

MEDIA RELEASE: 29 November 2007

World AIDS Day: Looking forward to new leadership on HIV/AIDS

New leadership is needed to restore the Australian HIV response and reverse the rate of HIV infections across the country, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) said today.

"We look forward to the new federal government and the new Minister re-energising Australia's HIV response," said Don Baxter, Executive Director of AFAO.

"National leadership faltered under the previous federal government and Commonwealth investment in AIDS programs was allowed to steadily decrease over the last decade – yet HIV infections have been on the rise for the last five years in all states except New South Wales," said Baxter.

HIV infections increased by 41 percent from 2001 to 2006, while funding for Australia's key HIV research centres dropped by 10-15 percent.

"We welcome Labor's policy document '*Preventative health care for our families and our future economy*', released by (then) shadow Minister Roxon in June this year, setting the overall framework for the government enacting their specific commitments to HIV/AIDS made in their response to AFAO's questionnaire to the political parties during the election campaign," Baxter said.

While HIV is no longer a death sentence, each new HIV diagnosis places a significant pressure on the public purse, as the effective but costly antiretroviral drugs need to be taken for a lifetime.

"Unfortunately we are no closer to a magic bullet that will prevent HIV - health promotion that supports people to sustain behaviour change is the best tool we have – so prevention remains everybody's business," says Baxter.

"Keeping health promotion relevant for people at risk of HIV requires leadership, commitment, creativity, good research, and adequate funding. We look forward to federal Labor working with us to restore an effective response," Baxter said.

Further information: Don Baxter (Executive Director) 0419 223 560



**AUSTRALIAN
FEDERATION
OF AIDS
ORGANISATIONS INC.**

**PO BOX 51
NEWTOWN
NSW 2042 AUSTRALIA**

**PH +61 2 9557 9399
FAX +61 2 9557 9867**

EEmail:
afao@afao.org.au

Internet:
<http://www.afao.org.au>