

## Govt to urge neighbours not to discriminate

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The Rudd Government will encourage Australia's Asia-Pacific neighbours to introduce laws that protect people with HIV and homosexually active men from discrimination.

The human rights push announced by Foreign Minister Stephen Smith is part of a new international HIV strategy to combat the growing epidemic on Australia's doorstep.

He cited Asian research which claims the spread of HIV can be stopped if prevention programs reach 80 percent of the high risk populations such as drug users, sex workers and their clients, and men who have sex with men.

The report claimed reaching those at-risk people is difficult because of systemic homophobia.

'Protecting people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation can remove secrecy by men who have sex with men, and increase their likelihood of accessing HIV services,' the report stated.

'Protection may be provided through statutory or constitutional law or by giving international treaties the force of law.'

Australia will also encourage its neighbours to update laws and policies to encourage people to find out their HIV status and get treatment, and to improve access to condoms and clean needles.

Ironically, the release of AusAID's new HIV response also puts the government in the awkward position of having an international HIV strategy, but not a national one.

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