

MEDIA RELEASE



HIV organisations condemn stigmatising disclosure of HIV status in the media

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Harmful reporting has occurred across multiple media outlets today involving the disclosure of an individual's HIV and hepatitis C status and the use of highly stigmatising language in making this disclosure.

The public disclosure of a person's HIV status without their consent compromises Australia's efforts to prevent HIV transmission. When people worry that their HIV status might be disclosed, they are less likely to test for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and, in the case of someone living with HIV or viral hepatitis, to access care to commence life-saving treatment.

Confidentiality and privacy are fundamental human rights. People living with HIV often report discrimination and stigma, which is almost always based on fear and misinformation. The publication of a person's HIV status can expose them to abuse and discrimination, and perpetuates the idea that it is acceptable to disclose a person's private health information without their consent.

In the context of this story, the young man's HIV status is irrelevant. The use of this information is sensationalist, and portrays people living with HIV and viral hepatitis as harmful and dangerous when evidence shows that the majority of people go to considerable efforts to improve their health and prevent onward transmission.

Describing the person in question as an "HIV sufferer" contributes to the false notion that people living with HIV are powerless victims. People living with HIV are leaders in the HIV response, and continue to be invaluable partners in educating others about HIV, in preventing new cases of HIV, and in making advances in HIV science. In countries like Australia, HIV is not a death sentence. People living with HIV can live long and fulfilling lives, and deserve to be treated with the dignity and respect afforded to others.

We encourage the Australian media to adopt better journalistic standards regarding future reporting of HIV and viral hepatitis. The HIV Media Guide produced by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) at www.hivmediaguide.org.au establishes standards by which HIV can be reported in language that is neutral and non-offensive.

ENDS

For more information, contact:

Adrian Hadjialexiou - VAC
Communications Officer
adrian.hadjialexiou@vac.org.au
Phone: 03 9865 6700
www.VAC.org.au

Emily Galdes - SHine SA
Marketing Coordinator
emily.galdes@shinesa.org.au
Phone: 08 8300 5340
www.shinesa.org.au

