**HIV in women in Aotearoa New Zealand: 25 years of surveillance data: 1996 - 2020**

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**Introduction**

Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) is a low HIV prevalence country. NZ aims to eliminate transmission of HIV, but to reach the goal it is important to ensure HIV testing, treatment and support services reach those who need them most.

Very little has been written about HIV in women in NZ. We therefore describe the characteristics of women diagnosed with HIV and AIDS over the last 25 years and of women thought to be living with HIV in NZ at the end of 2020.

**Results**

**Women diagnosed in New Zealand**

- 637 women were diagnosed with HIV – 18% of all diagnoses in this time.
- 81% acquired HIV through heterosexual contact
- 76% were aged <40 years at the time of diagnosis.
- 29% acquired HIV in NZ (Figure 1)

**Women with HIV acquired in New Zealand**

- 20% Māori, 41% European, 39% other ethnicities
- 43% were diagnosed late (CD4 count <350 cells/mm³ at diagnosis)
- 29% had ever had a previous HIV test

**Women living with diagnosed HIV**

- 76% are aged ≥40
- Ethnicity: African (39%), European (22%) and Asian (20%), Māori (6%), Pacific (7%)

**Women diagnosed with AIDS**

- The mean age at the time of diagnosis was 40 years.
- 72% were diagnosed late (i.e. AIDS diagnosis within 3 months of their HIV diagnosis)
- 33 women have died from AIDS

**Summary and conclusions**

- The number of women diagnosed with HIV in NZ has remained low over the past 25 years – particularly women who acquired HIV in this country.
- Almost half of the women who acquired HIV in NZ were diagnosed late. This requires:
  - Increased awareness of HIV testing amongst healthcare providers and women themselves,
  - Consideration of testing policies and other possible testing options for women,
  - Further research to understand testing rates and patterns.
- Meeting the needs of women as they age is important for all women living with HIV
- Culturally appropriate services to women of diverse ethnic backgrounds are required.
- For the health and wellbeing of Māori women living with HIV, the articles of Ōritetanga, Tino Rangatiratanga, and Whakarongo (enabling meaningful participation) need to be upheld:
  - Kāwanatanga (ensuring meaningful representation and participation at all levels),
  - Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination), and
  - Whakarongo (ensuring equity between Māori and other citizens of NZ).

**Methods**

Data on women diagnosed with HIV and AIDS in NZ (1996-2020) was collected through anonymous routine surveillance case reports from healthcare providers.

Women living with HIV at 31 December 2020 included those first diagnosed in NZ as well as those who were previously diagnosed overseas for whom no information has been received to say they had died or gone overseas.

**Figure 1:** Three-yearly average of women first diagnosed with HIV in New Zealand by place of acquisition

**Figure 2:** Annual number of women diagnosed with AIDS and deaths among women who were notified with AIDS

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