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Dear Professor O'Donnell

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations' 2019 Federal Election Survey.

Labor has a proud record on HIV. In the 1980s the Hawke Labor Government led the world with its response to the HIV epidemic.

That response was underpinned by the same principles that would guide a Shorten Labor Government – partnership, harm reduction and non-partisanship.

While we have made great strides in the decades since, around 1,000 Australians are still diagnosed with HIV every year, and in some areas we are going backwards. Shockingly, the rate of new diagnoses in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is now above other Australians for the first time ever.

That's why we must renew the effort to make HIV history.

A Shorten Labor Government will implement the Eighth National HIV Strategy, as well as the four other National Strategies on Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections that were recently agreed by all jurisdictions.

Crucially, the HIV Strategy includes a target to effectively eliminate HIV transmission in Australia by 2022. Having missed the previous target to eliminate HIV transmission by 2020, we must redouble our efforts.

A Shorten Labor Government will therefore invest \$39 million to step up the fight against HIV and tackle the stigma associated with HIV that is holding back success.

Labor's commitment will see:

- \$10 million a year to renew Australia's HIV response by restoring funding and capacity to HIV peak organisations, including the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, the National Association of People with HIV, Scarlet Alliance and the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League. Labor's investment in these groups and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation will allow them to undertake critical engagement and communications activity with at-risk populations.

- \$3 million a year to target ‘hidden populations’ including people who aren’t diagnosed with or treated for HIV, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Labor’s investment will improve prevention, testing and treatment for these groups through new health promotion campaigns, expanding access to testing, and partnering with primary health care providers to ensure that people who are diagnosed with HIV are treated.

Labor announced these policies in December 2017 – one of our first and most important health commitments ahead of the 2019 election.

As you know, at that time Labor also committed to support state and territory trials of the game-changing HIV prevention drug, PrEP. Labor welcomes the subsequent PBS listing of PrEP, as recommended by independent experts. Labor will work to ensure PrEP, HIV point of care and self-tests, and treatment are available to all who can benefit from them – again, based on advice from independent experts.

Labor will additionally invest \$20m in sexual health promotion and make it a health priority in Northern Australia. Labor will restore funding to the Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council, which has suffered savage cuts under the Liberals, and put in place a workforce plan to make sure there are resources to deal with sexual health issues, including the syphilis outbreak across Northern Australia.

Labor recognises Australia’s global leadership in HIV research - from basic science through to implementation research - and understands the importance of timely surveillance and breakthrough science.

Labor’s National Platform – our most important policy document – also includes a commitment to act urgently on any advice from the Red Cross Blood Service and the Therapeutic Goods Administration to reduce the deferral period for men who have sex with men. Labor understands that updated Blood Service and TGA advice will be provided to Government in the coming months and hopes that advice will allow a Shorten Labor Government to reduce the inequality and social harm caused by this discriminatory policy.

We will also ask the Australian Law Reform Commission to examine laws that hold back Australia’s HIV response and make recommendations to assist all jurisdictions to harmonise laws.

These commitments stand on top of existing Commonwealth policies and programs. While late in the current Government’s second term, Labor welcomes the recent 2019 Budget measures on HIV, BBVs and STIs and will deliver this funding if elected.

Internationally, Labor has committed to rebuild and grow Australia’s international development program and increase Official Development Assistance as a percentage of Gross National Income every year that we are in office, starting with our first Budget.

We are committed to working with and supporting civil society. We will increase the annual base grant funding for fully accredited NGOs in the Australian NGO Cooperation Program at a cost of \$32 million over the forward estimates.

In our region HIV continues to affect millions of people, and the number of those accessing treatment are unacceptably low. Health and gender equality and inclusion, in addition to education, climate change and infrastructure, will be central themes for Australia’s international development

program under Labor. This, and our commitment to rebuild the aid program, will have a direct bearing on combating HIV under a future Labor Government.

As our National Platform states, 'promoting women's economic empowerment is one of the most effective strategies to improve education for all young women and girls, reduce infant and maternal mortality, improve health – Including preventing HIV/AIDS – and promote prosperity'.

Labor has also committed to the United Nations Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS, which provides the global framework for action on HIV, including through the UNAIDS Fast-Track 95-95-95 targets to end the HIV epidemic.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to AFAO's 2019 Federal Election Survey. We have appreciated our relationship in Opposition and look forward to working with you even more closely in Government.

Yours sincerely

Australian Labor