

THE FACTS

**NAVIGATING THE
HEALTH SYSTEM**

FINDING AN HIV DOCTOR

You need an HIV doctor to help you manage and treat your HIV. Only specially trained doctors can do this. If the doctor who diagnosed you is unable to treat and manage HIV you will be referred to a doctor with specialist HIV training. HIV doctors are trained in the management and treatment of HIV and are the only doctors who can prescribe HIV treatment. YOU have the right to choose your own HIV specialist doctor.

HIV specialist doctors include:

- Infectious Disease specialists at a hospital
- Doctors at a sexual health clinic
- General practitioners (GPs) who have been trained in the treatment and management of HIV. They are often called S100 prescribers.

THE ROLE OF YOUR HIV DOCTOR

Your doctor will work with you to manage and treat your HIV and keep you healthy.

Your first visits to the your HIV doctor

At one of your first visits, your HIV doctor will:

- Test your immune system
- Check your general health
- Perform a blood count
- Check for treatment resistance.

They will also talk to you about your general health, other health conditions and any support that you might need to help you with your diagnosis.

Prescribing your medication

It is recommended that you start treatment as soon as possible after receiving your HIV diagnosis. This is very important for people with a low CD4 count, people with an HIV related medical condition, and pregnant women. Your doctor will discuss treatment with you to prescribe the medication that is right for you.

Monitoring your health

Your HIV doctor will check your health by doing regular blood tests. Ask your doctor how often you need to see them. You might see them more often at first but this will reduce over time (3-monthly, 6-monthly, or yearly). See the *Monitoring Your Health* fact card for more information.

CHOOSING A DOCTOR THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

It is important to find a doctor you can talk to and trust, and to form an on-going relationship with your HIV health care team. Your HIV healthcare team might include an HIV doctor; an HIV nurse; a psychologist; a social worker or counsellor and other health workers.

If you are seeing a doctor who doesn't feel right, you can change doctors. You can also change between hospital, sexual health and GP clinics or request to change between doctors within these clinics. It's your choice.

Some people have two doctors, an HIV doctor and a GP for general health. Others have an S100 prescriber GP who they see for HIV as well as their general health.

If you live outside Melbourne, you may have less choice about HIV care in your area. You may also worry about confidentiality. Living Positive Victoria Peer Navigators can help you find a doctor that is right for you.

What to Tell your Healthcare Team

- How you are feeling
- Any other medications you are taking (including non-prescription medications, supplements and/or recreational substances)
- What you eat and drink, caffeine and alcohol, drug and tobacco use
- Any changes or concerns, side effects, sleep patterns, mood

What to ask your health care team

- Should I start HIV treatment (if you haven't started)?
- What side-effects should I look out for?
- What is my viral load (amount of virus in my blood)?
- What is my CD4 count (immune system function)?
- Is my treatment working? Do I need to change anything?
- Is there anything I am taking or using that could interact with my treatment?
- How can I improve my health and wellbeing?

Travel assistance

The Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme

(VPTAS) helps with travel and accommodation costs.

It is for people who live in rural Victoria who need to travel more than 100 kilometres one way or an average of 500 kilometres a week to approved medical specialist services or specialist dental treatment.

The Thorne Harbour Health Community Support Team

has volunteers who provide transport for people who cannot get to medical appointments.

See the back page for more details

FOR MORE INFORMATION

HIV Doctors

A list of all general practitioners (doctors) who can manage HIV and prescribe HIV medication in Australia. You can search by location and by languages spoken.

www.ashm.org.au/HIV/HIV-prescribers

Thorne Harbour Health Community Support

This service provides transport for people who cannot get to medical appointments.

www.thorneharbour.org/hiv-aids/hiv-positive-services/communitysupport

The Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme

Helps with travel and accommodation costs for people living in country Victoria.

www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/rural-health/vptas-how-to-apply

Content is adapted with permission from Queensland Positive People's Peer Navigation Program.



living positive victoria



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