

Supporting the HIV, viral hepatitis and sexual health workforce during COVID-19; outputs from a rapid response Taskforce

Authors:

Karen Seager¹, ASHM COVID-19 Taskforce (corresponding authors Scott McGill², Dr Edwina Wright³)

^{1,2}ASHM, Sydney, Australia karen.seager@ashm.org.au, ²; ³The Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

Background/Purpose:

On March 11th the World Health Organisation announced pandemic status for COVID-19. That month, the Australasian Society of HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health (ASHM) recognised the need to rapidly convene a COVID-19 Taskforce specifically to support the healthcare workforce caring for populations living with HIV, hepatitis B (HBV), hepatitis C (HCV) and STIs in Australia and New Zealand.

Approach:

ASHM assembled a Taskforce of clinicians, basic scientists, social researchers and community organisations with expertise in HIV, viral hepatitis, STIs, migrant health, injecting drug use, sex work and criminal justice and immigration detention health. The Taskforce also convened a Regional Advisory Group (RAG) to support clinicians in Asia and the Pacific Region.

Outcomes/Impact:

The Taskforce had 102 members at end of July 2020, convened into focus cluster groups. A dedicated website and a weekly newsletter to the BBV & STI sector were established by April 2nd 2020. Weekly webinars commenced on April 2nd 2020 and Guidance documents on the care of populations living with HIV HBV and HCV during the pandemic were produced by April 16th. Subsequently, the Taskforce has produced reports on the status of STI services and Indigenous health; provided guidance on mental health care for patients and healthcare providers; called for the release of people in Immigration Detention Centres and Criminal Justice settings and called for free healthcare, accommodation and financial support as needed for international students, people on temporary working visas and undocumented workers. At 20 June 2020 there were 32,859 website visits, with webinars and clinical guidance receiving the most views.

Innovation and Significance:

The ASHM COVID-19 Taskforce was able to assemble rapidly to generate key clinical guidance and relevant reports to support the BBV and sexual health workforce and their patient populations in Australasia.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.