



QuAC



St Luke's
Positive Directions



queensland**positive**people

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For immediate release



Joint Call for Action on HIV Rises

HIV organisations in Queensland have joined forces to call for a renewed effort in response to the news of an increase in HIV notifications.

136 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in Queensland in 2004. This represents a 19.2% increase on the previous year and a 40% increase since 2001.

Organisations have expressed their serious concern about the rise which marks the highest number of annual HIV diagnoses in Queensland for 10 years.

General Manager of the Queensland AIDS Council (QuAC), Paul R Martin warned *'this rise underscores the importance of the safe sex message and that none of us can be complacent. QuAC will be working with gay men to reinforce the safe sex culture, promote regular HIV and/or STI checkups and address the wider issues that make it difficult for gay men to stick to safe sex'*.

Mr Stephen Lambert, Coordinator of the HIV Education Program of the School of Medicine, The University of Queensland stated *'it is time for renewed effort in HIV prevention education in this state. The rise in HIV notifications is worrying and it is time for all involved in the HIV sector to re-energise their commitment to preventing further spread of HIV'*.

Mitchell Giles, State Manager of St Luke's Positive Directions program stated *'Positive Directions seeks to continue to work with Government and Non-Government Organisations in finding proactive and supportive solutions to provide a coordinated approach to the care of people newly infected with HIV'*.

Simon O'Connor, General Manager of Queensland Positive People said *'QPP will be continuing to highlight the importance of shared responsibility between HIV+ and HIV- people to minimise the spread of HIV in Queensland. QPP is looking to the Queensland Government to provide strong leadership, expertise and increased resources at this crucial time and is committed to working in partnership with government departments and other relevant agencies to address this alarming rise in HIV notifications'*.

Will Kerkhof, General Manager of Queensland Injectors Health Network stated *'The rise in HIV notifications is a clear indication that HIV cannot be underestimated. With funding from Queensland Health, QuiHN will increase education programs to injecting drug users to encourage safer injecting and safer sex practices to prevent the spread of HIV and other blood borne viruses'*.

Mr Ian Muil, Executive Manager of ECCQ said: *"As the lead agency in the provision of HIV prevention education to Queensland's ethnic communities, ECCQ has great concern over the increase in HIV diagnoses. Of particular concern is the importance in being able to accurately target messages to those members of the community at higher risk and we will continue to work closely, and seek to strengthen, the partnerships between Government and Non-Government Organisations in this battle."*

Cheryl Matthews, State Manager of SQWISI (Self Health for Queensland Workers in the Sex Industry) states, "SQWISI will continue to provide innovative education and prevention strategies to sex workers and their private and commercial partners in conjunction with other lead agencies."

HIV organisations have called for a renewed energy and priority to be given to HIV issues at an individual, community and government level. The soon to be released Queensland Strategy for HIV, Hepatitis C and Sexual Health provides an opportunity to provide leadership and new direction for HIV prevention efforts.

The organisations have proposed a 5 point plan as an initial response:

1. Extend the current high profile NSW HIV & STI media campaign across Queensland, including television.
2. Investigate the circumstances under which people have become newly infected.
3. Properly resource a comprehensive sex and relationships program across Queensland schools as part of the core curriculum.
4. Develop a statewide campaign to tackle stigma and discrimination against people infected and affected by HIV.
5. Increase funding for HIV prevention activities and to reduce waiting times & increase access at sexual health clinics.

All organisations will continue to work together to respond to HIV infections in the short and long term.

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