

Issued: 24 September 2018

HIV risk fuelled by STIs

The University of NSW Kirby Institute's latest surveillance report¹ highlights significant risks and inequities for South Australians, in particular for Indigenous communities where STI rates are increasing. This is despite the report finding that across Australia HIV new diagnoses have hit a seven year low.

In fact, HIV diagnoses among Indigenous Australians have increased in the past five years from 26 to 31 new cases in 2017; 1.6 times the rate in the non-Indigenous population.

SHINE SA is a key South Australian sexual and reproductive health agency. SHINE SA's CEO Natasha Miliotis raises concerns about the lack of reductions in HIV and other STIs in SA, amidst a national syphilis outbreak:

"What most people don't realise is that having any STI makes you more likely to become infected with another one, including HIV.

STIs left undiagnosed and untreated can fuel HIV infection. Without treatment either syphilis or HIV can become a fatal infection. Syphilis left untreated during pregnancy can cause serious illness, disability and even death for the baby.

Lack of investment, particularly in Indigenous communities has created a significant differential in sexual health status that is unacceptable in modern day Australia."

Recent South Australian State Budget cuts to STI, HIV and viral hepatitis services have triggered serious concerns about the ability to meet the state's public health obligations, respond to outbreaks and continue previous years' work towards meeting targets set under the Australian Government *National HIV Strategy*.

In addition to maintaining investment in metropolitan areas, adequate funding is needed for Indigenous rural and remote services. Such funding is essential to develop rapid testing, treatment and access to preventive measures such as HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis medication (PrEP) which protects against HIV infection.

NATASHA MILIOTIS
CEO

For further information please contact Tracey Hutt, 0434 937 036.

¹ Kirby Institute. HIV in Australia: Annual surveillance report 2018. Sydney: Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney; 2018. shinesa.org.au