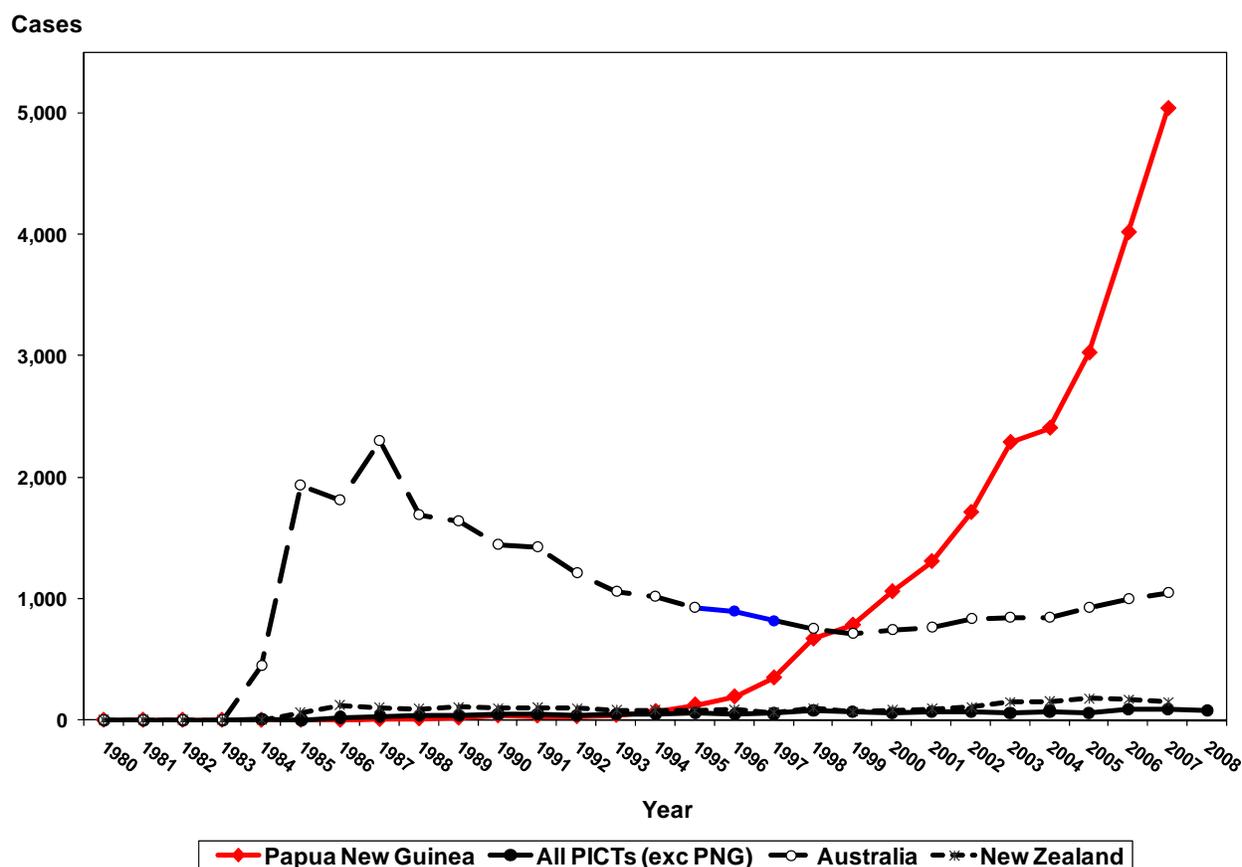


# HIV Epidemiological Update for Pacific Island Countries and Territories 2008

## Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

In 2007, there were 5,125 new HIV diagnoses reported in Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs), and diagnoses in PNG accounted for 5,038 or 98.6% of notifications. Excluding PNG, the annual number of new HIV diagnoses reported in PICTs was 87 cases in 2007 and 85 in 2008. Figure 1 shows the annual reported HIV cases in all PICTs, PNG, Australia and New Zealand from 1980 to 2007 (2008 for PICTs).

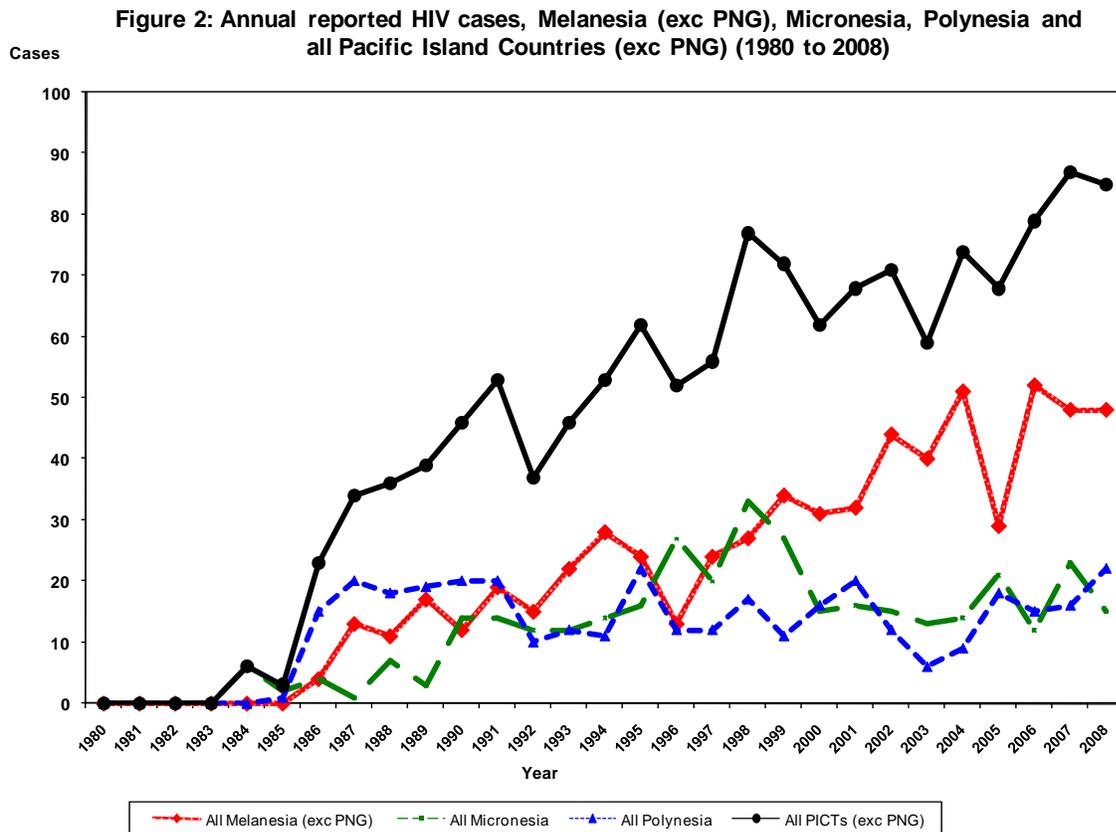
Figure 1: Annual Reported HIV Cases, all PICTs, PNG, Australia and New Zealand 1920-2007/8



Since 1995 there has been an exponential increase in the number of reported HIV cases in PNG. There has, however, also been a significant increase in the number of HIV tests carried out each year and therefore the increase in reported cases alone does not imply an increase in either incidence (the number of newly acquired HIV infections) or prevalence (the percentage of the population with HIV infection).

The number of annual reported HIV cases in Australia peaked in 1987 and the trend was downwards until 1999, since when there has been a slight upward trend. The very low numbers of annual reported

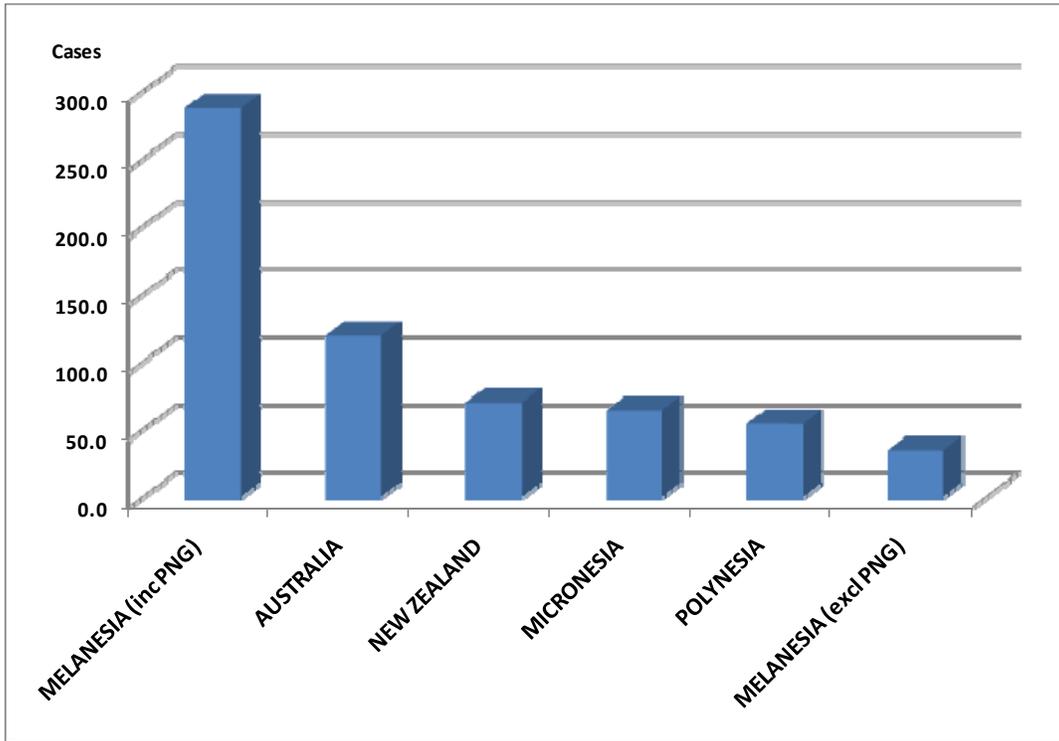
HIV cases in New Zealand and PICTs hardly register on the scale in Figure 1, but Figure 2 shows only PICTs excluding PNG.



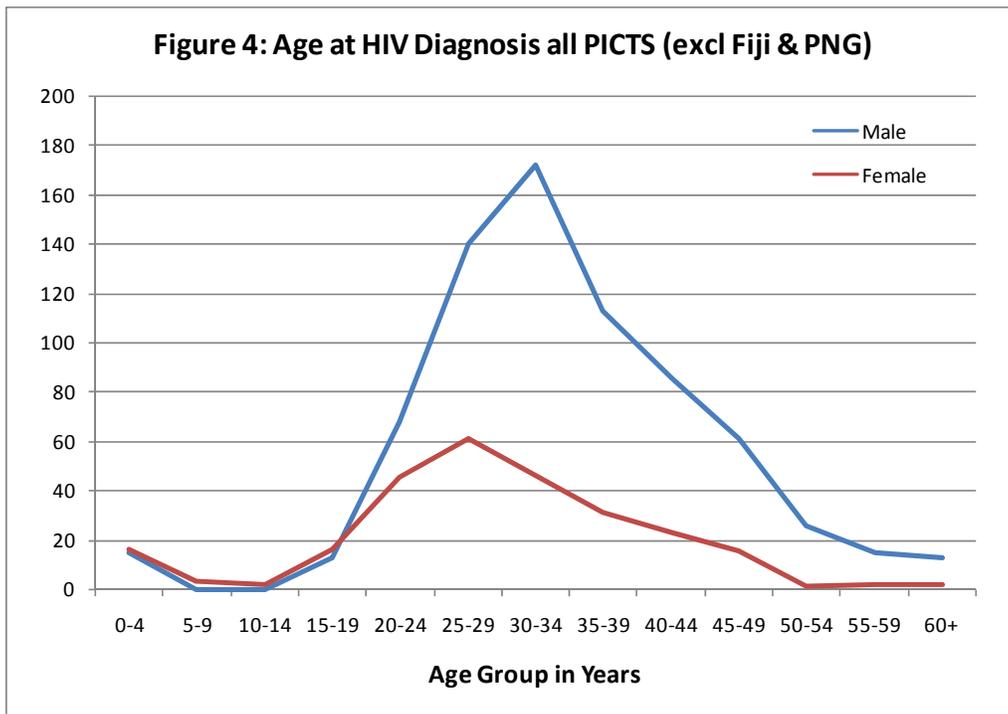
There has been a steady increase in the annual reported HIV cases in all PICTs since 1985, due almost entirely to the increase in Melanesia. The annual reported HIV cases in Polynesia have been relatively constant since 1986 and the number of annual reported cases in Micronesia has fallen slightly from a peak in 1998. As the number of HIV tests carried out each year has increased over time, it is not possible to determine from this data whether there has been any change in incidence or prevalence of HIV. However it is likely that there is significant under reporting of HIV in all PICTs.

As true HIV incidence is very difficult to measure, HIV cumulative incidence is used to describe the rate at which new infections are occurring. While Melanesia has had the highest number of annual reported HIV cases of the three sub regions since 1999, it has the lowest cumulative incidence per 100,000 population, as Figure 3 shows, if PNG is excluded. To December 2008 the cumulative incidence was 34.6 for Melanesia excluding PNG, 64 for Micronesia and 54.3 for Polynesia, compared with 119.4 for Australia and 358.8 for PNG to December 2007.

**Figure 3: Cumulative HIV Incidence per 100,000 Population, all PICTs 1980-2007/8**



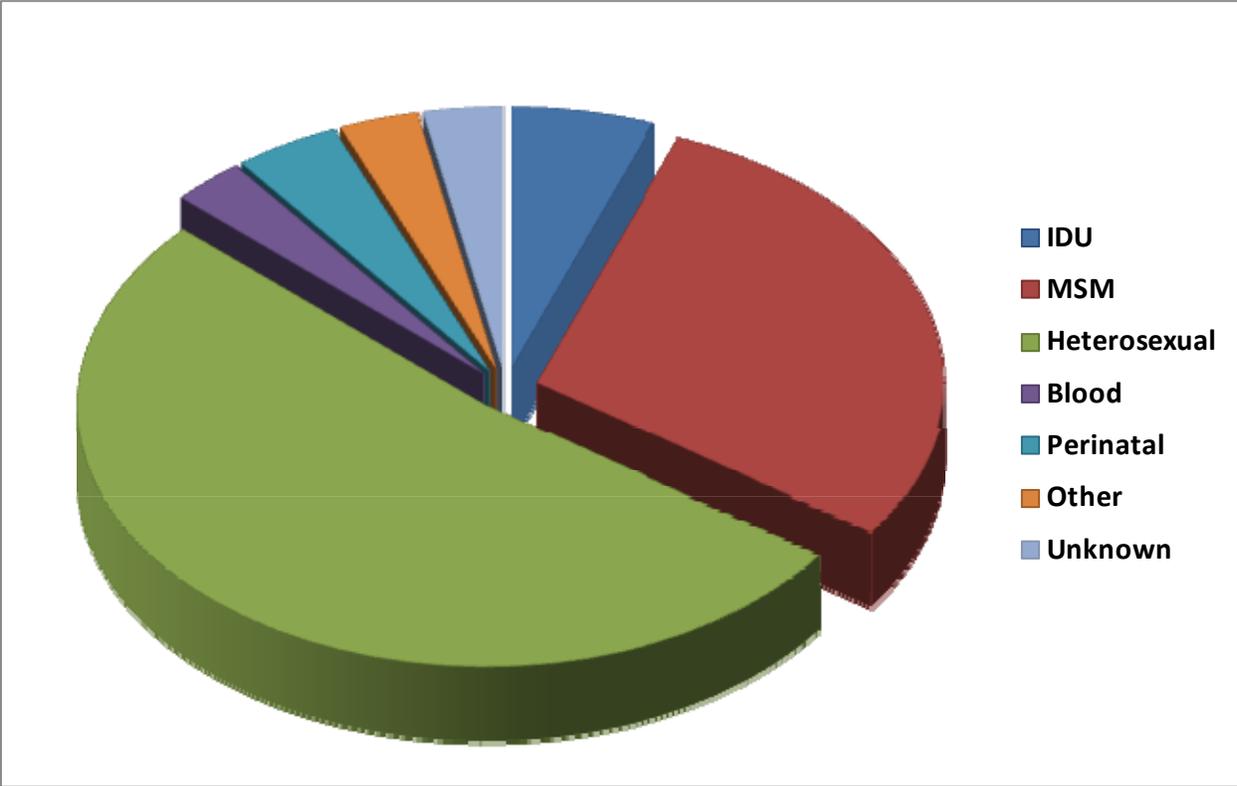
The age at HIV diagnosis is shown in Figure 4. The peak age at diagnosis for males is 30-34 years, whereas for females it is 25-29 years. (Fiji is excluded because age is reported in ten year age bands).



More than twice as many males as females have been diagnosed with HIV in PICTs to December 2008, whereas in PNG slightly more women are infected with HIV. In Melanesia the ratio of males to females affected is 2:1, in Micronesia 3:1 and Polynesia 2.4:1 compared with 0.9:1 in PNG.

The main mode of HIV transmission in PICTs is heterosexual, with approximately half of all HIV infections transmitted by this route, as Figure 5 shows. Over a quarter of HIV infections (29%) are transmitted by male to male sex (MSM) and six percent by injecting drug use (IDU).

**Figure 5: Mode of HIV Transmission in All PICTs excl. PNG**



Transmission of HIV differs between the sub regions however, with heterosexual transmission accounting for 59% of infections in Melanesia, but 46% in Micronesia and 42% in Polynesia. Less than 20% of HIV infections in Melanesia are transmitted via male to male sex, compared with 41% in Micronesia and 37% in Polynesia. Almost ten percent of HIV infections in Polynesia are among injecting drug users, compared with less than five percent in the other two sub regions.