

ACCESSING HIV MEDICATION FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV (PLHIV) WITHOUT MEDICARE

– A GUIDE FOR PLHIV –

HIV antiretroviral treatments (ART) are affordable for most Australian residents living with HIV because Medicare subsidises the cost of ART through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

For people living with HIV (PLHIV) who are ineligible for Medicare, the cost of ART can be prohibitive and therefore a barrier to the uptake of ART. The initiation of ART for PLHIV immediately after diagnosis is recommended to benefit long term health outcomes and prevent the onward transmission of HIV.

The NSW HIV Strategy 2016-2020 establishes the goal that all PLHIV initiate ART within at least six weeks of diagnosis, and Local Health Districts (LHDs) supports access to ART for PLHIV ineligible for Medicare in a range of ways.

If you are travelling to Australia and have not organised a supply of HIV medication this can cause delays to your access to treatment. It is recommended you arrange your medications **prior to arriving in Australia** by one of the following options.

1 RECIPROCAL HEALTH CARE AGREEMENT

Travellers from 11 countries can access their essential medical care including medication at the PBS subsidised rate during their time in Australia. Requirements will vary with each country.

For more information visit

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/rhca-health-care-visitors-australia>

If you are **already living in Australia** you can access your medications by one of the following options.

2 IMPORT YOUR HIV MEDICATION FROM YOUR HOME COUNTRY

While you're in Australia, you can arrange to have your own HIV medication to be posted to you from your home country under Australia's *Personal Importation Scheme*. This involves arranging for a medicine to be sent to you from an overseas supplier or family/friend and allows for three months of medication at a time.

You will need a letter as well as a prescription from the prescribing doctor in your home country. The letter will need to state the medication is for a medical condition. You might be asked to produce both the letter and prescription to pick up the parcel.

For more information visit <https://www.tga.gov.au/personal-importation-scheme>

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3 IMPORT ART MEDICATION FROM AN ONLINE CHEMIST

You can import your HIV medications from an online chemist using the *Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) Personal Importation Scheme*

<https://www.tga.gov.au/personal-importation-scheme>

This allows people to purchase generic brands of HIV medications from an online chemist for their own personal use. This means that PLHIV who are ineligible for Medicare can access medication at a cost that is substantially lower than if they purchase brand-name ART medication from Australian pharmacies.

When you purchase and import HIV medication for your personal use, there are a number of conditions you must comply with. The medicines are only to be used by you and must not be given to any other person. You can import a maximum of a three month supply with a valid Australian-issued prescription from an Australian S100 prescriber (specialist HIV doctor).

Online purchases of medicines must be approached with caution. You need to ensure that the website is legitimate and offers safe and reliable medication; otherwise there are risks that it is past the use-by date or not manufactured to appropriate standards. The World Health Organisation (WHO) approves safe and reliable HIV medications and purchasing WHO approved generic medications, means you can expect high levels of efficacy.

Three reputable online websites include:

- www.aids-drugs-online.com
- www.alldaychemist.com
- www.inhousepharmacy.vu

The following options are available under **extenuating circumstance and cannot be a guaranteed option**. If you rely on these options, care and management of your HIV could be interrupted or delayed:

4. NSW HEALTH HIV CLINICS AND SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

PLHIV can access ongoing care for your HIV by attending The Albion Centre or one of the many sexual health clinics within NSW to access treatment and care. The clinicians (doctors) in these clinics are able to support PLHIV with the monitoring of their viral load, CD4 and other blood tests and medications.

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5 CLINICAL TRIALS

PLHIV who are Medicare ineligible can access HIV medication by being part of a clinical trial. This will be reliant on the availability of the trial, the type of trial it is and your visa status. Direct contact with the clinicians (doctors) at these services can help identify current availability, eligibility and relevant clinical trials:

- [St Vincent's Hospital \(02\) 8382 3707](http://www.stvincentshospital.com.au)
- [The Albion Centre \(02\) 9332 9600](http://www.albioncentre.com.au)
- [Taylor Square Private Clinic \(02\) 9331 6151](http://www.taylor-square-private-clinic.com.au)
- [Holdsworth House \(02\) 9331 7228](http://www.holdsworthhouse.com.au) or
- Search the HIV trials database - <http://napwha.org.au/trials-research/trials-and-studies/hiv-trials-database>

6 COMPASSIONATE ACCESS

Pharmaceutical companies will sometimes provide free medication on compassionate grounds to PLHIV who are ineligible for Medicare. These applications are considered on a case-by-case basis and there is no guarantee that this option will always be available. You might need a letter from your doctor confirming you need the medication and explaining why you can't access HIV medication in other ways.

If you need support in this process you can call a Positive Life Treatment Officer on 1800 245 677 (freecall) or (02) 9206-2177.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MEDICARE ELIGIBILITY

Medicare Eligibility -

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/medicare-card>

Healthcare for visitors to Australia -

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/health-care-visitors-australia>

Find your nearest Medicare Office -

<http://findus.humanservices.gov.au/>

HIV/AIDS Legal Centre (HALC) -

<http://www.halc.org.au/>

HIV Positive Migration Guide -

<http://halc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/positive-migration-guide.pdf>

Australian Immigration Specialists -

<https://www.immiaustralia.com.au/blogs/are-you-eligible-for-medicare/>

Positive Life is available to offer information and support to ALL PLHIV in NSW, whether you are Medicare eligible or not.

We offer safe, free and confidential support.

Phone (02) 9206-2177 or 1800 245 677
