

MEDIA RELEASE: World AIDS Day 2009

For immediate release, 17 November 2009

The AIDS Council of South Australia Inc.

Telephone: (08) 8334 1611

Facsimile: (08) 8363 1046

Web: <http://www.acsa.org.au>

<http://www.redribbon.org.au>

Contact: Shane Dinnison, Executive Director



World AIDS Day 2009

Take Action – No Discrimination

HIV-related stigma and discrimination remain key barriers to dealing effectively with the HIV epidemic in Australia and around the world. The impact of these is not only felt by individuals living with HIV but also has direct consequences on Australia's public health response to the epidemic by undermining prevention, care and treatment efforts. HIV stigma can deter people at risk from being tested for HIV and deter HIV-positive people from accessing appropriate treatment and care. It also remains the key obstacle for HIV-positive people disclosing their status to friends and family, employers and work colleagues, health care providers, insurance companies, landlords, and sexual partners for fear of being treated less favourably, or being outrightly rejected or abused.

Australia's theme for World AIDS Day 2009 is Take Action - No discrimination and aims to confront the prejudices that exist within the gay and broader communities about HIV in 2009. A whole range of factors have led to an increase in stigma and discrimination: social and legal acceptance has resulted in many gay men no longer identifying the need for 'gay community', so there has been a subsequent decline in direct social exposure and personal experience between HIV positive and HIV negative gay men. Recent research conducted for the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations indicated that some younger gay men based all their attitudes and behaviours toward positive gay men on the preventative education and social marketing materials they had been exposed to over the years. Continuous messages of HIV prevention, and no "good news" stories of living with HIV, result in some men only having the knowledge that HIV is something to avoid at all costs. In most cases these men knew no positive people. The increased use of online spaces makes it easier to discriminate based on specific characteristics, including HIV, than it is in a face-to-face environment. Discriminatory behaviours take many forms but they all involve some form of exclusion or rejection. ("are you clean?", "d & d free").

All of this has led to the need to develop social learning processes which gay men can undergo to overcome their fear of HIV and practice of stigma and discrimination. The first lesson here is that personal contact with positive men enables



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negative men and the broader community to examine negative stereotypes of HIV positive men which are distributed through media and online.

So this World AIDS Day and beyond, take action and get to know someone living with HIV.

For media enquires contact Shane Dinnison, Executive Director, ACSA 0423159699

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