



Jillian Skinner MP

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MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW HIV STRATEGY ON TRACK: TEST NUMBERS RISE IN 2014

An extra 8,200 HIV tests were conducted in NSW in the first quarter of 2014 compared to the same period in 2013 - a seven per cent increase, Health Minister Jillian Skinner said today.

One hundred and three people were newly diagnosed with HIV in NSW in the January to March quarter - a 32 per cent increase compared to notifications in the first quarter of 2013.

Of these 103 newly diagnosed people, over half (57) were diagnosed within 12 months of when they were likely to have been infected with the virus, a higher proportion than in any of the previous five years.

This suggests the increase in testing is resulting in people being diagnosed in an earlier stage of the infection than ever before.

Of the 103 notifications, 84 per cent were in men who have sex with men.

“Increases in testing were reported across all high-risk groups. Early detection means early treatment, which we know improves the outcomes for individuals and is key to our aim of virtually eliminating the spread of HIV by 2020,” Mrs Skinner said.

Testing in 2013 was already higher than in 2012, with nearly half a million HIV tests performed in NSW in 2013, an increase of 27,000 tests in 2013.

“While we need to wait to see what data on notifications and testing shows for the rest of the year, the data from the first quarter of 2014 indicates that implementation of the *NSW HIV Strategy* is on track to decrease the spread of HIV in NSW.”

Preliminary results from the February 2014 Sydney Gay Community Periodic Survey show the proportion of gay and homosexually active men reporting an HIV test in the past 12 months was 76 per cent - the highest level recorded since the survey began in 1996.

“That testing has increased in NSW, particularly in high-risk groups, proves we are refocusing attention on the need for at-risk people to seek to know their status,” Mrs Skinner said.

“It is very heartening to see so many more people being tested for HIV.

“We know that by making testing more accessible and encouraging people in at-risk groups to be tested, the number of new diagnoses will increase before it starts to fall again,” Mrs Skinner said.

Mrs Skinner said NSW has a strong track record of achievement in preventing the spread of HIV.

“Research shows that for every \$1 invested in HIV prevention, the NSW Government has saved \$13 in clinical care costs,” Mrs Skinner said.

The NSW Liberal & Nationals Government released the *NSW HIV Strategy 2012-2015* to dramatically drive down the number of new infections by increasing testing, treatment and safe sex practices.

“Our investment in the *NSW HIV Strategy* has helped remove barriers to testing for high risk groups, made testing quicker and more accessible than ever and allowed quicker access to treatment.”

In 2013, the NSW Government funded the expansion of rapid testing to 15 additional sites to make a total of 19 sites, including community settings.

This was further enhanced by pop-up Rapid HIV testing sites, notably in Darlinghurst’s Taylor Square and Oxford Street shopfront and Lismore’s Tropical Fruits festival.

NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant said it is important that at-risk people know their status.

“The more HIV tests that are done, the better chance we’ll have of reaching our ambitious goal to eliminate the spread of HIV by 2020. Our expansion of rapid HIV testing sites has been and will continue to be an important tool in encouraging people at high risk of HIV to get tested regularly,” Dr Chant said.

For free and confidential sexual health support and information, call the NSW Sexual Health Infoline on 1800 451 624 (weekdays 9am-5.30pm).

For rapid testing sites, go to:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/Pages/sexual-health-clinics.aspx>

The *NSW HIV Strategy 2012-2015* can be found at

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sexualhealth/Pages/hiv.aspx>