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Australia loses a leader. Vale David Cooper

David Cooper was a man of science, but he never forgot that people are at the centre of the HIV epidemic.

Over three decades, David was a towering figure in the HIV response, not just in Australia, but across the globe. His commanding intellect was matched by humanity and humility.

In 1986 he established the research institute whose name would become synonymous with research excellence, the Kirby Institute. He served as its director until his passing on Sunday.

Along the way, David was involved at pivotal moments in the development of HIV science. David was at the forefront of many trials that developed life-saving HIV treatment. Some of his early work provided the first description of seroconversion illness.

David's enduring sense of social justice saw him parlay his scientific knowledge into profoundly important advocacy and activism. In Thailand, for example, he insisted those involved in anti-retroviral therapy trials have ongoing access to the medicine after the trials finished. This saved many lives and helped prevent the development of drug resistance.

David's advocacy and research were also critically important in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Myanmar and elsewhere in the region.

In his home town of Sydney, David led the recent trial of pre-exposure prophylaxis. The significance of that work will cascade into sharply lower rates of HIV transmission among gay and bisexual men in the years to come.

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations mourns David. He was a friend and leader, and a shining embodiment of humanity at its finest. We extend our deepest sympathies to his wife Dorrie, daughters Becky and Ilana, and the wonderful team at the Kirby Institute.

Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

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The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO's members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO's affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research and clinical workforce – share AFAO's values and support the work we do.