



HIV futures six

Making Positive Lives Count

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The HIV Futures research program is the largest of its kind in Australia. It is designed to provide HIV, health and funding agencies and HIV positive people themselves with a two yearly picture of the overall health, well being and social situation of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

The living with HIV team, in collaboration with a broad range of health and community organisations, distributed the HIV Futures 6 survey nationally in 2008. The survey asked PLWHA about their health, use of antiretroviral, complementary and other treatments, use of information and support services, and their housing and financial situation. It also asked about sex and relationships, social support, recreational drug use, work and financial situation and future planning.

The research team consulted extensively with PLWHA, HIV and health organisations around Australia in order to ensure that the survey was asking the most important questions in the most appropriate and useful way.

This brochure is a summary of the major findings from HIV Futures 6. If you would like more detail, please contact us for a full copy of the report (see back page) or you can download it from our study website.



DEMOGRAPHICS

The HIV Futures 6 survey was completed by 1109 HIV positive Australians from all states and territories.

This represents approximately 6.6% of the estimated HIV positive population.

92.4% were male (1018), 7.4% were female (81) and 0.3% were transgender (3). 78.5% were gay men, 7.5% heterosexual women, 7.0% heterosexual men, 4.5% bisexual men, 0.5% lesbian women and 0.7% bisexual women. The remaining 1.3% fell into other categories. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 80 years with a mean of 48.0 years and a median of 47.0 years. The majority of participants were Australian born (75.0%). Twenty five respondents (2.3%) were of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Island origin.



RESEARCH RESULTS

HEALTH AND HIV

People were asked about their diagnosis experience, their general health and well being, as well as the impact of HIV on their health.

HIV Antibody Testing

22.9% had received pre-test counselling/ engaged in pre test discussion (26.2% of those testing positive in the last two years), 55.8% received post-test counselling (74.8% of those testing positive in the last two years) Pre and post test counselling was most often provided by medical personnel and respondents were generally satisfied with the information and support received from this person.

Current Health Status

72.8% rated their health as good or excellent and 66.2% rated their general well being as good or excellent. Almost all PLWHA had taken a CD4/T-cell test and a viral load test.

Health conditions in addition to HIV

21.1% of respondents had been diagnosed with an AIDS defining illness, 9.6% in the last two years AND 24.7% of respondents indicated that they had experienced HIV-related illnesses. 46.1% indicated that they had a major health condition other than HIV/AIDS. The most common conditions reported were hepatitis C (5.0% of the total sample), cardiovascular disease (9.9%), asthma (3.9%), and type II diabetes (3.7%).

77.6% reported low energy or fatigue in the past twelve months, 60.7% experienced a sleep disorder, 40.1% experienced confusion or memory loss, 31.9 % experienced weight loss and 29.0% reported experiencing lipodystrophy or lipoatrophy.

72.6% of respondents reported that they had undergone sexual health screening in the twelve months prior to survey and 14.6% said they had been diagnosed with an STI in the previous twelve months.

Mental health

In the last six months 27.0% of respondents had taken prescribed medication for depression and 28.6% for anxiety. 44.6% had ever had a diagnosis of a mental health condition. 40.5% had ever been diagnosed with depression, 8.8% in the last two years.

Viral Hepatitis

23.6% had at some point had hepatitis A and 61.6% had been vaccinated against hepatitis A.

23.4% had at some point been diagnosed with hepatitis B, of whom: 77.5% had cleared the infection, 16.0% had ongoing infection and 2.9% had a chronic infection. 69.9% had been vaccinated against hepatitis B.

12.7% of respondents said they had tested positive for hepatitis C and 28.3% of those with hepatitis C had ever had medical treatment for this.

TREATMENTS

Antiretroviral Therapy

79.6% were currently using ARV, most commonly one NNRTI and two NRTI, and 85.0% had used ARV at some time. 32.7% of respondents were using a combination of three drugs.

39.1% of those participants currently taking ARV reported that they experienced difficulties taking them of which the major problems were side effects (19.2%) and remembering to take the drugs on time (20.2%).

83.5% of respondents believed that combination antiretroviral drugs mean better prospects for PLWHA, while 7.3% believed that it is still too soon to tell. 30.0% believed that combination antiretroviral drugs are harmful and 23.3% believed that the side effects outweigh the benefits of antiretroviral drugs. 46.4% of the sample were taking ARV twice daily and 45.1% were taking ARV once a day.

38.1% of those currently on ARV had taken a break from ARV and the median length of break was four months.

Doctors were less likely to be consulted before a break than during or afterward, however 30.6% saw their doctor before, during and after the treatment break.

Complementary Therapies

Complementary therapies tended to be used in conjunction with allopathic treatment. 56.6% used vitamin and mineral supplements, 16.0% used herbal therapies and 18.0% used marijuana for medicinal purposes.

SERVICES

Health Services

For HIV specific treatment 46.5% saw an HIV GP/S100 prescriber and 32.3% saw an HIV specialist/physician.

For general health care treatment 42.0% of PLWHA saw an HIV GP/S100 prescriber and 27.4% saw a non-HIV GP. For 36.5% of respondents these were different doctors.

Other Services

The services most often used at AIDS organisations were treatment advice, social contact, counselling, peer support, complementary therapies and advice on legal matters.

Information

The most important sources of information on treatments/HIV management were HIV GPs/S100 prescribers, HIV specialists, HIV magazines and newspapers, HIV/AIDS organisation publications, HIV positive friends and articles in the gay press.

The most important sources of information on living with HIV were HIV magazines and newspapers, HIV positive friends, publications from HIV/AIDS groups, HIV GPs and HIV specialists.

Publications

Gay and HIV press were accessed by large proportions of the sample, as were HIV community publications (particularly within their constituency area).

Involvement with AIDS Organisations

63.2% had some contact with HIV/AIDS organisations, mostly receiving newsletters or being clients of these organisations.

7.3% were employees of HIV/AIDS organisations.

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF PLWHA

Contact with Other PLWHA

Most respondents knew another PLWHA. 15.0% had a spouse/partner with HIV, 53.1% had acquaintances with HIV. 67.2% spent at least some time with other PLWHA. 15.2% had been involved with the care of someone with HIV/AIDS in the last two years and 68.7% said someone close had died of AIDS related causes

Disclosure

Almost all respondents had disclosed their HIV status to at least one person, generally partners, close friends and family. For 51.4% of respondents, their HIV status had been disclosed to another person when they did not want it to be (22.0% in the last two years).

Social Support

The most important sources of social support were partners/spouse, pets, doctors and close friends.

Planning for the Future

20.6% planned only one day at a time, while 53.6% planned at least one year ahead.

Relationships and Sex

Over one quarter (30.7%) of PLWHA had not had sex in the past six months. 43.2 % of PLWHA were in a regular relationship and of these 37.7% had a partner who is also HIV positive.

32.4% of the respondents had anal or vaginal intercourse with a regular partner in the past six months. Condom use with regular partners was strongly related to the HIV-status of the partner.

55.3% of the sample had sex with casual partners in the past six months. 29.8% of male respondents reported always using condoms with casual male partners.

Information about the most recent episode of sex with a casual partner in the previous six months was provided by over half the sample. Vaginal or anal intercourse took place in 79.7% of these instances. 16.2% used condom with of most recent HIV+ partner, 64.1% with a partner of unknown HIV status and 77.8% with an HIV negative partner.

51.2% of PLWHA would prefer to be in a relationship with someone who is also HIV positive. 57.1% of PLWHA expressed some fear of rejection from potential partners if they tell of their HIV status. The majority of PLWHA (62.3%) felt HIV had a negative effect on their sexual pleasure.

Only 18.3% of PLWHA agreed with the statement *I feel more confident about unprotected sex because of the new treatments.*

Those who agreed were no more likely than others to be on antiretroviral treatment or to be confident about treatments, but they were more likely to have unprotected sex.

Very few PLWHA agreed that undetectable viral load means HIV is unlikely to be transmitted (18.8%). However, 29.0% of PLWHA agreed with the statement *If there was a vaccine which prevents HIV I would not practice safe sex.*

42.4% agreed with the statement *I am worried about disclosing my HIV status to sexual partners because of the current legal situation,* and 28.4% expressed some concern about the legal implications of disclosure of sexual practices to service providers.

Recreational Drug Use

Alcohol was the drug most commonly used by PLWHA (75.7%), and 47.6% had used tobacco in the previous 12 months.

Approximately one quarter of respondents reported having missed a dose of ARV at some point as a result of using illegal drugs and 6.7% reported having had a bad experience as a result of using both illegal drugs and ARV.

HOME, WORK & MONEY

Accommodation

36.2% were in private rental accommodation, 38.1% owned or were purchasing house or flat, 13.4% were in public rental accommodation (government owned), and 3.3% were in community housing/housing co-operative.

40.1% of PLWHA lived by themselves and 52.2% of PLWHA lived with pets. 75.3% of respondents had access to a car

23.0% had ever changed their accommodation as a result of having HIV/AIDS and 5.5% had in the last two years.

Employment

Just over half of respondents were currently in paid employment (54.7%), the majority of these being in full-time work (37.4% of total sample). The majority of the remainder described themselves as either not working or retired. Most respondents said they had either left their career or in some way reduced their career goals as a result of their HIV diagnosis.

Around half of the respondents who were working said that HIV has had an impact on their capacity to perform their work duties. Most commonly respondents reported that they tired more quickly, that they had difficulty concentrating and that they have had to reduce their work hours.

52.0% of PLWHA currently in work had not disclosed their HIV status to anyone at their workplace, while 16.5% did not try to keep their HIV status confidential. The most common difficulties for those who do want to maintain confidentiality at work were gossip and explaining absences from work.

Finances

42% of respondents identified their main source of income as a government benefit or pension. As well, more than one half of PLWHA reported experiencing at least some difficulty with meeting the cost of daily living.

63.4% had difficulty paying for clothing, 62.0% for utilities, 60.5% for housing, 49.0% for food and 52.7% for transport

34.2% of those on a government benefit had been assessed by a Commonwealth Medical Officer in the past 2 years. While this resulted in termination of benefits or change in conditions for few respondents, it caused distress for 39.3% of those assessed.

Poverty

31.0% of PLWHA are living below the poverty line. Just under one quarter of respondents have a partner with whom they share financial resources and this protects some from extreme economic hardship. Very few respondents who are earning an income from paid employment reported incomes below the poverty line whereas around half of those on government benefits are living in poverty.

Discrimination

7.9% experienced less favourable treatment in relation to accommodation, 2.6% in the last two years

26.4% experienced less favourable treatment because of HIV in relation to health services, 9.9% in the last two years

17.3% experienced less favourable treatment in relation to insurance, 30 in the last two years.

Getting copies of the full report

If you are interested in receiving free copies of the full HIV Futures 6 report, or more copies of this brochure, please contact us at:

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This and other reports are available for download from our website: www.latrobe.edu.au/hiv-futures



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The HIV Futures 6 Study is part of the Living with HIV Program at The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society La Trobe University.

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