

WORLD AIDS DAY

Statement by Minister for Health

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [9.20 am]: World AIDS Day is held on 1 December each year to raise awareness globally and locally on the issues surrounding HIV–AIDS. Since its inception in 1988, it has been a day for people to show their support for people living with HIV, commemorate those who have died and highlight the current state of the epidemic. PrideFEST 2022 has recently ended. This event grew out of a community movement to protest laws that actively discriminated against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual community. This community has historically shouldered the burden of the HIV epidemic, and the stigma and discrimination associated with it.

The LGBTQIA+ community created and has led the sustained partnership between people living with HIV, clinicians, public health authorities, government and researchers that characterises the Western Australian and Australian response to the HIV epidemic. Although HIV has not gone away, it is in large part due to this partnership that Western Australia's HIV notifications are at an all-time low. This downward trend is also attributed to the engagement and response of the community in minimising the risk of HIV acquisition and onwards transmission through the uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis and proactive HIV testing. We continue to see high levels of treatment adherence and engagement with HIV services in WA, leading to high levels of viral suppression amongst those newly diagnosed, meaning the virus cannot be transmitted through sexual contact. This has contributed to our record low number of HIV notifications and, importantly, an improved quality of life for people living with HIV. WA is committed to meeting the UNAIDS target of virtual elimination of HIV by 2030. Recent epidemiological data from 2021 shows that WA has an estimated HIV treatment coverage of 89 per cent, with 90 per cent of newly diagnosed cases in 2021 having commenced treatment and having an undetectable viral load. This has been a consistent trend since collection of this data commenced five years ago, with 90 to 95 per cent of newly diagnosed people achieving an undetectable viral load over this period. However, there is still work to do in WA's HIV response. Australian-born heterosexual-identifying males who report acquiring HIV overseas make up a substantial proportion of new HIV cases in WA and are often diagnosed at a late stage. This signifies the need for an enhanced global response to HIV, as mobility and migration influence the global epidemic. HIV notifications are also disproportionately high in WA's Aboriginal population and, more recently, a number of cases among people who are experiencing homelessness have been notified.

Overall, the stigma of HIV and discrimination towards people living with HIV continue to detract from efforts to achieve the virtual elimination of HIV. Research has shown that stigma and discrimination is a barrier to accessing health care and engaging in HIV prevention strategies. We need to support strategies to reduce HIV stigma and continue to sustain high HIV testing and treatment rates if HIV is to no longer be a public health threat.