



HIV ➤ Newly Diagnosed

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2.1 What happens now?

It can be very difficult when you find out you have HIV. Many people still don't know much about HIV/AIDS and unfortunately many myths remain about this disease. Even if you've had HIV for a long time, you may be feeling confused and worried about the future. It can feel like you are the only person this has ever happened to.

It's important to remember that you are not alone. Thousands of other people in Australia are living with HIV/AIDS, including many people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

Learning to live with HIV/AIDS can take time and it's likely that being HIV-positive (infected) is going to mean some changes to the way you live and work, and your relationships with partners, family and friends. Take your time making decisions about the future – you don't have to rush into making decisions all at once.

There are many organisations across Australia that can help you with information, advice and support. Many people working at these organisations are HIV-positive (infected) themselves and some organisations, such as Positive Life NSW, are especially for people with HIV, their families, partners and friends.

“My family came here when I was really young so I talk with an Australian accent and most of the time I feel Australian. But my parents' culture and their beliefs and values are important to me too. I can't tell them I'm gay or HIV- positive (infected). They wouldn't cope with it. It's hard for my friends and even some health care workers to understand. I eventually found support with a service that has a lot of clients from different cultural backgrounds and they understand the cultural conflicts I have to live with and deal with.”

2.2 Confidentiality and Discrimination

Confidentiality means that any information a health or HIV/AIDS organisation has about you is private, and they can't give that information to other people unless you tell them to.

In Australia it is against the law for any staff member working for such an organisation to discuss any aspect of your health care – or even the fact that you use their service with any person outside of that organisation unless they have your permission.

This applies not only to doctors and nurses but also social workers, counsellors, interpreters and reception staff. None of these people can tell your husband, wife, partner, parents or children about your health without your permission.

Sometimes it may feel like too many people know your private business. For example, in a clinic you may see a number of doctors, nurses and other staff. This is because in hospitals and clinics staff usually work as a team. Any knowledge or discussion they have relating to your HIV status is in order to provide you with the best possible care.

Discrimination means to act unfairly against a person or group of people because of their gender, sexuality, race, skin colour, health problems or religious beliefs. In Australia it is against the law

for any health care worker to discriminate against you or refuse you service for any of the following reasons:

- you are HIV-positive (infected);
- you do not speak English or speak English with an accent;
- you are not an Australian citizen;
- your marital status;
- you have a disability;
- you are male;
- you are female;
- you are a woman who has sex with other women, a man who has sex with other men, you have sex with both men and women or are transgender;
- you are a man who has sex with women or a woman who has sex with men; or
- you are an injecting drug user.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against or treated unfairly for these or any other reasons you can make a complaint. In the “Finding Services’ section of this website there are contact phone numbers for the Anti- Discrimination Board/Commission in each State and Territory.

The staff at these organisations will tell you if you have sufficient grounds to make a formal complaint.

By making a formal complaint you are not creating problems. Everybody has the right to good service and respect.

2.3 Who do I tell?

This is often a difficult question. Being HIV-positive (infected) is not something to be ashamed of. However, there are still many myths and a lot of wrong information in the general community, and people with HIV may need to think carefully about who to confide in. A general rule is to tell only those people who need to know. They may include:

- doctors, nurses, dentists,
- counsellors and other people providing you with HIV-related care;
- any sexual partners.

Telling people that you trust and who can support you is important and with time you will probably work out who those people are.

Under most circumstances you do not need to tell the following people that you are HIV-positive (infected):

- your boss;
- work colleagues;
- people you share a home with;
- people you study with; or
- people you socialise with.

“When I first found out I had HIV I was very scared. I didn’t know anything about HIV/AIDS and I didn’t know about any services or where I could go to learn more. I ended up telling a few people that I’m HIV-positive (infected) who I didn’t need to tell. They told other people and pretty soon it seems like everyone knew. My family wasn’t here so at least they don’t have to deal with it. The friends I have now don’t care I’m HIV-positive (infected) and I go to a support group for young people with HIV. I still tell people I’m HIV-positive (infected) – I’m just more careful about who I tell.”

2.4 What happens if I’m not an Australian Resident?

Every person who applies for permanent residency in Australia must undergo an HIV antibody test and other health tests. The laws and regulations concerning becoming a permanent

resident are complex.

If you are applying or have already applied for residency it is very important that you have legal advice.

Contact the AIDS Council in your State or Territory as soon as possible. Some AIDS Councils have staff members who can help you with issues relating to immigration and others can advise you about the best place to go for help.