

Many faces, different stories

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World AIDS Day 2006

The 19th World AIDS Day was marked across Australia on December 1, with speeches, concerts, and warnings about increasing numbers of new infections.

Speaking at the Sydney launch of the annual commemoration, NAPWA President Robert Mitchell said "Australians living with HIV/AIDS are a diverse population, including children, youth, adult men and women, and now our senior citizens. Just as the age range is broad, so too is the breadth of our needs and experiences. We all have unique perspectives about living with HIV/AIDS, and whether you are newly diagnosed, or have been living with HIV for twenty years, these perspectives are necessary for hearing the stories and understanding the complex human dimensions that this [virus](#) [1]A small infective organism which is incapable of reproducing outside a host cell. has brought into our communities and our lives."

Mitchell spoke of the critical importance of the involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS to the Australian response. "The personal actions that lead us to become more informed, more active in the HIV response, more involved in representing and advocating for positive people and shaping policies and programs ... continue to be the way that HIV positive people contribute and proudly stand as equal in the partnership which is the guiding model of National AIDS Strategy," he said.

The principle of involvement of positive people was not mere rhetoric, Mitchell argued, calling the partnership approach "the singular platform of the national response which arguably has given Australia one of the best HIV responses in the world."

Federal health minister Tony Abbott, at the same event, said the government was deeply concerned about a trend towards higher numbers of HIV notifications, and hinted at a change in government policies to head off a resurgent epidemic.

"All of us are very concerned about the recent increase in HIV/ AIDS notifications. This obviously does suggest we need to have a rethink about our policies," Mr Abbott said. "Nine hundred or so new cases is a public health problem of the first magnitude and that's why we need to do more."

Mr Abbott said he would ask for expert advice from the Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS, Sexual Health and Hepatitis ([MACASHH](#) [2]Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS, Sexual Health and Hepatides. The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing's high level expert committee, providing advice on issues relevant to HIV/AIDS, sexually transmissible infections and hepatitis C.) before unveiling any new initiatives to combat HIV/

HIV-positive activist and academic Dr Susan Paxton also spoke at the Sydney launch. Dr Paxton told the crowd that her diagnosis was the greatest challenge she had ever had to face, and spoke of the discrimination surrounding HIV, often at the hands of health professionals. After her health deteriorated and she started treatment, Paxton decided to 'go public' with her HIV status at the urging of her 10-year-old son, who thought it might be 'good for her health'.

"I did go public, and it was good for me," Paxton said. "I'm really fortunate that I responded optimally to HIV medication and I continue to be very healthy, and I'm proud to say that last week my son finished his year 12 exams. I am one of the lucky ones."

Paxton believes that young people are "not getting the message" about HIV and that Australia's position as a world leader in responding to HIV has deteriorated.

"Each year, thousands of young Australians become sexually active. A responsible government must provide every opportunity to ensure that each of these young people can lead healthy and informed lives," she said.

- [involvement of positive people](#)
- [World AIDS Day](#)

Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/125>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/379>