

# YOUNG + POSITIVE: ACHIEVING BETTER ENGAGEMENT WITH CARE AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH HIV IN AUSTRALIA

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## **Background:**

While young people aged 18-29 are considered 'adult' within existing health and HIV services, evidence increasingly defines this age group as distinct from the broader adult population. Yet there is currently little research exploring how young people with HIV in Australia feel connected to, and access HIV services and supports, which is a missed opportunity to ensure they are being meaningfully recognised and supported.

## **Methods:**

This analysis draws on the mixed-method, community-based *Young + Positive* study, the first national study in Australia to document the perspectives of young people (aged 18-29) living with HIV, including those with perinatally and horizontally acquired HIV. Survey data ( $n = 60$ ) and qualitative interviews ( $n = 25$ ) were gathered between 2018 and 2019. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to explore how young people understand HIV, their connection, capacity, and willingness to access HIV care and support, and opportunities for improving their engagement.

## **Results:**

Participants identified mainly as male (93.3%), LGBTIQ+ (79.7%) and Australian born (64.2%). Findings confirmed that young people with HIV view themselves as a distinct cohort with specific support needs. Several inner and outer world factors were found to influence young people's ability and motivations to engage with existing specialist HIV treatment and support structures. Inner world factors included psychological outlook, perceptions of HIV and HIV services. Outer world factors included workforce competencies, physical space of the service and hours of operation. No single inner or outer world factor was more influential to patterns of engagement, but instead, it was a complex intersection of both.

## **Conclusion:**

Young people with HIV are a distinct group with specific needs that are currently being overlooked by existing structures of support. Opportunities exist to integrate young people more meaningfully into current HIV service systems, and to co-design youth-friendly programs of support.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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