

Partner Notification Officers





Who are Partner Notification Officers?

Partner Notification Officers (PNOs) are nurses who work in the Public Health Branch of the Department of Human Services.

They have experience in sexual health, drugs and alcohol, and mental health issues.

PNOs have two major roles:

1. to notify the sexual partners of people diagnosed with a Sexually Transmissible Infection (STI), which includes HIV/AIDS, on request
2. to help manage people living with HIV/AIDS who risk infecting others.

1) Partner notification

Notifying the sexual partners(s) of people diagnosed with a Sexually Transmissible Infection (STI) is a vital part of the public health management of these infections.

Usually the doctor who makes the diagnosis or the patient themselves will advise their partner(s) of their infection. Partners need to be informed of their exposure to an STI so they can receive medical advice and treatment.

Sometimes, however, patients or doctors find it difficult or are unable to advise their partner(s) and may request a PNO to assist.

How are partner(s) notified?

A PNO will make discreet contact with partner(s) to inform them of the diagnosis and to recommend they seek testing or treatment.

If the exposure involves HIV the PNO will contact and ask to meet with partner(s) and any support persons. PNOs will explain they have credible information regarding the partner's exposure to the HIV virus and recommend the partner be tested or seek medical advice.

PNOs are able to offer blood testing at this time if requested. This can be done quickly and discreetly.

Although most partners ask PNOs about the identity of the person with the recently diagnosed STI PNOs are unable to answer this question because they never know this person's identity.

2) Management of people living with HIV/AIDS who put others at risk

The second role of PNOs is to investigate allegations made to the department of people living with HIV/AIDS who risk infecting others.

Most people living with HIV are careful to avoid exposing others to the risk of HIV infection. However a small number of people, sometimes through psychiatric or other disabilities, continue to pose a risk of transmission. These clients are managed in line with the *Guidelines for the Management of People Living With HIV Who Put Others At Risk*.

PNOs will provide and explain written information about the processes involved including support, appeals and confidentiality.

What kinds of questions will PNOs ask?

PNOs carry out a discreet interview with the sexual partner involved and, if required, the client at the centre of the allegation.

They will ask a range of questions including sexual practices (having safe sex or not), other partners, the use of alcohol or drugs, and the psychological wellbeing of those involved.

The aim is to ensure HIV positive people are aware of:

- their legal requirements under the Health Act and
- either disclose their HIV status or have safe sex with all sexual partners.

The PNOs can also assist people living with HIV access appropriate support and counselling services.

Where does this information go and what happens next?

PNOs report their findings to the Medical Advisor of the Partner Notification and Support Unit and the Victorian Chief Health Officer who directs them in line with the *Guidelines for the Management of People Living With HIV Who Put Others At Risk*.

PNOs implement these directions, which may include:

- educating the client
- arranging counselling or other supports
- maintaining contact to ensure risk behaviours have ceased.

If required the Chief Health Officer may serve the client who is placing others at risk a Letter of Warning, Restriction Order, or rarely, an Isolation Order.

PNOs are involved in serving and monitoring these Orders.

All matters undertaken by PNOs are managed with the highest level of professionalism and confidentiality.

Contacts

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Further information about these processes and the role of the PNOs can found at

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer/>

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