

Media Release

Celebrate IDAHO in 2008

For immediate release, Friday 18th April 2008
**Gay Men's Health, a program of
the AIDS Council of South Australia Inc.**
Telephone: (08) 8334 1606
Facsimile: (08) 8363 1046



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On 17 May 1990, the General Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from their list of mental disorders. Yet discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is still not recognised formally by all the member states of the United Nations - even though human rights mechanisms such as the Human Rights Committee have repeatedly condemned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

So what is Homophobia?

Homophobia is the hostility, disapproval, prejudice, hatred or fear of homosexuals or those perceived as homosexual. Homophobia sometimes may lead to acts of violence and expressions of hostility and discrimination.

There are many ways homophobia can be expressed. These can include:

- Making assumptions about a person's sexuality based on dress, behaviour, or personality.
- Focusing on a person's sexuality, rather than as whole, complex person.
- Being afraid of social or physical interactions with people who are lesbian or gay.
- Avoiding social situations or activities where you might be perceived as lesbian or gay.
- Assuming that lesbians and gay men will be attracted to everyone of the same gender.

And the impact of homophobia is widespread, much wider than you might realise.

- Homophobia reinforces socially constructed gender roles.
- Homophobia pressures heterosexual men to have to prove their masculinity.
- Homophobia disadvantages heterosexuals having close relationships with same-sex friends with the possible fear of being perceived as gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- Homophobia promotes discrimination.
- Homophobia promotes exclusion and does not embrace diversity.
- Homophobia can impact not only individuals but their families, friends and children.

In 2004, Fondation Émergence (who were involved in establishing IDAHO) publicly revealed a five-year plan of action by proposing a specific theme for each campaign year and identifying an area of activity in society in which the need to fight against homophobia will be met.

The theme for 2008 is 'Homosexuality is not a sickness!'

Specialists, however, haven't always thought so. And for a long time, mental health professionals considered sexual activity between same-sex partners an illness. Psychiatrists listed homosexuality among mental illnesses in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder) used by the American Psychiatric Association, an internationally recognised organisation. It was not until December 15, 1973, that homosexuality was removed from the Association's reference manual. This decision is reflected in the DSM-III published in 1980.

During an annual Board of Trustees meeting held in January 1975, the American Psychological Association did likewise by passing a resolution to remove homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses and emotional disorders for good.

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In Australia in 1973, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists adopted a policy strongly condemning 'community attitudes and laws which discriminate against homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private'. The Psychological Association then adopted several resolutions based on the same principle.

The Australian Psychological Society followed suit in 1974 with the establishment of the Committee on Social Issues.

On May 17, 1991, the World Health Organisation (WHO) removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. In 1992, this withdrawal was officially recorded in its international classification (ICD-10). At its 2006 National Conference, the American Psychological Association restated its position in which homosexuality as not an illness.

IDAHO in South Australia is growing in prominence each year, with many events planned to celebrate May 17. This includes barbecues, displays, morning teas and other get-togethers.

And in line with the healthcare theme, a service audit has been developed, for use in health services.

You can find out what is happening for IDAHO by logging on to the SA IDAHO webpage. Go to: <http://www.acsa.org.au/idaho.html>

Or contact Hugh at Gay Men's Health on 08 8334 1606. Country callers should call 1800 888 559.