

## CONTINUED DECLINE IN HIV DIAGNOSES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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### **Background:**

The AIDS Epidemiology Group, at the University of Otago, New Zealand (NZ) has undertaken the surveillance of HIV since 1989. We describe the trend, and possible contributing factors, in HIV diagnoses in NZ over the past five years.

### **Methods:**

We utilised national HIV epidemiological surveillance data 2016-2020, disaggregated by main means of acquisition, age, ethnicity, CD4 count and country of acquisition. HIV testing data was obtained from the Ministry of Health (MoH) of all funded HIV laboratory screening tests (2016-2020).

### **Results:**

A total of 681 people have been diagnosed with HIV in NZ over five years with a decline from 196 in 2016 to 95 in 2020, a 52% decrease. The decline was predominately amongst gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) from 140 in 2016 to 62 in 2020, a 56% decrease. The decline was mostly in European GBM, aged 30-49, with a CD4 count >500 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, and GBM whose HIV was acquired in NZ. The number of men and women with heterosexually-acquired HIV has remained at a low, stable number of about 25 people per year. Of those whose HIV was heterosexually-acquired in NZ, almost half (47%) were diagnosed late (CD4 count <350 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>). HIV testing increased in males and females over the four years (2016-2019) and declined in 2020 to numbers similar to 2018. This pattern of testing was seen in each age and ethnic group.

### **Conclusion:**

The continued decline in diagnoses of incident locally-acquired HIV in 2020, while in part may have been affected by less transmission due to COVID-19 physical distancing measures and more limited testing access, is also likely due to ongoing promotion and availability of combination prevention measures in key populations. Earlier detection of HIV is needed for everyone, but especially those with heterosexually-acquired HIV.

### **Disclosure of interest:**

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