

Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017

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afao.org.au

Contact

Darryl O'Donnell

1/222 King Street

NEWTOWN NSW 2042

T: +61 2 9557 9399

E: Darryl.O'Donnell@afao.org.au

W: afao.org.au

Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

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.

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017 (the Bill), introduced into the Parliament on 7 December 2017.

AFAO is the peak national organisation for Australia's community HIV response. We are recognised nationally and globally for the leadership, policy expertise, coordination and support we provide. Through advocacy, policy and health promotion, we champion awareness, understanding and proactivity around HIV prevention, education, support and research. AFAO is particularly concerned about ensuring that an evidence-based approach guides Australia's HIV response and related public policy. Our members include Australia's state and territory AIDS Councils, national peak organisations representing communities affected by HIV, which include the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA), the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users' League (AIVL) and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers' Association. AFAO is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) and is an organisation that is endorsed with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status.

AFAO's submission highlights the importance of organisations' ability to engage with the government and public and propose solutions to critical policy issues.

Since the first National HIV strategy in 1989, Australia's response to HIV has been underpinned by a "partnership" approach between the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments, community organisations, researchers and clinicians. This partnership approach is characterised by ongoing collaboration between stakeholders to ensure that Australia's response to HIV is innovative, evidence informed and sensitive to the communities affected by HIV. Australia's adoption of a national Needle and Syringe Program, community informed programs to support safe sex awareness among gay men and sex workers and the provision of equitable and affordable access to HIV treatment are a result of this partnership in work.

Central to this partnership is the goodwill and trust between government and community. This partnership enables AFAO to play a leading intermediary role in providing government with up-to-date intelligence on trends in community practices, HIV science, technology and medicine to enable evidence informed and culturally sensitive decisions. The provision of this information is welcomed and appreciated by government, and, in many cases, requested by government to support the development of solutions to problems and improve the acceptability of government initiatives and political outcomes.

The benefits of the non-partisan advocacy undertaken by AFAO has been demonstrated through our work on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). PrEP is a new HIV prevention technology that involves the use of HIV medication by HIV negative people at risk of HIV to prevent HIV acquisition. PrEP is highly effective and has the capacity to dramatically reduce the burden of HIV in Australia. However, PrEP is very expensive to purchase over the counter and access is conditional on Australia's regulatory environment for approving medications. The optimal outcome for making PrEP available in Australia is for the product to be listed on the PBS for HIV prevention purposes.

Currently, access through the PBS is pending which has led to a disconnect between the supply of PrEP in Australia and the demand for this product by consumers. Consequently, individuals who are seeking access to PrEP are left to lawfully import the product. As awareness of PrEP has increased, several state governments funded large, short-term demonstration trials that have enabled interim access while pharmaceutical companies seek a positive recommendation from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). These developments have provided access for individuals who have high levels of health literacy and are in those states where a trial is operating. The situation has, however, created an environment of unequal access to PrEP in Australia.

AFAO as a national peak organisation is playing a unique role as an intermediary in briefing the Department of Health (DoH), and the Minister for Health, about developments in PrEP demand and access. These updates are informed by our ongoing communications with suppliers of the medication who are navigating Australia's regulatory framework, and our community based membership who are supporting individuals to access PrEP through the personal importation scheme and/or demonstration trials. This ongoing dialogue between AFAO, the DoH and Minister is informing solutions to PrEP access gaps.

As this case study demonstrates our advocacy work is not to influence election outcomes but is driven by our organisation's objectives, which include to advocate and influence for better outcomes to support the Australian government to meet its targets in the National HIV Strategy.

AFAO provides advice in equal measures to government, opposition and minor parties. When a statement or policy helps to achieve our organisational objectives, or the goals of the National HIV Strategy AFAO recognises and supports such a statement. AFAO's intermediary role between government and the wider community can be used to ensure that respectful dialogue and an evidence based approach to policy and decision making is supported.

An enduring legacy of Australia's successful response to HIV is the multi-partisan support of policies and initiatives that are evidence informed. This support has allowed an ongoing conversation between the community-led response and decision makers enabling policy outcomes that are credible, relevant and sensitive.

Continued partnership and engagement between AFAO, the Government and Opposition, community organisations, researchers and clinicians is required to ensure that our achievements are maintained and that the vision for the virtual elimination of HIV transmission can be realised.