

Media Release:

New Lobby group seeks better deal for gay and lesbian health

For immediate release 14 August, 2007

**Gay Men's Health, a program of
the AIDS Council of South Australia Inc.**

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New lobby group seeks better deal for gay and lesbian health



A new national lobby group was launched at Parliament House in Canberra today with the aim of putting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) health firmly on the political agenda in the run-up to the next Federal election.

Called the National GLBT Health Alliance, the new group has been set up to advocate for greater recognition of the health needs of GLBT people at a federal level and for the provision of adequate funding for program delivery and research. While the group was officially launched two months ago, today's event in Canberra brings the group to the attention of Federal politicians and policy makers.

The Alliance is a coalition of organisations from across Australia that provide programs, services and research in the areas of GLBT health and HIV/AIDS including ACON (NSW), the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities, the Victorian AIDS Council, the AIDS Council of South Australia, the Western Australia AIDS Council and the Northern Territory AIDS Council. The group also includes Gay & Lesbian Health Victoria, the only organisation in the country that is specifically funded to deal with gay and lesbian health issues.

Alliance spokespersons Adrian Lovney and Anne Mitchell say the group plans to be active on a whole range of issues, particularly in the lead-up to the forthcoming Federal election. The health issues the Alliance will address include ageing, HIV and sexual health, alcohol and drug use, mental health, violence and homophobia, Indigenous health, rural issues, relationship recognition and other forms of legislative discrimination.

"Most Federal laws and programs fail to recognise that GLBT people exist," Mr Lovney says. "This often results in poorer access to health services or higher costs of care.

"For example, Federal health programs such as Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Schemes are designed in ways that often result in higher costs for same-sex couples because they cannot take advantage of family thresholds. This is especially the case for GLBT couples with children. For aged care, the assets test discriminates against same sex couples by treating them as individuals, which can result in higher costs of care."

Ms Mitchell says one of the biggest barriers to fairer health services for the GLBT community is the failure of government agencies to collect relevant data.

"Other groups who experience disadvantage in accessing health services, such as older people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds, are counted in official figures," she says. "This means when they're not getting access to services, it shows up in the statistics. But GLBT communities aren't usually counted in official figures. That's why research is one of our major priorities because government decisions need to be informed by data that includes GLBT health and how we experience the provision of services."

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Mr Lovney says the Alliance is focussed on working with the Federal government to get results. "Many of the organisations that have come together to form this alliance have been involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Australia over the past two decades," he says. "So we understand that the most

effective pathway to successful health outcomes is through strong partnership with government. Therefore, we'll be seeking a commitment from the next Federal government to working with us to make sure that our communities get what every person should be able to expect - good quality affordable health and aged care delivered in a sensitive environment."

For further information, contact:

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