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PLWHNT

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV NORTHERN TERRITORY

Produced by NTAHC's
Care & Support Program

Welcome to your magazine created by and for people living with HIV, to inform, inspire, and connect.

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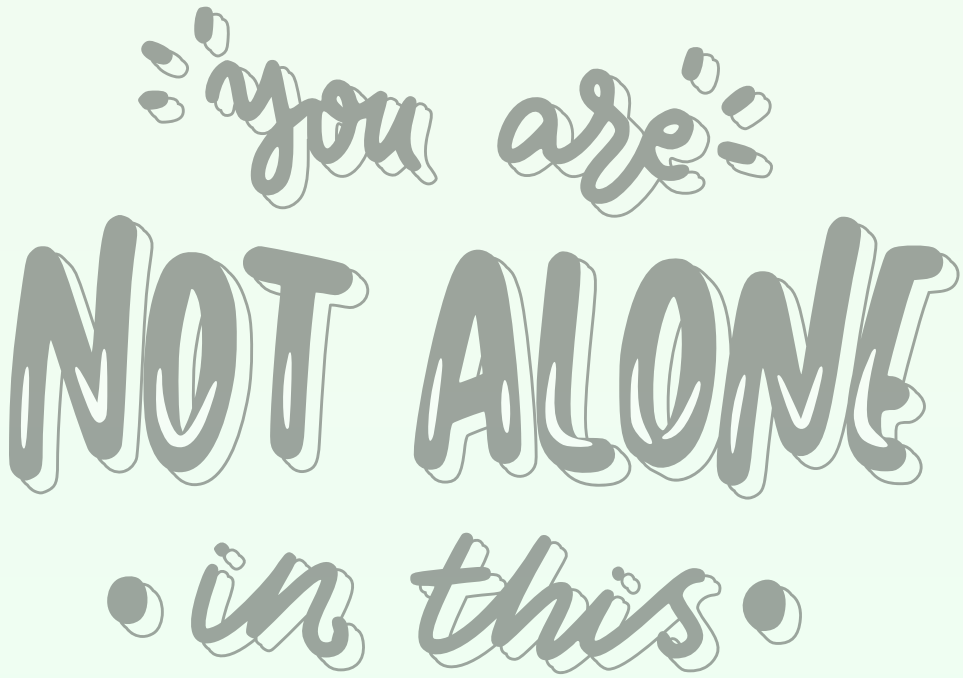


Hello and welcome

I'm Mark Halton the Care and Support Coordinator for NTAHC.

I intend to put this magazine together regularly over the next 12 months.

This will be created by and for people living with HIV.

Having lived with HIV for almost 20 years and worked in this sector for many more, I know the benefits of community, connection, and shared experience.

This magazine is a space to inform, inspire, and empower.

Here, you'll find real stories, health updates, support resources, and voices from across our diverse community.

Whether newly diagnosed or living well for decades, this publication is for you to remind us that we are not alone, that our lives are rich and full, and that our voices matter.

You're input and ideas will be welcomed.

Thank you for reading and being part of this journey.

In solidarity,
Mark

Editorial:

Why This Publication Matters

This publication has been a long time coming and it's more then just a magazine. It's a platform for connection, sharing stories and celebration

Connection matters.

For many people living with HIV, particularly those OF US IN remote and regional areas, connection can be difficult. Services ARE limited, FEAR OF stigma IS stronger, and community can feel far away.

This magazine aims to bridge that gap—to connect us, no matter where we are, with stories, resources, and shared experiences that remind us we are not alone.

You are not alone.

HIV can still be isolating. The silence AND the fear of judgment ARE real. But you are not the only one in the NT navigating this path. People live full, meaningful lives with HIV, and this publication exists to reflect that truth. Through real stories, peer voices, and honest conversations, we hope to offer comfort, solidarity, and strength.

There is so much to be hopeful for.

We are living in a time of remarkable progress. Today's treatments are simpler, safer, and more effective than ever BEFORE. **Undetectable = Untransmitable** (U=U) - BEING ON TREATMENT AND HAVING AN UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD MEANS YOU CANNOT PASS IT ON - has changed everything—scientifically and socially. With the right support and information, people with HIV can expect to live long, healthy lives.

But while we celebrate these advancements, we also acknowledge the realities: Living with HIV is not the same for everyone. For women, stigma often comes with additional layers— AROUND motherhood, relationships, and cultural expectations. For men, particularly gay, MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN, bisexual, and trans men, experiences may be shaped by different social pressures or historical trauma. And for anyone in a remote community, the lack of anonymity and access to care adds another challenge. These differences matter—and they deserve space in our conversations.

This magazine will not speak for OR TO everyone, but it will strive to reflect the diversity of our lives. It will shine a light on the good, the hard, and the deeply human experiences of living with HIV today.

Thank you for being here and for being part of this shared journey. This space is yours.

In community and strength,
Mark Halton
Editor

Heterosexual Men's Advocacy Network.

Our aim is to advocate for the wellbeing of heterosexual men living with HIV in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.
If you are a heterosexual man living with HIV, who might be interested to connect with other straight guys LWHIV.
Please be assured them that we pay careful attention to privacy and confidentiality.
Registration essential via email: hetman@napwha.org.au
If you would need any clarification around this please feel free to call Anth on 0490 214 554 for a chat to learn more before taken the next step.
Kind regards Anth.

Positive Asian Network Australia.

How to join
Are you interested in joining PANA? This is open to all people living with HIV, of Asian-background, and living in Australia. You can find the registration form on the NAPWHA web site where you can fill in the form on line.
Any any queries or questions to email: **pana@napwha.org.au**

Positive Latinx Australian Network (PLAN)

How to engage with us
Are you living with HIV in Australia? Do you identify with a Latin American or Hispanic background? We would like to hear from you. We meet regularly to advocate on behalf of ourselves. Our social network will aim to provide a safe inclusive spaces and ways to connect with each other for social connection.
It is also a way to exchange conversations relating to HIV and general health – this includes talking about navigating the healthcare system in Australia.
email: **plan@napwha.org.au**

PATSIN

The NAPWHA-auspiced Positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Network (PATSIN) is a national membership-based group for Indigenous people living with HIV (PLHIV).
For more information and how to engage with us **https://napwha.org.au/patsin/**
https://napwha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UsMobandHIV_2021.pdf

PATSIN works within Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander communities and service providers to represent the interests of Indigenous Australians. It exists to provide an outlet for exchanging experiences and knowledge about HIV, and to advocate for change at the community level.

PATSIN is committed to increasing education and addressing the high-level of HIV stigma within Indigenous communities.

Mental Health and Coping with HIV

Living with HIV is more than just managing a health condition—it's navigating the emotional, psychological, and social impacts that can come with it.

While treatments have advanced and stigma is slowly shifting, mental health remains one of the most important—and often overlooked—parts of living well with HIV.
The emotional journey is different for everyone.
Some people feel shock, fear, or shame after a diagnosis. Others may carry the weight of long-term trauma, secrecy, or rejection.
Feelings of isolation, anxiety, or depression are common, and it's okay to acknowledge them. You are not weak.
You are human.
You are not alone.
Many of us have been where you are.

Peer support, professional counselling, and simply talking to someone who gets it can make a world of difference. Reaching out is not a sign of defeat—it's a powerful act of self-care and strength.

Strategies for coping:

Talk it out. Whether with a friend, peer, or therapist, don't bottle things up.
Stay connected. Isolation fuels stigma.
Connection builds resilience.
Know your worth. HIV doesn't define you. You are still you—still valuable, still deserving of love and joy.

Take one step at a time. Some days will be harder. That's okay. You don't have to do everything at once.
Access support. Many organisations offer free counselling or support groups (online or in person).
Mental health matters just as much as physical health.
With the right support, people living with HIV can—and do—live vibrant, mentally healthy lives.

Healing takes time. It also takes community, compassion, and a space to be real. That's what this magazine hopes to offer.
If you need help now, speak to your GP, a peer worker, Mark or Busi on 89 44 7777 or after hours contact a helpline like QLife (1800 184 527) or Lifeline (13 11 14).
You are not alone. We are walking this journey together.

And more importantly don't let your HIV diagnosis define who **you** are so much more.

NTAHC Positive Women's Support Social Inclusion Group

My name is Busi, a member and NTAHC project officer for

HIV positive women (Northern Territory) with a long-lived experience.

My diagnosis in 2002 when I was in my late thirties in the third world as married woman with 4 children did not come without challenges. Challenges were many and solutions were very few.

My mind had to navigate through lots of things without a chronological order.
During my lived experience with HIV, I have realised that positive life comes with a lot of challenges from the day you are diagnosed.
Peer groups bring a feeling of social acceptance and relief from stigma.

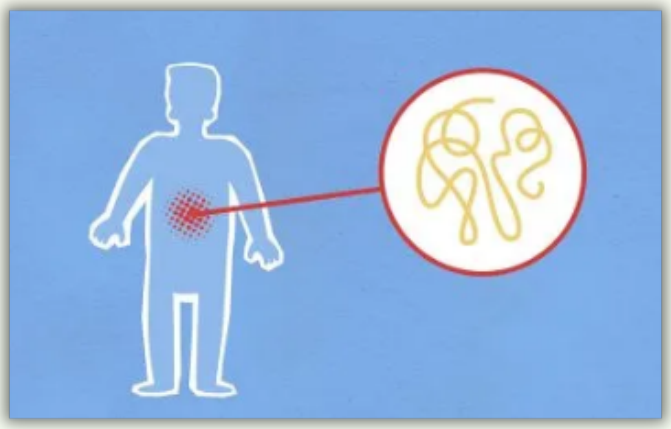
Objectives of Women's Positive Social Inclusion Group

Create a platform where women living positively can meet and share or just listen to stories with their peers without being judged.

- Each person is a custodian of their positive life stories and must choose how to tell, who to tell it and when to tell it.
- Create a connection and supportive environment from peers and have a one-to-one talk
- Get updated scientific information on medication from qualified health practitioners for our health and well being
- Get information to advocacy and support services
- Organise friendly and informal activities based on your wants and needs

Whether recently diagnosed or living with HIV for several years all are welcome to join the social inclusion group.

Join the NT Women's Support Social Inclusion Group
contact Busi on 89447777
or email: busisiwe@ntahc.org.au



Statin medication & why it maybe important to discuss with your GP.

HIV and cholesterol

On average, people with HIV have higher levels of 'bad' cholesterol (LDL) than the general population. LDL causes atherosclerosis (disease and damage including build-up of fatty deposits of plaques on the blood vessels), known to contribute to CVD.

Elevated LDL cholesterol is asymptomatic, and often silently causes damage to the heart and blood vessels, contributing to CVD risk. Elevated LDL is caused directly by HIV, certain HIV medications, as well as traditional risk factors.

Statin medications are highly effective at reducing 'bad' cholesterol, and it has long been theorised that statins may have anti-inflammatory properties as well.

Up until now there were no large studies with people with HIV that tested these theories or showed a clear benefit. Many of these questions have been answered by the REPRIEVE study.

For more detailed information on this important issue,
go to https://napwha.org.au/the-new-importance-of-taking-a-statin/

Specific Issues for Women Living with HIV

1. Gendered Stigma & Disclosure Fears
Women living with HIV often experience more intense social stigma—particularly around motherhood, sexuality, and relationships. Fear of being judged as "irresponsible" or "unclean" can create shame and isolation, especially in cultural or religious communities.

2. Reproductive Health & Pregnancy
Women may have questions around fertility, contraception, menstrual cycles, and whether or not they can safely have children. The answer is yes—HIV-positive women can have HIV-negative children with the right treatment and care—but many don't know this or feel afraid to ask.

3. Hormonal Changes & Menopause
HIV and antiretroviral medications can interact with hormonal systems. This may affect the onset or symptoms of menopause, and there's limited research on how HIV affects women during this life stage.

4. Mental Health & Gendered Trauma
Many women living with HIV have experienced gender-based violence, abuse, or trauma—sometimes related to their diagnosis. Mental health support must be trauma-informed and sensitive to these realities.

5. Underrepresentation in Research & Services
Women are often underrepresented in clinical trials and less likely to be engaged in peer networks that reflect their lived experiences. Services may not be tailored to their needs or provide child-friendly, women-safe spaces.

6. Access & Caring Roles
Women—especially those living in remote areas or caring for children or family—may struggle to access appointments, maintain treatment, or even prioritise their own health due to their caring responsibilities.

Join the NT Women's Support Social Inclusion Group
contact Busi on 89447777
or email: busisiwe@ntahc.org.au

WHAT SHOULD WOMEN DISCUSS WITH THEIR HIV SPECIALIST?

✓ **REPRODUCTIVE & SEXUAL HEALTH**

CAN I SAFELY BECOME PREGNANT OR AVOID PREGNANCY?

WHAT ARE MY CONTRACEPTIVE OPTIONS WITH MY TREATMENT?

WILL HIV OR TREATMENT AFFECT MY PERIODS, MENOPAUSE, OR FERTILITY?

✓ **HORMONAL INTERACTIONS**

HOW MIGHT MY TREATMENT BE AFFECTED BY MENOPAUSE OR HORMONAL CHANGES?

CAN I TAKE HORMONE THERAPY SAFELY?

✓ **MEDICATION SIDE EFFECTS**

ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS THAT AFFECT WOMEN DIFFERENTLY?

IS MY TREATMENT UP TO DATE WITH THE LATEST GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN?

✓ **MENTAL HEALTH & TRAUMA**

CAN I ACCESS SUPPORT FOR ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, OR TRAUMA?

ARE THERE FEMALE PEER WORKERS OR TRAUMA-INFORMED COUNSELLORS I CAN TALK TO?

✓ **GENDERED STIGMA & SAFETY**

HOW DO I NAVIGATE DISCLOSURE IN RELATIONSHIPS OR PARENTING?

ARE THERE RESOURCES OR SUPPORTS SPECIFICALLY FOR WOMEN?

✓ **BONE HEALTH, WEIGHT, AND CARDIOVASCULAR RISK**

AM I AT INCREASED RISK FOR BONE THINNING OR HEART DISEASE AS A WOMAN WITH HIV?

SHOULD I BE SCREENED MORE REGULARLY?

ENCOURAGING WOMEN TO SPEAK UP, ASK QUESTIONS, AND ADVOCATE FOR THEIR HEALTH IS KEY. HIV CARE NEEDS TO MOVE BEYOND A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH.

WOMEN'S VOICES, NEEDS, AND EXPERIENCES MUST BE SEEN, HEARD, AND RESPECTED—BY SPECIALISTS, BY SERVICES, AND BY OUR BROADER COMMUNITY.

LIVING POSITIVE - Northern Territory

August 2025

WOMEN'S SUPPORT

SOCIAL INCLUSION GROUP

To get involved or for more information, please email Busi
Busisiwe@ntahc.org.au