

6.3 WORLD AIDS DAY RECOGNITION

Submitting Councillor: Cr Josh Fergeus

MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Shows its support for people living with HIV in the community and seeks to commemorate people who have died of AIDS related conditions or other conditions associated with HIV;*
- 2. Notes the 302 newly diagnosed cases of HIV across Victoria in 2017¹;*
- 3. Lights up Council offices and the Euneva carpark in red on the 1st of December 2018 and on the 1st of December in each subsequent year to mark World AIDS Day.*

BACKGROUND

World AIDS Day is held on 1 December each year². It raises awareness across the world and in the community about HIV and AIDS. It is a day for the community to show their support for people living with HIV and to commemorate people who have died of AIDS related conditions or other conditions associated with HIV.

World AIDS Day aims to encourage Australians to educate themselves and others about HIV; to take action to reduce the transmission of HIV by promoting prevention strategies; and to ensure that people living with HIV can participate fully in the life of the community, free from stigma and discrimination.

HIV still exists in Australia. There were 1081 new HIV diagnoses in Australia in 2014 with the rate remaining stable over recent years³.

HIV can affect anyone. There is no vaccine or cure for HIV, however there is highly effective treatment. People living with HIV take medications on a daily basis to maintain their HIV at an undetectable level and to keep themselves healthy. Today, HIV is considered a chronic but manageable condition, and people living with HIV can lead long and healthy lives, with a similar life expectancy to a person who does not have HIV.

The colour red is an international symbol of HIV awareness and support⁴.

WHAT IS HIV? WHAT IS AIDS?

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, HIV Quarterly Report 2018 Q2

² <http://www.worldaidsday.org.au/>

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that can weaken the immune system to the point that it is unable to fight off simple infections. HIV is not the same thing as AIDS⁵. AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is the most advanced stage of HIV infection, when the immune system is at its weakest and a person has several specific illnesses. AIDS is now very rare in Australia, as HIV treatments effectively protect the immune system from the virus.

STIGMA

HIV can prompt intense feelings in people, regardless of their HIV status. It is sometimes viewed with a sense of unacceptability or disgrace. A person with HIV may feel great shame and despair about their status. An HIV-negative person may be fearful or angry when they discover someone has HIV. The relationship of these feelings to HIV is referred to as stigma.

‘Felt stigma’ (also known as internalised stigma) refers to deep feelings of shame and self-loathing, and the expectation of discrimination. It can have serious negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of people living with HIV by discouraging them from getting tested, receiving support, or taking treatment⁶. It can also lead people to engage in high-risk behaviours that harm their health, and contribute to new HIV infections.

‘Enacted stigma’ is the experience of unfair treatment by others. For people living with HIV this can be in the form of being treated differently and poorly, or through rejection, abuse, or discrimination.

Stigma is often attached to things people are afraid of. Ever since the first cases of AIDS in the early 1980s, people with HIV have been stigmatised. There are a number of reasons for this⁷:

- If undiagnosed and unmanaged, HIV can still be a serious, life-threatening illness. There is a long history of illnesses being stigmatised – cancer and tuberculosis are two other examples.
- People who don’t understand how HIV is transmitted may be afraid of ‘catching’ it through social contact.
- Some people have strong views about sexual behaviour. They may think that there are situations in which sex is wrong or that certain people shouldn’t behave in particular ways.

Stigma leads to people not being treated with dignity and respect.

CONCLUSION

HIV can affect anyone, and people living with HIV often feel isolated because of their fear of being discriminated against and not being accepted.

⁵ <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hiv-and-aids>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ <http://www.aidsmap.com/>

Feeling accepted and having ongoing support available can make a big difference in helping people deal with the physical and emotional challenges HIV brings.

World AIDS Day, held on 1 December each year, is a significant opportunity to show our support for people living with HIV in our community and to contribute to breaking down stigma.