

## **Experiences of adjusting to HIV diagnoses among overseas-born gay and bisexual men.**

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### **Background:**

Rates of HIV diagnoses have been declining significantly among Australian-born gay and bisexual men (GBM). In contrast HIV notifications among overseas-born GBM have not been declining. This paper explores overseas-born GBM's experiences of being diagnosed with HIV with a particular focus on how they understood and adjusted to their diagnosis.

### **Methods:**

The RISE study is an ongoing qualitative cohort study of 34 people living with HIV (PLHIV) diagnosed from 2016 onward in Australia. This analysis is based on a sub-sample of 10 overseas-born GBM, 6 of whom who had participated in follow up interviews, providing 16 interviews for analysis. Interviews were conducted between February 2019 and July 2021.

### **Results:**

Eight participants identified as gay and 2 as bisexual. Participants were born in Asia (6), Europe (2), South America (2), and Africa (1). All had undetectable viral load and were engaged in care.

Like their Australian-born peers, participants commonly experienced HIV diagnoses as distressing and for some, HIV was understood to be a terminal illness. Overseas-born GBM also reported concerns over how HIV might affect their opportunities to remain in Australia. Those who had very recently arrived in Australia also reported experiencing social isolation owing to having small social networks. Participants generally reported peer support as being an important source of information, assisting with navigating unfamiliar healthcare systems, and enabling the development of social relationships with other PLHIV.

### **Conclusion:**

The accounts of overseas-born GBM suggest that they may experience different forms of distress than their Australian-born peers when receiving an HIV diagnosis, including uncertainty about their access to healthcare, concerns around visa status, and limited social networks to seek support from. Therefore, peer support can play an important role in helping overseas-born GBM adjust to an HIV diagnosis, build their social networks, and navigate the Australian health system.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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