Positive Speakers
Protecting Young Australians

The Newsletter of
People Living with
HIV/AIDS Victoria Inc

Information, Education
& Representation

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Note from the Executive Officer

Sonny Williams

The start of the year has seen the organisation engaged in a number of profile raising activities from Midsumma, Pride and ChillOut to launching new resources and a new campaign. Our stall at Midsumma Carnival saw the first components of a new Syphilis campaign—a humorous radio advertising campaign encouraging condom use and syphilis testing during the party/festival season, and drink bottles with a message Ready for action—Test Every 3 Months. Despite the chilly weather the bottles proved to be a popular take away item.

At ChillOut and the Easter Party weekend we distributed limited edition brushed aluminium dog tags with the same message, and these proved even more popular. The takeaways promote the GoTest website (www.gotest.net.au) supporting the Syphilis campaign about testing frequency, which is currently visible in a full-colour gay community press campaign. They represent the tangible outcomes of a multi-faceted approach to communicate a simple message in a relevant and accessible manner.

Along the way PLWHA Victoria also had a strong presence at Pride March, celebrating its twentieth anniversary with a message “20 Years Strong” printed on masses of blue and white balloons, handed out to the crowd as we marched down Fitzroy Street. We will celebrate this anniversary with a dedicated event later in the year.

Recently we launched two new resources, one from the Speakers Bureau “Protecting Young Australians from HIV” (for distribution to schools and corporate training managers) and the other an updated version of the popular Up Up & Away resource for positive travellers.

The Speakers Bureau resource aims to raise the profile of the Bureau and educate decision-makers about the changing face of the epidemic worldwide.

Up Up & Away is available as a pocket-size printed resource and online in a companion website www.positivetravel.info, and comes at a time when the agency receives weekly calls from PLWHA who are thinking about overseas travel and grappling with the issues involved.

Both projects were funded by external sponsors, Merck Sharp & Dohme and Roche Products respectively, and their development and distribution could not have occurred without the continued commitment and support of these companies.

We also thank Dr Jonathan Anderson from Carlton Clinic who put his considerable experience of treating HIV together with his passion for overseas travel in a comprehensive and informative presentation at the launch of the travel resource.

Finally if you have any suggestions on what you would like to read in PosLink, or want to contribute an article, please contact the office on 03 9865 6772 or email info@plwhavictoria.org.au.
As autumn brings more warm weather to our fine State, there has been no rest for the State’s peak advocacy, education and support organisation.

I am very pleased to announce that the selection committee for the Michael Masters Fund (MMF) have finalised the first round of disbursements and all who were successful should have received their cheques by now. I would like to take a moment to explain why the MMF is slightly different to other funds. The fund was set up to assist PLWHA in financial hardship with the criteria being very “loose”. This enables the fund to make its decisions based on a wide range of “lifestyle” and “quality of life” based requirements. In this round, for example, the fund bought a push bike, a stereo, an outdoor setting, a fridge, and other goods and services which will help improve both the financial situation and quality of a PLWHA life. The next round will happen toward the middle of the year – watch out for the announcement on our website and in PosLink. I would also like to personally thank our Administration Officer, David, for making the process of taking enquiry calls, arranging quotations, and disbursing payments an extremely smooth one.

During this month, Sonny and I visited Tasmania, to attend a TasCAHRD function and to meet with members of PLWHA Victoria at a social gathering on the Saturday morning in North Hobart. It was extremely pleasant, and gave us the opportunity to make sure we are servicing our southern members in the fashion that they wish to be. We, as an organisation, will continue to liaise with our Tasmanian members to make sure our duty of care to members is maintained regardless of whether you live in Melbourne, country Victoria or across the Bass Strait.

Speaking of travelling, in August this year, Sonny and I will also be attending the International AIDS Conference in Mexico. This will be a vitally important conference – given the rapidly changing landscape of the pandemic – but also one which will see, for the very first time, a delegate report directly back on to JOY 94.9fm. I thank Stephen Hahn (the Station Manager) for helping make this a reality, and look forward to informing you of what is happening at the conference. I will also, of course, be providing full reports for PosLink and our friends in the gay media upon my arrival back in Australia.

On two separate occasions in the past month, I have had the opportunity to meet, speak with, and hear speak, the Honourable Minister for Health, Daniel Andrews. A very eloquent man, who appears to understand the plight of Positive People in this State, and what his Government needs to do to control any future rise in the infection rates. I thank him for his kind words (about PLWHA Victoria, myself and our staff) and for the direction he has intimated he, his Government, and his department will take in the future.

In conclusion I want to respond to a letter from a member in regard to the content of PosLink and the ability to ask questions. You are, at any time, welcome to send questions to PosLink and/or make suggestions of issues to be covered. This is in line with my open door policy - enabling any member to contact me directly with queries or comments. Contact details for the office are in the front of this publication, and both my email and phone number are listed on our website at plwhavictoria.org.au

I hope this finds you enjoying very good health. Until next time, be safe and happy.
Speakers Bureau launches a major new campaign “Protecting Young Australians from HIV”

The Victorian Health Minister launched the campaign at the State Library with a large audience attending. The campaign targets young Australians who travel overseas for work and as tourists. The campaign resource will be distributed to every Victorian Secondary School, every politician and to the top 40 companies located in Melbourne.

Deanna Blegg was the keynote speaker from the Bureau. She spoke passionately about her work educating students about the realities of living with HIV, being a mother and how she is inspired to reach her personal goals as an elite athlete.

Brett Hayhoe, the PLWHA Victoria President was the compere for the launch with his usual flair and Murray Altham from Merck Sharp & Dohme spoke passionately about the importance of positive speakers.

Australians love to travel overseas and travel is cheaper than ever before for young Australians to backpack around Europe, the America’s, or South East Asia. The findings of research into backpackers also applies to Australians traveling abroad. Among backpackers surveyed in Sydney and Cairns, 39% had casual sex in Australia with someone they had known for less than 24 hours. Half used protection only occasionally when they had casual sex and one quarter never used it at all.

One in five a school leavers believes that HIV affects only gay men and drug users, so they may not realise its prevalence within the mainstream community in countries they visit. They may also meet other travelers coming from those countries.

Research shows that travelers who made informed choices about safer sex at home were prepared and protected themselves when traveling overseas. So raising awareness of the realities of living with HIV and AIDS is an important step we can take and the members of the Speakers Bureau Media Group give presentations to motivate young Australians to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS at home and when they travel overseas.

The campaign is the culmination of 18 months work. However the idea of a NGO and large multinational corporation working together to promote the importance of HIV positive speakers as community educators began over 8 years ago.

Merck Sharp & Dohme has supported community development at PLWHA Victoria for all of this time. Merck Sharp & Dohme also sponsors HIV positive speakers to the Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men’s Health Centre Peer education workshops.

Daniel Reeders was the Project Manager for this campaign and used his extraordinary abilities to build and implement the campaign.

The campaign resource now has a new website where you can read the resource and listen to Deanna’s speech.

www.positivespeakers.com.au

Records broken again in 2007

Last year we broke our own record again with 127 talks to an audience of 3824 people. 66 male and 61 female speakers participated in the talks delivering 65 single talks and 31 dual talks. Our focus is talks to Secondary School students and 1st year Medical Students. However we also had many speaking engagements with the Melbourne Language Centre for Japanese students and nurses, Royal District Nursing Service, The Council of Adult Education, The Adolescent Forensic Health Service and VAC/GMHC Peer Education and Volunteer training workshops. The diversity of the requests indicates that our speakers are well recognised in the wider community for their powerful and informative presentations.

Speakers Bureau Training

The Bureau is currently developing a training calendar that will allow our speakers access to a variety of informative workshops both in house and externally. We have an exiting new concept for a six week creative writing workshop that will be facilitated by an RMIT Professional Writing graduate who is widely published both in Australia and overseas. The project proposal is being developed by Peter Davis of whom many
of our speakers know and who is also a published writer.

Speaker training interstate
As our Bureau has grown and developed a sustainable model we have been recognised in most of Australia for promoting the importance of HIV Positive Speakers as educators and for providing best practice training to assist our speakers both professionally and personally. Last year we had a member of Queensland Positive People (QPP) attend our new workshop on advanced communication techniques. She was so impressed that QPP decided to reinvigorate their speakers training and asked that Max deliver their speaker training. 22 speakers attended from all over Queensland and in a significant and groundbreaking development QPP worked in collaboration with the Queensland Hepatitis Council to involve people living with Hepatitis C to participate in the workshop. It was a very successful workshop where people made new friends and everyone showed enormous enthusiasm during the training. QPP now have a Positive Speakers Bureau Management Committee and have appointed a volunteer Speakers Bureau Coordinator who is working with Max to ensure best possible training and to further enhance the capacity of Queensland speakers.

Positive Life NSW (previously PLWHA NSW) requested assistance to redevelop their Speakers Bureau and we have provided all of our training resources to them to assist their Speakers Bureau. Last year we also assisted PLWHA South Australia by providing all of our Speakers Bureau resources to them to assist their Speakers Bureau.

As mentioned in the last Poslink issue we have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Tascahrd (Tasmania)

(Continues page 9)
A weekend workshop for guys who have recently become HIV-positive. The next workshop will run in early 2008. Please call Vic on (03) 9865 6772 to find out more.

GET FREE!
QUIT IN ’08
A free course to help you quit smoking.

- Give your lungs and heart a break
- Free up some extra spending money
- Look and feel great in ‘08!

Everyone’s doing it
A free course for people living with HIV
Available in group or 1-on-1 support available
Call Vic at PLHWA Victoria (03) 9865 6772 today

Connected Sexual Health Services
SBS Swanston Street, Carlton
Telephone: (03) 9347 0244
Opening hours:
Monday - Friday: 9:00am - 5:00pm
Friday: 9:30am - 5:00pm

Qualified sexual health nurses are now offering free and confidential sexual health testing and treatment of selected STIs on site venues.
Call 9347 0244 for details or visit our walk-in clinic in Carlton.
No appointment necessary. If you wish to be anonymous, you can - we don’t ask for your Medicare Card.

HIV & SEXUAL HEALTH
Connect
1800 038 125
www.connectline.com.au

get wise
get screened

If you are a sexually active man who has sex with other men, it is recommended that you be screened for sexually transmissible infections every 3 to 4 months.

To “Check Your Risk” for sexually transmissible infections and the tests you might need, visit our website and click on “Check Your Risk”
www.mshc.org.au

Additional clinics specialising in sexual health:
(Medicare card may be required. Some clinics may charge for services).
The Centre Clinic
Rear 77 Fitzroy St
St Kilda
Ph: (03) 9525 5866

Middle Park Clinic
41 Armstrong St
Middle Park
Ph: (03) 9699 4626

Carlton Clinic
88 Rathdowne St
Carlton
Ph: (03) 9347 9422

Prahran Markel Clinic
131 Commercial Rd
South Yarrav
Ph: (03) 9826 4500
Up, Up & Away!

Contact the PLWHA Victoria office for a copy of this hot new guide for positive travellers

PREPARING
When you travel overseas, you may be exposed to a range of illnesses that are uncommon in Australia. Travelling can disrupt your sleep patterns and meal times, making it tricky to stick to your medication routine. It’s a good idea to make an appointment with your doctor at least three months before you travel, to arrange any vaccinations, tests and letters you may need before you leave.

HIV TREATMENTS
Avoid starting a new treatment combination within a month of your trip, as your doctor may need to monitor and adjust your treatment in case of side-effects or allergic reactions. (And you don’t want these to ruin your trip!)

In the past, some positive travellers have chosen to take a treatment break while they travel, but a recent study shows treatment breaks are more harmful than we previously realised. This is an important decision to make in consultation with your doctor.

Your doctor, nurse or treatments officer can suggest some tips and tricks to help you stick to your dosage schedule when you’re travelling across time zones and wrestling with your body clock.

We know from research that posting meds can result in unexpected treatment breaks, as they do not always arrive as expected. The same risk applies to packing your meds in checked luggage. Discuss this possibility with your doctor, and maybe carry a week of meds in a pill box in case this happens.

If you really can’t take them with you, contact a local AIDS agency before you leave and through them, make an appointment with a local physician to score a prescription for 2-3 weeks of the drugs you need. You can expect to pay quite a lot of money, but it may be worth it for peace of mind.

TRAVEL HEALTH
Diarrhoea is a common experience for travellers, so you might want to ask your doctor about anti-diarrhoea and anti-nausea medications.

Put together a travel health kit. Mosquito repellent is vital as mosquito bites can transmit malaria and other exotic diseases. Electrolyte powder can be a life-saver when you’re dehydrated by a bad case of diarrhoea.

VACCINATIONS
Most vaccinations are fine, but it is often recommended that HIV-positive people should avoid ‘live’ vaccines, which contain a live (but weakened) sample of the relevant pathogen. The safety of these vaccines depends on the strength of your immune system, so ask your HIV doctor for advice.

Bring all your Vaccination Certificates when you travel, in case you need to show them to customs and immigration officials.

The current Cholera and Yellow Fever vaccines are not recommended for people with HIV. Ask your doctor to provide a Vaccine Exemption Certificate for any vaccination you don’t receive.

Yellow Fever is a big deal in central Africa and South America. If you spend time in these regions, you may be denied entry into other countries unless you can provide a certificate of vaccination or exemption for Yellow Fever.

Whether you are travelling or not, it’s a good idea to get vaccinated against Hepatitis A&B, flu, tetanus and diphtheria. Remember your booster shots!

MALARIA
It is recommended that you take anti-Malaria tablets when visiting any country where Malaria is prevalent. However, you should check with your HIV doctor or pharmacist whether they will interact with your current treatment regimen.

There are drug-resistant strains of Malaria, and co-infection with Malaria can hasten disease progression in people living with HIV. Prevention is best – always wear a tropical-strength mosquito repellent containing DEET and sleep under mosquito netting. Cover up with long-sleeved garments, treated with permethrin. These are all available from any army disposal store.

WEBSITE
Travel conditions change quickly and to respond in a timely fashion we’ve created a companion website for the Up Up & Away travel resource.

Visit www.positivetravel.info to find more information and the full updated content of the resource! If the interweb is not your thing, you’re always welcome to call the PLWHA Victoria office with queries: phone (BH) 03 9865 6772.
The Positive Living Centre (PLC) is a program of HIV Services at the Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre (VAC/GMHC). The PLC was first established in St. Kilda in April 1993 and moved to its current location at Commercial Road in 2001. The Centre was established to provide a focus and a wide range of services for the HIV/AIDS community, including a drop-in service, a meals program, peer support groups, and other services and activities for members such as complementary therapies and fitness classes. The PLC is available for everyone who is HIV positive, regardless of gender, nationality, age or sexuality. We endeavour to make this a safe, and comfortable space for members, staff, volunteers and visitors alike.

As many of you may be aware, the PLC has been involved in a review and currently the VAC/GMHC Board is considering that review. In light of this, and pending the outcome of the Board’s deliberations, I would like to make you aware of some staff changes that have occurred in the past few months, and also draw your attention to a few other activities currently occurring at the PLC.

Firstly I would like to introduce myself. I joined the service in September 2007 and have been working in the role of PLC Coordinator, on a full time basis. In that position I am responsible for managing the operation of specific services at the PLC and ensuring that the organisation is providing member-focused services. Prior to this position I was employed as the Executive Officer of Aidsline and the Hepatitis Line. I have had a long association with that service, spanning over ten years, where I held a number of positions, ranging from volunteer counsellor, Development Worker, through to EO. I have also previously worked for VAC/GMHC in 2001, as the Volunteer Training Coordinator, which was a very rewarding experience. It’s wonderful to be back and part of the welcoming team at the PLC.

Michael Riches also joined the service in September last year in the role of Member Services Officer. He currently works part time on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Michael is a registered general and psychiatric nurse and has a long association with the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON). He has worked for that organisation, both as a volunteer and paid worker in the Peer Support, Health Promotion and the Retreat Projects. He brings to the PLC a friendly relaxed style with a background that suits the requirements of this challenging role.

Heather Morgan became part of the team in January this year, as a Member Services Officer. She also works part time on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Heather has had extensive experience in the HIV sector; most recently she has worked as the Training Coordinator at Aidsline. She was active in that organisation for over 13 years and many of you may know her via that role or you may have attended a course that she has facilitated. She runs her own private practice involving counselling and workplace supervision. She also currently co-facilitates the Pre and Post Test Counselling Course at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre. Heather brings to the team at PLC an enthusiastic spirit and an approachable and hospitable demeanor, which fits the role well.

Both Heather and Michael work together in sharing the role of Member Services Officer, working closely with members of the Positive Living Centre in assisting them to utilise the services and activities at the PLC, in addition to helping them to access other appropriate services in the community. With this new team in place we hope to create an environment where all those visiting the PLC feel welcome, acknowledged and supported.

Another very important program that HIV Services operates, which works in harmony with the PLC, is the Drop-In. These social groups in Northcote and Frankston provide people with the chance to meet and chat while enjoying lunch. Many members have commented on the value and need for such a service. It provides the opportunity to socialize in a relaxed and informal way and is another avenue for people to access emotional and social support.

The North Drop-In meets in Northcote from 12 noon to 2pm on every second Wednesday, in the off-pension week. The South Drop-in groups meet on the first Friday of every month, from 12.30pm to 3pm, at various locations in Dandenong, Frankston and on the Mornington Peninsula. The regular lunches are sometimes replaced by outings such as picnics, barbecues and cinema visits. There is no cost to attend either Drop-in. For more information, please contact Campbell Smith on 9863 0421.
A program that has been offered for some time is PK Tix, which was started by Lynda Horn in 2000, as a project to reduce the social isolation of VAC/GMHC Community Support Program clients. It provides positive people with free tickets to arts, entertainment and sporting events, encouraging them to get out of the house and reconnect with the community. It is an avenue for many in the community who may not normally have access to Melbourne’s vibrant theatre life. The thousands of tickets distributed over the past eight years have made an immense difference to the health and well being of many people. The Community Support Program volunteers now administer PK Tix and there are plans to expand its reach over the next few months.

A recent initiative, which is currently being put into practice, is a series of workshops, facilitated by Lynda Horn. If you have any problems with money, or even if you just want to learn how to put a budget into place, come along to the free “Money Matters” workshops at the PLC. These workshops cover a variety of issues; you can learn how set financial goals, adhere to them and see how you can save for a specific objective, such as a holiday. You can discover ways to negotiate with banks, and if you are not satisfied with their services, discover what you can do about it. The series of five workshops cover Financial Goals, Budgeting, Debt, Credit and Bankruptcy. Workshops are on the first Tuesday of each month between 1-3pm. There will also be the option for evening workshops if there is sufficient demand. Places are limited so please call to register your interest on 9863 0444.

The Positive Living Centre is a safe space that provides a range of health-related programs for people living with HIV/AIDS. It is one part of an integrated and comprehensive strategy intended to diminish the stigma, discrimination and social isolation associated with HIV/AIDS. Our aim is to enhance the health and well being of HIV positive individuals through the provision of social, emotional, educational and recreational services and activities. We endeavor to provide a broad range of these to enable people living with HIV/AIDS to freely access services and to actively participate in the community.
Induction of our Patron, Annie Phelan, into the 2008 Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Anne (Annie) Phelan one of Australia’s well-known and loved actresses and Patron of Positive Women Victoria, was on the 8th of March inducted into the 2008 Victorian Honour Roll of Women. Annie, winner of 8 Best Actress Awards, has been involved with the Australian theatre, film and television industry for over 30 years. Annie received the 2002 Oz Showbiz Cares/Equity Fights AIDS Activist Award for her contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS and in 2007 was awarded an Order of Australia for her outstanding service to the arts as an actress, and to the community, particularly through support for women living with the HIV virus and for asylum seekers and refugees.

Patron of Positive Women Victoria since 2000, Annie has been a passionate advocate for the rights of women living with HIV. She has worked consistently to ease the burden of social stigma and isolation faced by HIV positive women. Annie believes that an urgent response is required to the rise of HIV diagnoses for women living in Victoria, and has become an enthusiastic educator on the topic of HIV prevention. A firm believer that all forms of the arts can act as a conduit for people’s real stories, she likes to quote the late actor Bob Maza who when asked about his involvement in Aboriginal rights combined with his work, said, “you cannot inform unless you entertain”. And so, it was with her encouragement and advice that Positive Women Victoria began to use the creative arts as a vehicle for their health promotion work and as a way to provide it’s members with a voice. Annie was the driving force behind the development and production of the play In the Family that highlighted the effects that HIV has on women, their families and the community.

Her natural ability to communicate with people and her work as an actor brings her into contact with people from all walks of life and she makes the most of every opportunity to bring the focus around to her work with Positive Women Victoria. Through this and many other activities, Annie has been instrumental in raising money that goes toward the provision of food vouchers and the much needed retreat for HIV positive women. Annie continues to make a major contribution that benefits the lives of HIV positive women and HIV negative women living in Victoria. As Patron and friend, she has committed herself to take action to ensure that information, education and support are made available to assist women to make informed choices that may affect their health and their lives. Positive Women Victoria Board, staff and members congratulate Annie on this wonderful achievement and thank her for her unwavering support of our organisation.

A Body of Knowledge Exhibition and Launch

A Body of Knowledge is our compelling photographic and text exhibition that takes the viewer inside the world and emotions of women who are affected by HIV/AIDS. This work aims to break down the myths and stigma around HIV/AIDS and challenges the notion that only “a certain type of woman” contracts HIV. The
connection and can ease that sense of isolation that many HIV positive women live with. Someone else’s story can also assist with answers to questions or provide a useful map for other women to follow in regard to dealing with issues such as coping with diagnosis, disclosure, finding love, having children, work and managing medication. There is a vast range of experience out there among you that could assist other positive women.

Your stories also have the power to educate HIV negative people in a way that straight facts, figures and medical information cannot. You do not have to use your own name on your story and confidentiality is assured. Members of Positive Women Victoria range from newly diagnosed to women who have lived with the virus for twenty years. You don’t need to put down your whole life story. You might want to write about a particular time in your life or about your experience with a particular issue that has come about because of your HIV status. We appreciate that the process of writing your story can take time and a good deal of heart felt effort so we are offering $100 for each story selected for publication. Please contact us at the office if you are interested.

The HIV-positive women’s resource Treat Yourself Right published by AFAO/NAPWA has been updated and reprinted. This is a brilliant resource that is highly recommended for HIV-positive women as well as those within and outside of the sector who wish to learn more about women and HIV and the issues positive women face. The resource is available electronically and can be downloaded from www.afao.org.au. It is also available in hardcopy from our office if you are in Victoria or from other positive people’s organisations and aids councils around the country. This resource was launched recently in Sydney by the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Status of Women and Member for Sydney, coinciding with International Women’s Day and a women@NAPWA network face to face meeting. The women@NAPWA network advises the NAPWA Board on issues relating to women and HIV, and had much input into the revision of Treat Yourself Right. Around 50 people attended the launch, with sector representatives from across the country, and a good contingent of positive women attending.

New Year Party - Picnic in the Park

Around 20 people attended our New Year Party - a picnic at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Glorious weather prevailed and members, their partners, children, family, friends and their pets enjoyed a picnic lunch and lots of getting to know each other. We will be holding 2 more family picnics this year, contact us for more details.

Tell Us Your Story

Over the years we have assembled a collection of stories from our members, first hand accounts of women living with HIV. Some of the stories have been written with the help of a professional writer and some have been written by members without any guidance. Collected stories have been published in books, articles, member’s newsletters and on our website. While each person’s story is unique, reading a story about somebody in a similar situation often provides a sense of connection and can ease that sense of isolation that many HIV positive women live with. Someone else’s story can also assist with answers to questions or provide a useful map for other women to follow in regard to dealing with issues such as coping with diagnosis, disclosure, finding love, having children, work and managing medication. There is a vast range of experience out there among you that could assist other positive women. Your stories also have the power to educate HIV negative people in a way that straight facts, figures and medical information cannot. You do not have to use your own name on your story and confidentiality is assured. Members of Positive Women Victoria range from newly diagnosed to women who have lived with the virus for twenty years. You don’t need to put down your whole life story. You might want to write about a particular time in your life or about your experience with a particular issue that has come about because of your HIV status. We appreciate that the process of writing your story can take time and a good deal of heart felt effort so we are offering $100 for each story selected for publication. Please contact us at the office if you are interested.
Support after Suicide

Suicide is a difficult issue for the GLBT communities and one which we would certainly rather not have to address. Nevertheless all the recent Australian research clearly demonstrates that GLBT people are at a higher risk of suicide than are others in the community. Research also shows that those bereaved by suicide are at increased risk of suicide themselves.

- How can we best support GLBT people following a suicide in their peer group?
- What are the most urgent things to be done?
- What are the longer term needs of those bereaved by suicide and how and where can they get support?
- How might we recognise warning signs of others at risk of suicide?
- How can we manage and address the stigmatisation and guilt that follow a suicide?
- What resources does the GLHV clearinghouse need to collect to support workers on this issue?

Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria is hosting a half day workshop run by the Jesuit Social Services program Support After Suicide to assist workers and others in support roles to learn more about these issues.

When: 9.30 – 12.30 8 May 2008
Where: Ground Floor, 215 Franklin St, Melbourne (near Vic Market)

There is no cost for this workshop and morning tea will be provided. Registration is essential as numbers will be limited. Phone Melanie Hales on (03)9285 5382 or M.Hales@latrobe.edu.au.

VAC/GMHC Counselling Services Therapeutic Groups

Why groups? Group therapy provides psychological support and intervention through participation in the group by the group. Participation in therapeutic groups can alleviate feelings of loneliness, isolation, depression and helplessness.

For some, group therapy can offer a more realistic environment to understand and change behaviour than individual therapy.

The VAC/GMHC Counseling services offers an integrated and ongoing range of group programs as a way of addressing the continuing challenges of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the needs of the gay community. The Therapeutic Groups Program is reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis. While there will be three different groups in 2008, other groups may be offered in the future, in response to the needs of our client group.

Revisioning Group. A ten-week program where gay men can explore and understand their feelings of anger and learn about breaking patterns of violent, abusive, or controlling behaviours. Participants can build their confidence and self-control, and develop skills in dealing with conflicts and difficult emotions in relationships and other parts of life without the use of such behaviours.

Anxiety Group. A six-week therapeutic group for gay men who experience anxiety that impacts on their everyday life. The group provides effective ways to overcome fears and behaviours that prevent participants from being in a world that is productive and fulfilling.

Are you a HIV negative man in a relationship with a HIV positive man? You are not alone.

The Negative Partner’s Group (NPG) is an eight-week group starting in July. It will be a safe and confidential environment where you can meet other HIV negative guys and get support. The group provides the opportunity to talk about issues related to being in a serodiscordant relationship that may be shared by others.

- The aims of the group are:
  To provide a forum for discussion in a non-judgemental environment
- To explore the diverse needs within a relationship and to separate relationship based issues from issues of HIV or serodiscordance
- To develop skills in communication and negotiation around relationship issues including HIV and safer sex practices
- For couples to make informed decisions about safer sex and the development of stronger relationships.

The NPG will be held at the VAC/GMHC, 6 Claremont Street, South Yarra. A sliding scale fee applies.

For more information, call 9865 6700 between the hours of 2pm-4pm, Monday – Friday and ask to speak to the duty worker. You can also email trish_thompson@vicaids.asn.au
One of the more recent projects of PLWHA Victoria is the telephone information, support and referral service, HIV & Sexual Health Connect Line.

The service was established in July 2007 and is staffed by health workers from PLWHA Victoria and the Victorian AIDS Council / Gay Mens Health Centre. A high quality and consistent level of information is provided because staff have a clear understanding of both the medical and social implications of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

Connect Line is a confidential and non-judgemental service that provides information in a manner that respects each person’s privacy. Referrals are available to a range of HIV related services and also to professional counsellors.

Coordinating this project has been very satisfying as the anonymity of speaking over the phone, allows callers to express themselves honestly and openly with our staff members and then work out the best course of action for them to take.

Someone recently said to me “Oh, I thought that was for Mrs Mother Of Three from the suburbs to call if she’d found a discarded syringe” … well, yes it is, as we are the initial point of contact for anyone in Victoria with concerns about HIV and other STIs, but we also really want to hear from Mrs Mother of Three in the suburbs who is living with HIV and looking for up to date information and support services.

Callers present with such a wide range of issues such as HIV/STI transmission risks, locating appropriate services and much more complex issues that those living with HIV face. We have often received calls from someone who has been newly diagnosed with HIV, received their test results at their local clinic and then feel abandoned and are full of questions.

Since Connect Line staff work in varying capacities within the HIV sector, we are regularly aware of any topical issues and are able to provide further information or refer callers to other publications and appropriate websites. Recent media attention about the rise in syphilis rates among men who have sex with men has seen an increase in the calls about syphilis and testing.

We also hear from those entering into new relationships, be they positive or not, who call to discuss their sexual health and various concerns about being with a new partner. We work closely with all the support organisations in the HIV sector so that Connect Line staff are aware of any workshops, support groups or events being organised for positive people, their partners and families.

We’d really encourage members of PLWHA Victoria to use Connect Line as a source of information and support. It would be great for our members to feel a sense of ownership about the service and to also feel comfortable about providing us with information about any services they have used and benefited from. This information allows us to provide informed referrals to other callers and also helps shape service delivery in the HIV sector.
Navigate Social Wellbeing offers individual counselling to explore and navigate emotional and social wellbeing around:

Adolescence  Disability  Depression  Alcohol and Other Drugs  Change  Health  
Loss and grief  Chronic Illness  Coming out  Sexuality

Located conveniently close to public transport with offices in Melbourne CBD (Lonsdale Street) and Melbourne’s West (Seddon).

Contact David Tonkin for further details and appointments: phone 8456 9352 or email navigatesw@iprimus.com.au.

Holding the Man Season Extended

Due to popular demand the Melbourne Theatre Company is extending the season of Holding the Man until Saturday 26 April.

Described as ‘rip-roaring, hugely physical and dazzlingly acted’ – don’t miss out on your last chance to see this true Melbourne love story – no further extensions are possible.

For many Australians, Tim Conigrave’s bestselling memoir about his fifteen year relationship with John Caleo captured better than any book of the period what it was like being young and gay during the AIDS crisis emerging in the 1980’s.

Those who loved the book will find this adaptation by Tommy Murphy transfers every ounce of honesty, humour and heart-wrenching irony to the stage.

PLWHA Victoria is proud to be a Supporting Partner of the production. Holding the Man is playing at the Malthouse – book now at Ticketmaster on 1300 723 038 or visit www.mtc.com.au for more information.
catch me if you can...

There's an outbreak of syphilis among gay and bisexual men in Melbourne. Keep an eye out for symptoms, and if you find something unexpected, don't wait – book yourself in for a check up!

Over 400 guys will get syphilis in 2008. Some people don't get symptoms. If you visit a sauna or dry sex venue more than once per month, we recommend sexual health screening every three months. Testing is quick and easy, and there's a clinic near you.

Visit www.gotest.net.au to find out more.
Acknowledgement

PLWHA Victoria would like to thank our sponsors for providing unrestricted educational grants to fund Poslink and Treatment Interactive Events in 2007.

Membership application

All details provided will be treated as strictly confidential.

I wish to become a member of People Living with HIV/AIDS Victoria and to receive all privileges of said membership. I agree to abide by the Rules of the organisation at all times. I understand I can obtain copies of the Rules of the organisation from the PLWHA Victoria office.

Please tick

- [ ] Full Membership
  I am HIV-positive and am able to provide verification of this if required.

- [ ] Associate Membership
  I do not wish to disclose my HIV status, I am HIV-negative or I do not know my HIV status.

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Please fax or post your membership application to:

PLWHA Victoria
6 Claremont Street
South Yarra VIC 3141
Tel 03 9865 6772
Fax 03 9804 7978

[ ] I do not wish to be contacted by postal mail.

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