COMMUNITY LED EFFORTS

Stigma and discrimination

OBJECTIVES
To reduce HIV stigma and discrimination-related barriers to testing, treatment and care.

CURRENT ISSUES

- HIV-related stigma and discrimination continue to be a central part of the lives of many people with HIV across Australia. That stigma is driven by a range of factors, including outdated notions of HIV and misinformation about transmission and transmissibility;
- HIV-related stigma and discrimination is experienced in a range of settings, including the gay community, the general community, health care settings, government agencies, workplaces and mainstream and on-line media;
- The effects of stigma and discrimination are multifaceted:
  - HIV-related stigma and discrimination is a source of significant harm in the lives of individuals, causing both a decline in wellbeing and quality of life (through social isolation, shame, anxiety and depression) and in physical wellbeing (social isolation is correlated with poorer adherence to HIV treatment).
  - At a population level, stigma and discrimination present a barrier to people presenting for regular testing, engaging with health care providers regarding risk behaviours, and sustaining contact with health care and treatment adherence. These factors in turn pose a risk to our public health goals of reducing HIV transmission;
- Despite the substantial body of knowledge about the prevalence, nature and impact of HIV-related stigma there has been limited investment to date in innovative activities to address stigma and discrimination.

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

- Develop interventions that build individual resilience among people with HIV, so that individuals can withstand stigma and discrimination where it does occur;
- Develop strategies to address systemic factors that perpetuate stigma and discrimination, including policies and laws that regulate key populations and have an adverse impact on those populations;
- Publish an annual report on HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and document activities to combat HIV stigma and build resilience of PLHIV;
- Develop an evidence-informed programmatic response to HIV-related stigma and discrimination that:
  - engages communication specialists to design a sophisticated, integrated communications package targeting (general and gay-specific) community settings, mainstream media and online channels;
  - builds on recent efforts to address HIV-related stigma and discrimination in clinical settings;
  - supports local workforces to design local interventions that address context-specific stigma and discrimination.

IMPACT

- Improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of individuals with HIV;
- Reduce barriers to testing, treatment and retention in care.

COST-BENEFIT

This investment will contribute to the prevention of poorer health outcomes among people with HIV, thereby reducing pressure on primary care and public health, and reduce late diagnoses and the health care costs associated with late HIV diagnosis.

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT

$400,000 per annum