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Developing a sustainable HIV, viral hepatitis,
and sexual health workforce



AIDA

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS
DOCTORS' ASSOCIATION

napwha national association of
people with HIV australia

ASHM, AIDA and NAPWHA congratulate the Australian Government's release of new National BBV and STI Strategies

Media Release – 30 November 2018

ASHM, Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) and National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA) have welcomed the Australian government's release of five new National Blood Borne Virus (BBV) and Sexually Transmissible Infections (STI) Strategies in the lead up to World AIDS Day tomorrow.

The National Strategies acknowledge the crucial role of national health and community organisations in ensuring the success of the framework and agreed direction for a high-quality and coordinated national response to BBV and STI for 2018–2022.

"ASHM is pleased that our inputs have been incorporated across five of these strategies in HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, sexual health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This includes key areas for action to increase the knowledge and awareness of BBV and STIs among general practitioners and primary care professionals. Ensuring that a highly-skilled, multidisciplinary health workforce is respectful of and responsive to the needs of people with or at-risk of BBV and STIs," said ASHM CEO, Alexis Apostolellis.

"Also, to achieve our goals, we will need to engage beyond specialist services – extending the workforce development reach to medical practitioners and allied health workers who are not yet engaged in PrEP, HIV, STI, viral hepatitis care. Breaking down stigma in healthcare settings and towards otherwise underserved populations is also an imperative."

"NAPWHA successfully advocated for the inclusion of targets for stigma reduction and improving quality of life for HIV positive people. We welcome the inclusion of *Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV (MIPA)* and *Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV (GIPA)* listed as guiding principles in the new Eighth National HIV Strategy 2018–2022. The MIPA and GIPA principles are critical inclusion in improving the relevance, acceptability and effectiveness of program development in HIV responses. Through access to better information about care and prevention, this ultimately reduces the unacceptable stigma and discrimination that people living with HIV can experience," said NAPWHA Acting Executive Director, Dr John Rule.

"NAPWHA are also delighted to see reference to peer support across the strategies and look forward to working with the Commonwealth on developing these through the strategy implementation process".

Both NAPWHA and ASHM advocated for inclusion of *Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)* — the social campaign highlighting the research to-date that has found that people with HIV who take ART and achieve and maintain sustained viral suppression have effectively no risk of sexually transmitting the virus to an HIV-negative partner, which has been acknowledged in the Eighth National HIV Strategy 2018–2022. "Much investment is yet needed, however, the powerful combination of PrEP and U=U (and Treatment as Prevention) positions Australia well to potentially be one of the first countries in the world to eliminate HIV transmission," Dr John Rule adds.

AIDA spokesperson, Dr Ben Armstrong said, "It is both impressive and appreciated that the Government have actively included an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice on issues regarding BBV and STI and how they affect all Australians, including our Indigenous Peoples. We also appreciate that they have worked hard to include our input in these strategies, and that our voices form part of a strategy spanning five years, at the state and national levels."

The release also comes with Health Minister, Greg Hunt's announcement of accompanying down-payment investment – an additional \$5 million in funding to support the implementation of the strategies at a national level.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved the Australian-devised and manufactured Atomo HIV Self-Test – a single-use rapid finger prick that is expected to be available for online purchase in early-2019. Improving the frequency, regularity and access to testing is a key action area in the Eighth National HIV Strategy 2018–2022.

ASHM publishes the *HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B testing portal* to ensure best practice for health professionals when providing, interpreting and delivering results to patients. This portal will be updated in early-2019 to reflect the newly announced changes in self-testing – with information that advocates proper access and linkages to services.

The five new National BBV and STI Strategies are available at <http://www.health.gov.au/sexual-health>

For all media enquires, contact ASHM Media on **0403 184 339** or media@ashm.org.au

Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) is the peak body representing the HIV, viral hepatitis and sexual health workforce.

Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) is a not-for-profit, member-based, professional association supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors.

NAPWHA is Australia's peak non-government organisation representing community-based groups of people living with HIV.