



MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday 30 NOVEMBER 2011

Arguing about Clean Needles in 2011 is Pathetic

30 years after the beginning of the global HIV pandemic, how is it possible that we can still have a debate about access to clean injecting equipment as a crucial strategy in minimising transmission in our prisons? President of the AIDS Action Council of the ACT, Scott Malcolm, labels the continuing debate as bizarre and disturbing and is calling for good sense to prevail this World AIDS Day.

“The evidence is crystal clear” he says. “Australia has about the lowest rate of HIV acquired through injecting drug use in the world because of the needle syringe programs introduced in the 80’s. Yet we deny some of our most vulnerable citizens access to them even though we all understand that potential transmission risk in custodial settings is higher than anywhere else.”

The AIDS Action Council points out that reducing the risk of HIV transmission benefits the whole community, and no opportunity to do so should be avoided in any setting. General Manager Andrew Burry believes that part of the problem is a lack of awareness and knowledge of blood borne viruses amongst our community generally, and that ignorance increases risk significantly. Burry points out that there were 1,043 new diagnoses of HIV in 2010. “This means that we now estimate that there are 21,391 people in Australia living with the virus and this is the highest number ever”, he goes on.

HIV does not discriminate and in the ACT as in other regions, people from all types of backgrounds are living with the condition. Fortunately, the majority of people have access to effective antiviral medications although it is far from smooth sailing; the medications are for life and the side effects can be chronic and debilitating. Some experience fluctuating health and other conditions that are now emerging as people with HIV are ageing for the first time.

Living with HIV in the nation’s capital presents some significant but avoidable challenges. In addition to on-going stigma and discrimination, there are very few doctors in Canberra qualified to prescribe the specialist drugs necessary to manage the condition, and prescriptions can only be filled in a single location – the Canberra Hospital Pharmacy. “These are some of the issues we ought to be addressing rather than who can and can’t benefit from harm minimisation”, says Burry.

World AIDS Day is a worldwide commemoration, and in the ACT this year the day will be launched with a Community Breakfast on the lawns of Westlund House Resource Centre, 16 Gordon Street Acton from 8am to 10am on Thursday December 1st. Everyone is welcome.

Information on HIV globally, nationally and locally can be obtained from the AIDS Action Council of the ACT on (02) 6257 2855 or found at www.aidsaction.org.au

Event details

Date: Thursday 1st December 2011

Time: 8am to 10am

Information and resources during week of World AIDS Day:

The Canberra Hospital Foyer, Ground Floor. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

For more information contact:

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For further information on HIV and World AIDS Day 2011, visit www.worldaidsday.org.au