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## Positive Living Readership Survey 2003: The people have spoken

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The results are in from last year's readership survey, and they show that in its fifteenth year of publication, Positive Living continues to hold a special place in informing and education HIV-positive Australians.

One hundred and eighty responses were received to the survey form published in the October-November edition of PL, from across the country. Tim Leach, a former deputy director of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO [1] Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. AFAO is the peak non-government organisation representing Australia's community-based response to HIV/AIDS. AFAO's work includes education, policy, advocacy and international projects. ) developed the survey and analysed the results. His final report was passed on to NAPWA in early February.

We set Tim three broad goals in conducting this exercise — to determine who reads PL, and how that readership has changed (or not) since earlier evaluations done in 2000 and 1998; to ask our readers what they think of the magazine, the mix of articles, the language we use and the ways we might improve PL; and to look at our current distribution arrangements and provide us with some guidance on how we might improve the distribution of the magazine.

### Who reads PL?

As has been the case in the past, PL's readership reflects the distribution of HIV in Australia. Most of our readers are gay men, and most of you live in Sydney or Melbourne.

But PL continues to have a significant readership that defies these generalisations — positive women, heterosexual men, Indigenous Australians and HIV-negative people make up an important part of our readership, and you live in all states and territories.

- Most readers are men: 89% male, 9% female and 2% transgender.
  - Most readers identify as gay: 82% gay men, 2% lesbian, 7% heterosexual, 6% bisexual and 3% other.
  - Most readers are over 40: just 5% of readers are under 30, 33% are in their thirties, 40% are in their forties, and 22% are aged 50 or more.
  - Most (58%) live in Sydney or Melbourne.
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- Indigenous Australians made up 3% of respondents.

Positive Living has always been a magazine targeted at people who are living with HIV/AIDS, but we know we've also always had a significant HIV-negative readership. In this survey, 73 percent of readers identified as positive, 23 percent were negative, and 3 percent had not been tested or were unsure of their status.

Several HIV-negative respondents took the opportunity to comment on the value of Positive Living to them: "HIV is an issue for all of us, and not just positive people's problem," wrote one respondent. "Thanks to all of your information and education I have not been infected," wrote another.

Most of us can reasonably claim to be long-term survivors of HIV, with 47 percent having been diagnosed in the 1980s and about two-thirds of us having lived with HIV for more than a decade. Seventeen percent have been diagnosed since 2000.

Nearly half of HIV-positive respondents are working either part-time or full-time, and at least 43 percent are receiving some form of social security payment. Tim's report says that this suggests our readers will be interested in issues relating to employment, social security and the balance between the two.

## Treatments

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Positive Living's main focus has always been on HIV treatments, in the context of living with HIV and our place in the global AIDS pandemic.

- About two-thirds of positive readers are currently on treatments. The other third is evenly split between those who have never taken treatments and those who are currently taking a break.
- Of those who have never taken treatments, half had their HIV diagnosis since 2000.
- 57% are using [complementary therapies](#) [2] A broad range of healing philosophies, approaches, and therapies that Western (conventional) medicine does not commonly use to promote well-being or treat health conditions. Examples include acupuncture, herbs, Traditional Chinese Medicine, etc..

## Distribution

Most respondents are getting their copy of Positive Living as an insert in the local gay and lesbian press (PL is distributed this way in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth). Most respondents said they didn't have difficulty picking up the magazine and most said they thought the current distribution arrangements were appropriate.

Although we know that distribution through the gay and lesbian press works well, and we have no intention of changing that arrangement, we're also aware of the reality that not all our readers are gay or lesbian, and some are either uncomfortable with or unable to obtain PL in this way.

We asked readers to indicate ways they thought we could improve availability of the magazine, and we had a number of suggestions.

The most common suggestions were for a direct mail-out of the magazine and for making the magazine available online. We already do both, suggesting that we're not doing enough to promote these options. We'll work on improving knowledge of the free subscription service and the online edition of PL in coming months. We'll also work on improving the usability of the online edition.

Another common suggestion was for expanded distribution through HIV clinics and doctors' surgeries. Again, we'll act on this suggestion and offer to put PL into those clinics which don't already get copies. If you have suggestions about places you'd like to see PL available, please let us know.

In some states and territories, the local AIDS Council or PLWHA organisation routinely includes PL with their regular member mail-outs, and Tim's report concludes that this is an effective and highly targeted way of distributing the magazine. We'll discuss this with the states where it isn't already happening.

## You like us, you really like us

Striking the right balance — between treatments and non-treatments stories, between the scientific and personal aspects of an issue, between local and international news ??— is one of the major challenges of producing a publication like Positive Living . We're conscious of the fact that our readership is diverse and that the experience of living with HIV is changing.

Treatments information continues to be the core of what we do, but as treatments have improved and people are living longer, the focus is shifting towards things like long-term side effects, returning to work and living long-term with HIV. To make Positive Living as useful and informative as it can be, we need to reflect the real lives of people with HIV as well as possible.

Most respondents to the survey seem to approve of the content of the magazine, the way it is written and the direction we have moved in the last few years.

- Almost half of respondents (44%) consider Positive Living either their 'most important' (12%) or a 'very

important' (32%) source of treatments information; 49% consider it 'reasonably important', and 8% say we're 'not important'.

Most (94%) readers say the way PL is written is accessible and easy to understand. Just over half (51%) said that PL is 'an easy read', 41% find it 'moderately demanding', and 8% say it's a difficult read.

One respondent described our articles as being "like letters to and from family: supportive and not patronising." We have "a very good ability to explain the most difficult scientific issues," according to another. The two most common responses people say they have when they read PL are that they are 'informed' and 'stimulated'.

- The layout and design of the magazine was well-liked, with 87% of readers saying the look is visually appealing.

We asked readers to nominate which are their favourite — and least favourite — regular sections of the magazine. The most popular responses were:

- HIV treatments and side effects (57%)
- Living with HIV (47%)
- Personal stories (39%)
- Briefs (38%)
- National news (33%)
  
- International news (32%).

Among HIV-positive readers, the most popular were:

- HIV treatments and side effects (64%)
- Living with HIV (59%)
- Personal stories (39%)
- Briefs (39%)
- What's Your Problem? (36%)
  
- National news (33%).

Relatively few respondents completed the 'least favourite sections' question. Among those who did, book and film reviews and the PLWHA Broadsheet were listed as the least popular sections.

Overall, your responses generally reflect the space and prominence we give to the various sections of PL, and we'll make use of them when planning the content of the magazine in the coming months and years.

One of the key challenges identified in the evaluation of PL in 2000 was the need to find the right balance between treatments and non-treatments information. In this survey, we asked you if you thought we had the balance right, whether there should be more treatments stories or whether there should be more non-treatments stories. We also asked a similar question about the balance between 'personal' and 'scientific' styles of writing.

- Most respondents (60%) think the balance between treatments/non-treatments is right. Among those who don't, roughly the same number of people think there should be more treatments stories (16%) as think there should be more non-treatments stories (13%).
  
- Most respondents (55%) also agree that the balance between personal/scientific is right. Again, among those who disagree, there's no clear consensus between those who want more personalised writing (25%) versus those who want a more scientific style (20%).

### H3. Advertising in Positive Living

We asked a question in the survey about whether readers would support advertising in the magazine. We don't have any plans to introduce advertising, but with the funding landscape constantly changing, we wanted to gauge the response to this idea.

Your response was a cautious — and qualified — 'yes'.

- 63% would support advertising in Positive Living , 22% are opposed and 15% don't care.

Several people commented that if Positive Living were to accept advertising, there needed to be a clear commitment to maintaining the magazine's independence from advertisers, that the amount of space for sale be limited, and that the advertisements be relevant to positive people.

Some people supported advertising on the condition that it not be available to pharmaceutical companies — perhaps suggesting that readers are not aware that drug company sponsorship is already a major part of how the magazine is funded.

- [NAPWA news](#)

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/385>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/478>