

Get it straight: HIV and heterosexuals

A fact sheet for health professionals

Who are HIV-positive straight people?

Heterosexuals living with HIV are a very diverse group of people. They include men and women, partners and families. They come from a wide range of socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They are married and single, old and young. About one in five people with HIV in New South Wales identifies as heterosexual.¹

What's important to know about this client group?

Research shows that heterosexuals living with HIV tend to have little contact with other HIV-positive people, peer support or HIV services. Barriers to accessing services and support include lack of information, social isolation, geographical dispersal, cultural background, language difficulties, concerns about stigma and stereotyping, and a profound need for privacy and confidentiality.² As a result, many HIV-positive heterosexuals and their families do not have easy access to information, skills and resources that are useful for managing their health, the risk of transmission, disclosure and relationships. Referring these clients to appropriate and specialised services is therefore of utmost importance to promoting a healthy life with HIV.

How do I interact with this client group?

There are many issues this client group may need help with: meeting others, advice about treatments, finding a doctor, safe sex, safe injecting drug use, building relationships, disclosing HIV to a new partner, complementary medicine, benefits, legal assistance and housing—in fact, almost anything related to living with HIV.

It is important to consider not only *what* information is given, but also *how* it is given. Try not to make assumptions about your clients' sexual orientation, sexual practices or drug use. And avoid 'curiosity' questions about how they contracted HIV. These assumptions and questions can cause discomfort for these clients and make them unwilling to approach services.

What does my client need to know now?

- Where to go for blood tests and medical care
- Where to go for HIV testing (partners)
- Who to ring for support and information
- Where to find cultural and language-specific support
- Where to get information on safe sex and HIV transmission
- Where to get information on post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)
- Who to ring to get advice about treatments
- Where to find a counsellor or social worker.

What resources can I give my client now?

- Pozhet phone number and website address (see overleaf)
- Multicultural service phone number and website address (see overleaf)
- *Changing lives*
- *A–Z of sexual health*
- *PEP brochure*
- *Getting it right*
- *Living a positive life* (in English with instructions on how to access it in other languages)
- Multicultural brochures (you can print out the web version in your client's language before they leave your clinic): www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au

Make sure you have these resources in stock. They are available from the Heterosexual HIV/AIDS Service (Pozhet) and from the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service.

Where can I access HIV information and support?

If you wish to remain involved in the management of your client's health, you can access support and information from the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine.

See www.ashm.org.au

Information for clients

Finding the nearest doctor

NSW HIV/AIDS information line

To find an HIV doctor, clinic, counsellor or social worker close to where you live.

Ph: (02) 9332 9700 Freecall: 1800 451 600

TTY: (02) 9332 4268

Sexual health clinics

To find your nearest clinic, or see a doctor, nurse or social worker, look under 'S' in the White Pages or go to www.racp.edu.au/public/SH_register2006.pdf

Aboriginal community controlled health services

To see a doctor or Aboriginal health worker at your nearest Aboriginal community controlled health service, look under 'A' in the White Pages or go to www.ahmrc.org.au/mapofmemberregions.htm

Finding emotional and practical support

Heterosexual HIV/AIDS Service (Pozhet)

Pozhet is a statewide program supporting men and women living heterosexually with HIV/AIDS, their partners and family members.

Freecall: 1800 812 404 Website: www.pozhet.org.au

Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service

To contact bilingual/bicultural co-workers who assist people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Freecall: 1800 108 098

Website: www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au

Western Suburbs Haven

For social support, cheap groceries, lunch, workshops, internet access and respite care in Sydney's Greater West, and to find out about events for heterosexuals living with HIV.

Ph: (02) 9672 3600

Website: www.westernsuburbshaven.org.au

NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUUA)

To access services for past and current injecting drug users. Freecall: 1800 644 413

Aboriginal sexual health workers

Aboriginal sexual health workers are based in both the public and Aboriginal community controlled health sectors within all areas of New South Wales.

Go to www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/getting_tested.html#shw

ACON (formerly the AIDS Council of NSW)

For counselling, family support, treatments advice, vitamins and referrals, contact your local ACON branch.

Ph: (02) 9206 2000 Freecall: 1800 063 060

Website: www.acon.org.au

Finding support for families and children

KWAIDS (Kids with AIDS)

Camp Goodtime is a national camp for families living with HIV. Contact the Paediatric HIV Social Worker at Sydney Children's Hospital.

Freecall: 1800 689 188 Website: www.aidstrust.com.au

Family Planning NSW

To get help with all your sexual and reproductive health needs.

Ph: (02) 8752 4300 Website: www.fpahealth.org.au

FPA Healthline

To have your questions about sexual and reproductive health answered.

Ph: 1300 658 886

Men's Line Australia

Provides help and telephone counselling for men with family and relationship problems.

Ph: 1300 789 978 Website: www.menslineaus.org.au

References

- 1 NSW Department of Health. (2006). *NSW HIV/AIDS Strategy: Environmental Scan 2006–2007*. Sydney, p. 6: heterosexuals accounted for 18% of overall notifications but a much larger proportion of late diagnoses (about 40%). Available at http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2006/pdf/hiv_aids_strat_enviro_scan.pdf
- 2 Persson, A., Barton, D., & Richards, W. (2006). *Men and women living heterosexually with HIV: The Straightpoz study, Volume 1* (Monograph 2/2006). Sydney: National Centre in HIV Social Research, The University of New South Wales. Available at <http://nchsr.arts.unsw.edu.au/pdf%20reports/Straightpoz.pdf>
Körner, H., Petrohilos, M., & Madeddu, D. (2005). *Living with HIV and cultural diversity in Sydney* (Monograph 4/2005). Sydney: National Centre in HIV Social Research, The University of New South Wales. Available at http://nchsr.arts.unsw.edu.au/pdf%20reports/hiv_cald.pdf

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