Between 2016 and 2020, the estimated proportion of people diagnosed with HIV who were receiving antiretroviral treatment (ART) remained stable and was 91% in 2020. Greater access to treatment across priority populations is required to meet the target of 95%.
- Among participants in the GCPS, the proportion of HIV positive men who reported receiving ART remained stable and was 86.9% in 2020.

Target 3

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Increase the proportion of people on treatment with an undetectable viral load to 95%

- Between 2016 and 2020, the estimated proportion of PLHIV receiving treatment with a suppressed viral load (less than 200 copies of HIV per millilitre of blood) increased from 95% in 2016 to 97% in 2020. The 95% target was met in all years from 2016 to 2020.
- Among gay and bisexual men living with HIV and attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion with a suppressed viral load increased from 93.0% in 2016 to 95.6% in 2020. Fewer people living with HIV attended clinics participating in the ACCESS project in 2020 and trends in data to 2020 should be interpreted with caution.
- Among people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds living with HIV (classified using country of birth) and attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion with a suppressed viral load increased from 92.3% in 2016 to 95.8% in 2020.
- Among PLHIV who inject drugs and attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion with a suppressed viral load increased from 90.2% in 2015 to 97.3% in 2020.

Target 4

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Reduce the incidence of HIV transmissions in men who have sex with men and other priority populations

- Between 2016 and 2019 the HIV notification rate declined by 14% from 4.2 to 3.6 notifications per 100 000 population. Between 2019 and 2020, the HIV notification rate declined by 31% from 3.6 to 2.5 per 100 000. Similar trends occurred among males and females. Declines between 2019 and 2020 are likely attributable in part to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on healthcare access and testing, and travel during 2020.
- The number of HIV notifications attributed to male-to-male sex declined from 714 notifications in 2016 to 534 notifications in 2019, a decline of 24%. Between 2019 and 2020 the number of notifications declined by 32% from 534 to 365. A full breakdown of the number of notifications by exposure classifications can be found on the [Kirby Institute data site](#).
- Changes in the proportion of HIV notifications classified as newly acquired (clinical evidence of HIV acquisition within the previous 12 months) may be influenced by changes in HIV incidence but can also be influenced by changes in HIV testing patterns. Between 2015 and 2019, the proportion of notifications attributed to male-to-male sex and classified as newly acquired declined from 41.5% in 2015 to 36.3% in 2019, and then declined to 27.9% in 2020. Similar declines were seen across all exposure classifications in 2020 and were likely related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A full breakdown by exposure classification can be found on the [Kirby Institute data site](#).
- Among female sex workers attending clinics participating in the ACCESS project, HIV incidence remained low and was 0.00 per 100 person-years in 2020.
- *Data relating to **Indicator 5a: Incidence of HIV among people who inject drugs** were not available at the time of reporting. Future reporting will include data relating to this indicator.*

Target 5

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Sustain the virtual elimination of HIV among sex workers, among people who inject drugs and HIV transmission from mother to child through the maintenance of effective prevention programs

- Between 2016 and 2020 the number of infants who acquire HIV through perinatal transmission reported to the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit remained low. In 2018 and 2019, there were two and one case of perinatal HIV transmission, respectively.
- Of infants born to women living with HIV, the proportion who were diagnosed with HIV was 4.7% in 2018, 2.8% in 2019 and 0% for 2016, 2017, and 2020. It should be noted that the number of perinatal HIV exposures reported to the APSU may be under reported and caution should be applied in the interpretation of these figures.

Target 6

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Increase the proportion of eligible people who are on PrEP, in combination with STI prevention and testing, to 75%

- Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is the use of antiretroviral treatment by HIV-negative people to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV. PrEP became available to eligible individuals through the Australian Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) on 1 April 2018. Between the end of July 2018 and the end of December 2020, the cumulative number of people with one or more PBS-subsidised PrEP prescriptions increased from 6 503 to 39 868.
- Among non-HIV-positive participants of the GCPS:
 - The proportion who reported being aware, eligible and who reported using PrEP in the previous 6 months increased from 2.4% in 2016 to 21.3% in 2020. This proportion does not include those who were ineligible for PrEP through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
 - Among the men who reported using PrEP, the proportion who also received an STI test in the previous 12 months remained close to 100% for all years, 2016 to 2020.
 - Of the men who reported engaging in condomless anal intercourse with casual male partners in the previous six months, the proportion who reported using PrEP increased from 4.5% in 2016 to 34.5% in 2020.
- Between 2016 and 2019, among gay and bisexual men who have received PrEP and attended clinics participating in the ACCESS project, the proportion who had at least one STI test in the previous 12 months remained stable and was 95.3% in 2020. By comparison, the proportion who had at least three STI tests in the same period fluctuated between 52.8% to 66.0% from 2016 to 2019, then declined from 62.5% to 48.9% between 2019 and 2020.
- Among participants in the ANSPS, between 2016 and 2020 the proportion of people who inject drugs that reported re-using another person's used needle and syringe in the previous month remained fluctuated between 15.8% and 18.9% and was 15.8% in 2020.
- *Data relating to **Indicator 6b: Proportion of the eligible population receiving PBS-subsidised PrEP in the previous 12 months** was not available at the time of reporting. Future reporting will include data relating to this indicator.*

Target 7

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75% of people with HIV
report good quality of life

- Among participants of the HIV Futures study, using a four-point scale, the proportion of PLHIV reporting their general health status and general well-being to be excellent or good was 51% in 2019, down from 60% in 2016. More work is required to reach the target of 75% of PLHIV reporting good quality of life.

Target 8

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Reduce by 75% the reported experience of
stigma among people with HIV, and expression
of stigma, in relation to HIV status

- As reported in the **Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour 2019 HIV and STIs in Australia**:
 - Among PLHIV surveyed in 2018, 56% reported experiencing any stigma in the last 12 months compared with 74% in 2016.
 - Among health care workers surveyed in 2018, 44% reported witnessing any stigma towards PLHIV in the last 12 months. Further, 22% of health care workers reported expressing any stigma towards PLHIV because of their HIV status in the last 12 months.
- As reported in the **Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour 2021 HIV and STIs in Australia**:
 - Among gay and bisexual men surveyed in 2020, 74% reported any stigma in relation to their sexual orientation in the last 12 months.
 - Among members of the public surveyed in 2020, 30% reported that they would express stigma or discrimination towards PLHIV.

Appendix

National HIV Strategy

Indicator	Data source
Target 1 Increase the proportion of people with HIV (in all priority populations) who are diagnosed to 95%.	
1a Proportion of people living with HIV who are diagnosed.	Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney
1b Proportion of gay and bisexual men who have been tested for HIV 1 time or more in the previous 12 months.	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
1c Proportion of gay and bisexual men who have been tested for HIV 3 times or more in the previous 12 months.	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
1d Proportion of people who inject drugs who have been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months.	Australian Needle Syringe Program Survey
1e Proportion of gbsm who have been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months attending a health service participating in the ACCESS network	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
1f Proportion of fsw who have been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months attending a health service participating in the ACCESS network	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
1g Proportion of pwid who have been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months attending a health service participating in the ACCESS network	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
1h Proportion of heterosexuals aged 16-29 who have been tested for HIV in the previous 12 months attending a health service participating in the ACCESS network	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
1i Proportion of new HIV diagnoses determined to be late (CD4 count<350 cell/ μ L) by exposure category.	State and territory health authorities
1j Self-reported HIV prevalence among gay and bisexual men.	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
1k Prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs.	Australian Needle Syringe Program Survey
1i Prevalence of HIV among people in custodial settings.	National Prison Entrants' Blood Borne Virus Survey (NPEBBVS)
Target 2 Increase the proportion of people diagnosed with HIV on treatment to 95%.	
2a Proportion of people living with diagnosed HIV who are receiving ART.	Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney
2b Proportion of HIV positive gay and bisexual men receiving ART.	Gay Community Periodic Surveys

Appendix

National HIV Strategy		
	Indicator	Data source
Target 3	Increase the proportion of those on treatment with an undetectable viral load to 95%.	
	3a Proportion of people receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV infection whose viral load is less than 200 copies/mL.	Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney
	3b Proportion of gay and bisexual men receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV infection whose viral load is less than 200 copies/mL.	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
	3c Proportion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV infection whose viral load is less than 200 copies/mL.	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
	3d Proportion of people who inject drugs receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV infection whose viral load is less than 200 copies/mL.	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
Target 4	Reduce the incidence of HIV transmissions in men who have sex with men.	
	4a Annual notification rate of new HIV diagnoses.	State and territory health authorities
	4b Number of HIV notifications by exposure category.	State and territory health authorities
	4c Incidence of recent HIV infection among HIV diagnoses by exposure category.	State and territory health authorities
	4d Incidence of HIV among people who inject drugs.	Not yet reported
	4e Incidence of HIV among female sex workers.	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
Target 5	Sustain the virtual elimination of HIV among sex workers, among people who inject drugs and from mother to child through the maintenance of effective prevention programs.	
	5a Incidence of HIV among people who inject drugs.	Not yet reported
	5b Incidence of HIV among female sex workers.	ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
	5c HIV transmission to newborns perinatally exposed to HIV.	Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit

Appendix

National HIV Strategy

Indicator	Data source
Target 6 Increase the proportion of eligible people who are on PrEP, in combination with STI prevention and testing to 75%.	
6a Number of people with one or more PBS-subsidised PrEP prescriptions in the previous 12 months.	Monitoring HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis in Australia
6b Proportion of the eligible population receiving PBS-subsidised PrEP in the previous 12 months.	Not yet reported
6c Proportion of non-HIV-positive gay men who have received PrEP in the previous 12 months.	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
6d Proportion of gay and bisexual men who have received PrEP and had at least 1 STI tests.	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
6e Proportion of gay and bisexual men who have received PrEP and had 3 or more STI tests	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
6f Proportion of gay and bisexual men who have received PrEP and have had an STI test	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
6g Proportion of gay men who have engaged in condomless anal intercourse with casual male partners in the previous six months who have received PrEP	Gay Community Periodic Surveys
6h Proportion of people who inject drugs who report re-use of someone else's needle and syringe in the previous month	Australian Needle Syringe Program Survey
Target 7 75% of people with HIV report good quality of life.	
7a Proportion of people with HIV who report their general health status and their general well-being to be excellent or good.	HIV Futures
Target 8 Reduce by 75% the reported experience of stigma among people with HIV, and expression of stigma, in relation to HIV status.	
8a Proportion of surveyed people living with HIV who report experiencing any stigma or discrimination in relation to their HIV status in the last 12 months.	Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour
8b Proportion of surveyed men who have sex with men who report experiencing any stigma or discrimination in relation to their sexual orientation in the last 12 months.	Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour
8c Proportion of health care workers expressing stigma or discrimination towards clients living with HIV.	Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour
8d Proportion of the Australian public who report they would express stigma or discrimination towards people living with HIV.	Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour