



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS  
PO BOX 51 NEWTOWN NSW 2042 AUSTRALIA  
TEL: + 61 2 9557 8825 FAX: + 61 2 9557 9461  
EMAIL paul@napwa.org.au www.napwa.org.au

# MEDIA RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **World AIDS Day: keeping the promise**

Australia's remarkable success in combating HIV/AIDS is in danger of being squandered if governments forget the lessons of the past, the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) has warned.

"The global theme for World AIDS Day 2005 is 'Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise', and today NAPWA promises the federal government that we will continue to press for the voices of positive people to be heard and respected," said NAPWA President Ms Gabe McCarthy.

Australia's success in the past has been driven by the adoption of a coordinated national response with the involvement of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS at all levels of that response. But the federal government is showing signs of distancing itself from this approach despite its proven effectiveness.

"We had to wait more than a year for the government to release the fifth National HIV/AIDS Strategy. They have promised an Implementation Plan for that strategy and we look forward to seeing that delivered in the next week," she said.

"HIV-positive Australians have been instrumental in the response to HIV/AIDS from the earliest years of the epidemic and today, despite continuing stigma and discrimination, many of us are living healthy, productive lives," McCarthy said. "Yet the government seems hell-bent on making life more difficult for people who live with chronic illness and disability."

"The proposed changes to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) will penalise those who want to work but can't and will leave many chronically ill people financially worse off. The government calls this 'welfare-to-work' but in reality it's just shifting people from one welfare program to another. What we need are policies that encourage and reward workforce participation, not new penalties attacking the weak."

NAPWA has questioned how the proposed changes to the welfare system will affect people living with HIV/AIDS, typically an episodic condition involving periods of better and worse health. At present, people who qualify for the DSP are able to take on periods of employment when they are able and to come back to the pension when they need to; under the new system they could be shifted to the Newstart benefit with its more strict compliance requirements and harsher penalties.

"For more than two decades, HIV-positive people have worked to end the AIDS epidemic and protect our fellow Australians; we promise we'll continue to do that but we call on the federal government to keep their side of the bargain," McCarthy said. "In 2006 we'll continue to fight for the rights of positive people, to question the direction the federal government is taking us, and to honour the memories of our fallen friends."

"That's a promise."

### **For more details contact:**

Gabe McCarthy – NAPWA President – (0407) 892 446  
Paul Kidd – NAPWA Media Officer – (03) 9285 5358 or (0438) 203 754

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