

PEER SUPPORT ... WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Positive Women Victoria provides peer support for women living with HIV

Peer support refers to information about living with HIV shared by another person living with HIV. The kinds of things which might be discussed through peer support can include:

- What can I expect following my HIV diagnosis?
- How might I feel after being told I have HIV?
- How is HIV transmitted?
- Do I need to tell people about my diagnosis, and if so, how can I tell them?



The benefit of talking to another person living with HIV is that the peer worker is able talk from real life experience about common issues people can experience: fears, making treatment choices, how to handle negative experiences such stigma or discrimination, and about other kinds of experiences women may have, such as talking about HIV to a new partner, or making decisions about having a baby or breastfeeding.

Peer support definitely doesn't assume that all women living with HIV share the same life experiences or experience HIV the same way, but recognises the benefits and reassurance of talking with someone who understands what it is like to live with HIV. It's not a counselling service or an advice service.

The peer support worker doesn't make specific recommendations about things like treatment, or what doctor to see, legal matters, or what personal life choices a person should make. They do share insights, experiences if this is appropriate, and help point people in the direction of information they may need.

Women living with HIV can choose to be either clients of PWV, or if they want to become more involved with the community of women living with HIV, and the response to HIV. They can also become members of Positive Women Victoria, meaning they could attend meetings and run for the Board. It's up to the individual. Sometimes, people just want a bit of initial information, reassurance or contact.

Other women may have specific questions or needs, such as wanting to discuss an issue like having a baby when you are living with HIV.

Positive Women Victoria's peer support workers are all women living with HIV who have been supported and trained by the organisation with the skills to undertake this work safely.



At all times, the peer support worker will protect the privacy and confidentiality of women, and be guided by the needs of the client or member.

As well as peer support information provided one-to-one, PWV can help women to connect to other women through our program of events, and social activities and opportunities throughout the year.

Some activities have a focus on health support, while others are purely social, and allow women with HIV to connect safely and confidentially.

Women who come to PWV for support have very different life experiences, health needs, and support needs. PWV can't help women with all their health or social issues, but we can help connect women to social and support services that might help.

We don't provide financial support, housing, clinical services, legal advice, immigration advice, or counselling, but we can certainly refer women to services they may need, and have connections to:

- Other Victorian HIV services
- Counselling services
- Financial counsellor support
- Housing support services
- Clinical and medical services
- Sexual and reproductive health services
- Legal services
- Immigration services.



PWV provides our support services and information to women living with HIV who reside principally in Victoria.

We are a safe and non-discriminatory service for people who are transgender or gender-diverse. We do not provide services to people who self-identify exclusively as male, however, Living Positive Victoria is a service we work closely with can support men living with HIV.

People may be referred to PWV by a health or social service, another HIV service, or can make contact directly through our website, by phone or by email.

CONTACT:
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