

Date 5th May 2005
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QuAC

Media Release

Queensland AIDS Council Responds to HIV Increase

The Queensland AIDS Council has expressed its serious concern and has made a commitment to revitalise its prevention efforts in response to the news of an increase in HIV notifications in Queensland.

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.

'Over the past few years we have seen an increase in unprotected sex with casual and regular partners, increases in STIs which facilitate HIV transmission and a higher number of people who have recently become infected and therefore have a high viral load' said Paul R Martin, General Manager. *'All of these factors have contributed to the increase in HIV diagnoses we are now seeing in gay men.'*

Following changes to the funding of the organisation in 2004, QuAC is actively reviewing its HIV prevention program and has brought in new staff to supplement existing workers. Key priorities for QuAC are:

- **Reinforcing the safe sex culture among gay men** – including the consistent use of condoms, especially with casual partners;
- **Promoting regular HIV/STI check-ups** – at least annual check-ups or more frequently if more sexually active;
- **Supporting safe sex in the context of relationships** – helping men talk about and make decisions about sex in and outside their relationship; and
- **Addressing the wider issues that make it difficult for gay men to stick to safe sex** – such as drug & alcohol use, assertiveness & self esteem and stigma & discrimination.

QuAC continues to provide a range of evidence based HIV health promotion interventions including:

- outreach to gay venues, events and settings
- workshops for various groups of gay men
- production and distribution of small and mass media resources and campaigns
- information and referrals through the 1800 Men's Health Line and the QuAC website
- training on HIV and gay and men who have sex with men issues to service providers
- advocacy and policy development
- participation in research, including the Gay Community Periodic Survey

Rod Goodbun, President of the Queensland AIDS Council (QuAC) stated *'condoms remain the best form of HIV prevention, but there is still much work to be done in the broader community to promote the safe sex message and to support gay men in making informed decisions about their sexual health. We need to develop a culture of understanding and acceptance in Queensland, where sex and sexuality can be openly discussed free from stigma and discrimination.'*

QuAC joins with other HIV organisations in calling for the implementation of the following 5 point plan:

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 education 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.

If gay and other men who have sex with men are concerned about the rise in HIV or their own sexual safety they can ring the Men's Health Line on 1800 155 141 or visit the QuAC website at www.quac.org.au

Additional information is available from the Contact person listed above.