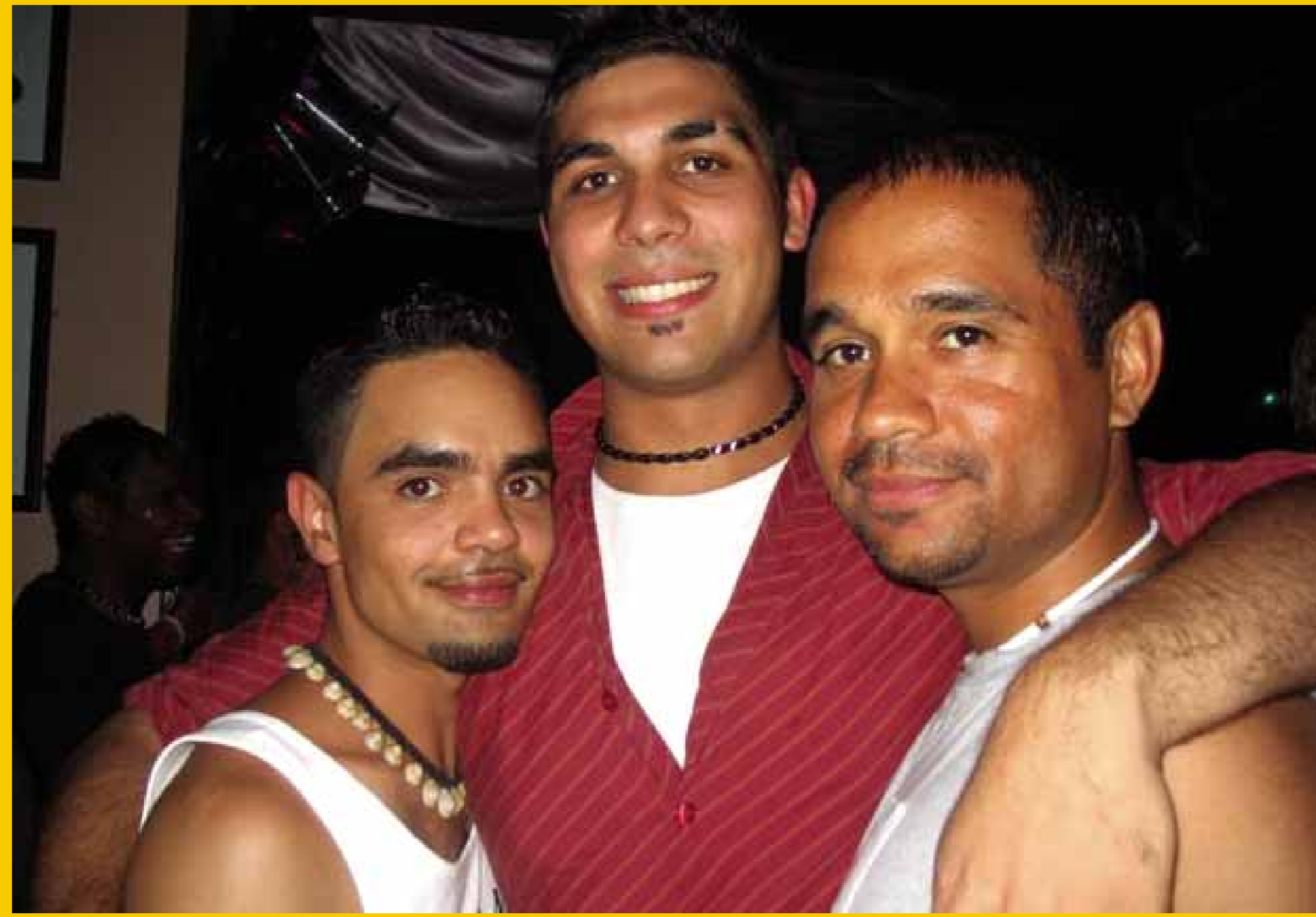


anwernekenhe STRONGER TOGETHER Mylor – South Australia 25 – 28 April 2006



Australian Indigenous Strategic Alliance (ISA) - Colin Ross, Robert Smith, Corey Czok, Gary Lee, Arone Raymond Meeks, Crystal Johnson, Tony Coburn, Mario Soki
Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) - Michael Costello, Keith Ball



Changing Epidemic

The HIV epidemic among Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is changing. To date, the majority of transmissions have been attributed to male-to-male sex, making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gay men, sistergirls, people with gender issues and men who have sex with men a priority group for HIV/AIDS education work. However, recent data has shown that HIV transmissions have increased among women and injecting drug users in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This change in the pattern of the epidemic has led to changes in the HIV response among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which was at first focussed mainly on gay men and sistergirls.

The 2006 *Anwernekenhe 4* Conference aimed to respond to how HIV uniquely affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women through incorporating new components into the conference agenda. For the first time, men and women came together to address the changing nature of the epidemic. Cultural protocols in the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community separate men and women's business, so separate spaces were provided for discussions, with the group coming together to determine outcomes and a way forward.

In 2005 the ISA proposed to broaden its focus to respond to the needs of all of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities most affected by HIV/AIDS. *Anwernekenhe 4* participants unanimously supported and endorsed the new proposal – representing a shift to a 'whole of community response to HIV'.

Capacity Building

A range of topics that impact on HIV/AIDS and sexual health and well-being were addressed at the conference. Capacity building was given special attention to empower delegates to work with their communities. The conference addressed:

- HIV & STI prevention
- Living with HIV/AIDS
- Isolation and discrimination
- Youth
- New and emerging research
- The workforce
- Sexuality and gender issues impacting on sexual health and well-being

International Collaboration

The conference provided international regional linkages to be forged with participants attending from both Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Papua New Guinea.

Anwernekenhe 4 also allowed for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to contribute to the THE TORONTO CHARTER - Indigenous Peoples' Action Plan on HIV/AIDS 2006, which will be delivered at the 16th International AIDS Conference in Toronto.

Informing the Australian National Response

Anwernekenhe 4 provided an opportunity to evaluate responses and learn of new and emerging issues in meeting the challenges of HIV/AIDS and sexual health in Australian indigenous communities.

The 35 recommendations made by delegates will go on to inform national strategic HIV responses by AFAO, AIDS Councils, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and government health departments.

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Definitions

'Anwernekenhe': the name given to a series of conferences held every four years that underpin the community based HIV response of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gay men, sistergirl and transgender community. Coordinators: the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Project of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations in collaboration with the Indigenous Strategic Alliance, the primary advisory committee to AFAO on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

'Anwernekenhe': the word given to conference participants at the *Anwernekenhe 1* conference by the Elders of the Arrernte nation in central Australia meaning **'us mob meeting together here in this place'**.



Acknowledgement: Photos by - Gary Lee, Sarina Solar, Keith Ball, Simon Donohoe, Selena Pirika