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# How providing free HIV testing kits could eliminate the dreaded virus once and for all amid calls for Federal Government to put its money where its mouth is

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- **HIV Taskforce established to help eradicate virus**
- **First report by new taskforce published last week**
- **Taskforce made a 25-point recommendation**
- **HIV self-testing in Australia is integral to eradication**

- **READ: Cure for HIV could be months away as first three patients are injected with new CRISPR therapy that seeks and destroys lingering pieces of virus**

A push to eradicate the dreaded [HIV](#) virus once and for all could be as simple as providing home testing kits to any Australian who wants one.

According to experts, new HIV testing technologies are 'potential game-changers', boosting testing rates for at-risk groups.

The revelations are part of a series of recommendations handed down last week by the Federal Government's new HIV Taskforce, which has just filed its very first report.



**Widespread access to HIV self-test kits could help eradicate the dreaded virus for good**

The taskforce was established this year in an effort to end the HIV epidemic and achieve virtual elimination of HIV transmission in Australia by 2030.

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The taskforce is made up of representatives from government, community organisations, peak bodies, researchers, advocates and medical experts.

HIV self-tests make it possible for people to test privately and anonymously using a finger prick or oral fluids.

Experts found self-testing can reach people who may not test for HIV.

Recent pilots of the kits saw vending machines placed in greater Adelaide, which reportedly proved effective with both gay and heterosexual men.

At present, there is only one self-test kit on the local market, which can be bought online or in person through a limited number of stockists or accessed through a small number of local and national programs.

Oral fluid self-tests remain unavailable in Australia despite a recent Australian study finding they were the preferred testing option for migrant gay and bisexual men.

The taskforce found incentives needed to be made available to manufacturers to enable the supply of a range of low-cost, convenient testing options.

On Monday, John Kelly, the boss of Sydney-based company [Atomo Diagnostics](#), told Daily Mail Australia the home testing kits were important to catch the virus in locations outside the traditional inner-city areas.

'It's in cohorts that are not part of that ecosystem as much and therefore the current testing services really weren't being effective enough in those other areas and I think self-testing has been proved overseas as part of public health to be really successful,' he said.

Atomo Diagnostics had been among the first to identify the need for rapid antigen testing kits to save Australians from Covid-19 lockdowns.

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## Gay and bisexual men will benefit the most from home testing kits for HIV

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While [dismissed by politicians at the time](#), RAT tests would go onto free Melburnians from endless lockdowns.

Mr Kelly said it was encouraging to see the government had recognised the importance of HIV home testing kits.

'I think the fact that it's now part of formal HIV policy will make it much easier for budgets and deployment to now really happen at the scale that's needed to have an impact,' he said.

Mr Kelly said while self testing was currently happening, it had not been properly funded.

'Because it's not been part of their policy. Now they've adopted it as part of their policy, the evidence from the pilots that we were able to show was it really being effective of reaching those hard-to-reach

groups, I think it has been really helpful in getting the government to adopt self testing,' he said.

Mr Kelly said HIV testing should not be a discretionary decision in terms of spending money.

'It has been proven overseas that having to pay for tests is a barrier for a lot of people testing, particularly vulnerable cohorts that may not have a lot of disposable income,' he said.

'Removing that barrier of having to pay for a test is a very big step forward in helping people access testing more frequently.'

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**Atomo Diagnostics boss John Kelly hopes widespread HIV self-testing kits will eradicate the virus**

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Atomo Diagnostics has already struck up a major deal with UK supermarket giant Tesco for an initial release of more than 200,000 HIV self-testing kits to be sold throughout its network.

Its HIV self-testing kit is the only one to have been approved by Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration for supply to users for at-home screening in Australia.

The taskforce found some regions of Australia, such as inner-city Sydney, had already achieved virtual elimination of HIV.

'The HIV epidemic has taken too much from too many for too long,' the taskforce stated in its report.

'Virtual elimination will mean HIV is no longer a public health threat in Australia, equivalent to a 90 per cent reduction in new diagnoses since 2010, or less than 91 new HIV notifications per year.

'With wide and equitable access to prevention and testing, thousands of people will avoid acquiring HIV and the need for ongoing treatment, translating into significant savings for the healthcare system.'

[HIV & AIDS](#)

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