

POSITIVELY RURAL

Information about the rural lifestyle in Victoria
for people living with HIV/AIDS



CAN
VICTORIA INC.
Country Awareness Network (Victoria) Inc.

A Positive Change

In recent years, the terms *Sea Change/Tree Change* have become embedded in our modern-day vocabulary. Not surprisingly since Victorian rural and regional communities have a lot to offer city dwellers that are looking for something different.

It may be a change of pace or the lure of a cleaner greener lifestyle that has so many people looking for their own tree/sea change.

The reasons can be many and varied. Country Victoria is very beautiful with a diverse environment that includes everything from beaches and temperate rainforests, to mountains and rivers.



CAN, being Victoria's peak rural HIV organisation, has seen an increased number of PLWHA* considering their own lifestyle changes. With improved treatments, PLWHA are afforded longer life expectancies, improved quality of life and more lifestyle options. Being HIV positive does not exclude Sea/Tree Change opportunities. However, there are some special considerations that should be made before taking the plunge.

Following are some tips and things to consider.

*PLWHA - Person/people living with HIV/AIDS

Housing

If you are considering moving to a country area, go there for a short holiday or visit prior to moving. Use this time to look around, find out where towns are located and the distance from shops, medical services, and other amenities.

Check out housing costs and the availability of properties in the area in which you would like to live. Finding affordable rental accommodation in some rural or regional areas can be difficult.

This being said, the cost of purchasing a home is often considerably less in country areas compared to the city. This may present an opportunity for home ownership which would never have been possible at city prices.

Public housing is not available in all rural communities and in most regional areas there are long waiting lists. This is especially true if you are a single male.

Build?
Rent?
Buy?



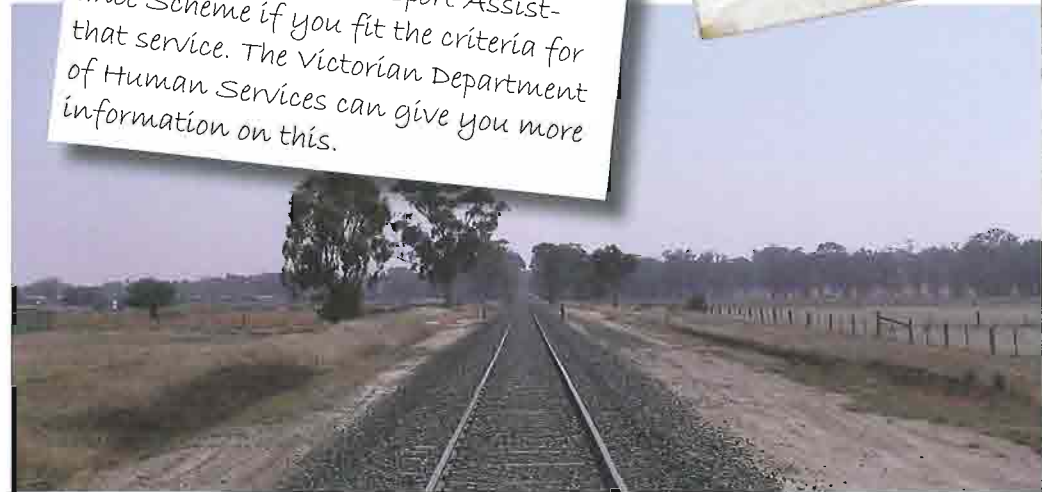
Transport

Transport can be a real issue for people in rural areas. There is limited public transport in remote locations.

While housing can be cheaper in the country, those savings may often be eaten by the additional costs of transport. The price of petrol, if you are on a low/fixed income, may limit how far and often you can travel.

If you have a vehicle you need to ensure that you have the ability to maintain it. Travelling longer distances on country roads can add to the cost of maintaining the vehicle.

You may be eligible for the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme if you fit the criteria for that service. The Victorian Department of Human Services can give you more information on this.



Medical

It is a fact that most specialist HIV services are concentrated in metropolitan areas. While there are a small number of s100 prescribers* located in country areas, they can be difficult to get access to and often have waiting lists for new patients.

Some GPs can provide shared care, working with metropolitan HIV service providers. You'll need to locate a GP who you can work with. Regardless, ensuring that you have ready access to appropriate medical care is paramount.

It's important to note that many country areas are experiencing a shortage of GPs and very few GPs bulk bill.



*s100 prescriber: Specialist GP that is authorised to prescribe HIV drugs



Depending on where you are thinking of moving, how your general health is and what kind of access you have to transport, you may choose to continue having your HIV medical needs met by your current metropolitan provider/s. Many PLWHA living in rural Victoria find it manageable to travel every three months or so for ongoing tests and meds.

Many rural/regional Community Health Centres offer some form of HIV care, support or information services. It may be worth finding out what's available in the area you are considering.

Social Life

The geographical distances between towns dictates that the population is scattered over a larger area and this can sometimes make it more difficult to cultivate new networks of friends and contacts.



If you're gay or bisexual you'll find that there are few, if any gay-identified venues. Statewide there are a number of GLBTI* social/support groups. These vary in membership and activeness from place to place and also from time to time. Populations and needs often shift and change and so do these groups. A good idea is to try to get hold of a newsletter or visit a website of a group in the area to judge for yourself how useful they may be to you.

It is no different in the country than the city; friendships can take a while to form and it helps if you already have family, friends or contacts in the area.

*GLBTI - Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex

Other Services

Recipients of unemployment benefits may not be eligible to receive payments for a period of time if they move to an area of high unemployment. Centrelink can give you more information on this.

HIV peer/community support groups operate in some regional localities. These often come and go as needs change. It is worth finding out if one is active in the area you want to live.

There are very few specialist GLBTI services in country areas.

Keeping in touch with friends/family can become more expensive with long distance telephone calls. Internet services in country areas are often limited to dial up or satellite which are considerably slower than cable broadband services.

Access to affordable specialist counselling services is very limited.

Mainstream charitable and community services such as St. Vincent de Paul, Lifeline, Salvation Army, etc. operate in most areas although they have high demands placed on them and may be limited in the assistance they can offer.

Already a country boy/girl?

When you are first diagnosed with HIV it can sometimes be scary and confusing time. It's easy to think your life is going to change dramatically all at once. This doesn't always have to be the case though. If you are generally in good health and have a GP who you are comfortable with, it could be that things don't have to change that much at all.

Of course it is important to take good care of yourself and to follow advice given to you by your GP or HIV specialist. Reading some of the tips in this guide and finding out about support and services in your area might be helpful. HIV is a virus not restricted to metropolitan communities. You may find that your current lifestyle and support networks of friends, family, etc. are far more valuable to you than the HIV specific social/support services that are typically only available in the city.

It is true that sometimes the need to be close to HIV specialist services means that a move to the city may outweigh the benefits of country living.

However most find that living positively rural is both achievable and rewarding.



More information

If you'd like more information or have questions regarding services available to people living with HIV/AIDS in rural/regional Victoria, you can contact us:

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34 Myers Street (P.O. Box 1149), Bendigo VIC 3552
Ph: (03) 5443 8355 Fax: (03) 5443 8198
email: can@can.org.au
www.can.org.au

Other useful contacts/information

The ALSO Directory -

http://www.also.org.au/resources/also_directory

ASHM Directory -

www.ashm.org.au/ashm-directory

Victorian HIV Consultancy
Ph 03 9276 3658

PLWHA Victoria -
www.plwhavictoria.org.au

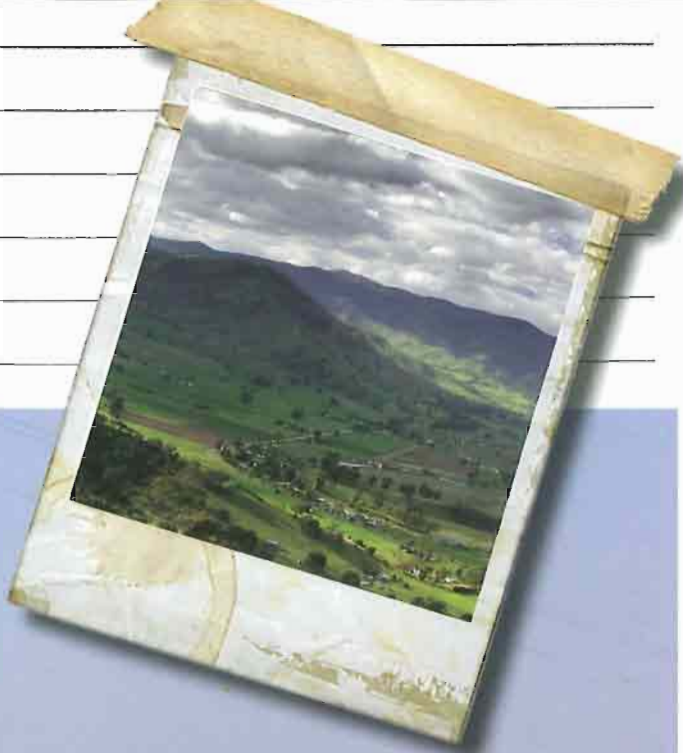


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