

New Victorian Government Pilot Project for People Living with HIV to be led by Living Positive Victoria

For immediate release

1 Dec 2017 – Living Positive Victoria welcomes the Andrews Labour Government's commitment of \$300,000 towards a pilot project that will place HIV-positive peer workers in high-caseload Melbourne clinics as part of its ongoing commitment to the HIV response in Victoria.

Health Minister Jill Hennessy made the announcement at the launch of World AIDS Day held at the Doherty Institute on Friday morning. The pilot project will run from 2018-20 and be led by Living Positive Victoria.

Interim CEO Suzy Malhotra said that harnessing the lived experience of people living with HIV (PLHIV) is significant and should be at the forefront of the HIV response.

"The lived experience of PLHIV is vital to an effective response to HIV in Victoria. We are thrilled with this new funding and our organisation will use this project to remain focused on our commitment to PLHIV because HIV is still here and still matters," said Malhotra.

There are approximately 7,800 people living with HIV in Victoria. The recently published Victorian HIV Strategy indicates that of those 7,800 individuals, 90 per cent know their status but more than 15 per cent are not on antiretroviral therapy and more than 20 per cent do not have controlled virus levels.

"The availability of peer workers can address these gaps and increase the number of PLHIV staying in care. This in turn will enable PLHIV to maintain and improve their health and give them an increased sense of hope and control over their lives."

Christabel Millar, President of Living Positive Victoria, agrees that this pilot project will make a difference for people at a crucial time in their HIV journey.

"Each person is different but the shared similarities of PLHIV allows individuals to connect on a unique and intimate level that cannot be replicated through other support services," said Millar.

"The moment of diagnosis is extremely isolating due to stigma and misconceptions about the virus. As a person living with HIV, I'm ecstatic to think that a positive peer will be there in that moment to help alleviate any fear and put people at ease because a good quality of life lies ahead for them."

Peer workers will work in clinics across Melbourne including Prahran Market Clinic, Melbourne Sexual Health Clinic and Northside Clinic.

Living Positive Victoria is a not for profit, community based organisation representing all people living with HIV in Victoria since 1988 and is committed to the advancement of the rights and wellbeing of all people living with HIV.

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