

Restrictions on HIV-positive guest workers ‘unjustified, discriminatory, racist’: NAPWA

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The proposed Pacific Island guest worker visa program should be open to all people regardless of HIV status, the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) has said.

Recent media reports have said that applicants to the pilot program, due to start later this year, will be screened for HIV before they are granted visas to work in Australia. NAPWA has called on the federal government to clarify its plans and to reject discrimination on the basis of HIV status.

“Australia does not currently have restrictions on short-term travel by people with HIV, including for numerous visa categories with permission to work,” said NAPWA President Robert Mitchell. “So the suggestion that people applying for guest worker visas should be treated less favourably, just because they come from the Pacific, is deeply troubling.”

“A young person coming to Australia from the UK on a working holiday visa doesn’t have to have an HIV test, nor does a sponsored employee coming to work in Australia for up to four years. People from Pacific Islands should be treated no differently,” he said.

“Setting up an HIV restriction for foreign guest workers would be a very backward step for Australia and would tarnish Australia’s reputation as a country with an enlightened attitude to HIV. This is a program that is meant to be of benefit to Australia and its neighbours; people with HIV have as much to offer as their HIV-negative counterparts. Banning them from participation would be unjustified, discriminatory and racist,” he said.

NAPWA has consistently argued that people living with HIV should not be restricted from international travel or immigration, especially for temporary visits, nor should they be required to declare their HIV status or submit to an HIV test before being granted a short-term visa.

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