



Speech by

**Hon. WENDY EDMOND**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA**

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Hansard 18 November 1998

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**AIDS Awareness Week**

**Hon. W. M. EDMOND** (Mount Coot-tha— ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: Tuesday, 24 November 1998, marks the beginning of AIDS Awareness Week, culminating in World AIDS Day a week later on 1 December. This year, the campaign centres around young people and the theme is Force for Change. Across the world, there are 30 million people living with HIV or AIDS. Of these, at least one third are young people between 10 and 24 years of age. It is estimated that 7,000 young people world wide acquire the virus every day. This equates to 2.7 million new infections a year, or five per minute.

Young people, as a Force for Change, have been chosen for this year's campaign for a number of reasons. These include: a significant proportion of cases of HIV infection are acquired between the ages of 10 and 24 years; for young people, the adolescent years are a time of experimentation and emerging sexual identity; many people commence sexual activity during these years; young people may be vulnerable to unsafe sexual practices, as well as pressure from peers and youth culture; young people at this age may be receptive to health promotion which aims to minimise potential harm; and young people can help reduce the stigmatisation of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Around Queensland, my department is working with the community sector to run a series of education and awareness strategies to coincide with World AIDS Day. These strategies build upon a range of ongoing programs which my department has been supporting for many years. Queensland has been and remains an active partner in the national strategy to prevent HIV/AIDS.

The Australian approach to HIV/AIDS prevention and control is an internationally recognised success. The key to this success is the willingness to develop innovative approaches and work closely with the most affected communities. Those communities are the ones best placed to lead the charge and to support and lead their members in healthy lifestyle choices which minimise harm. This process is proactive and most clearly reflects the preferred approach of this Government.

The prevention of ill health, be it physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual, is a major focus for Queensland Health under my stewardship. The benefits, actual and financial, which accrue from such a focus cannot be understated. That is why I am keen to pursue a prevention-focused agenda. That is why I support the work of a plethora of community organisations, research and academic institutes and Queensland Health in responding to HIV/AIDS.

The fight against HIV/AIDS should not get bogged down in moralising or value judgments. It should focus on the reality of life, regardless of how unpalatable it may be for some sections of the community. HIV/AIDS does not discriminate and neither should we. The fact is there are people in the community who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer. They have sex. They can expose themselves to HIV and AIDS. There are people in the community who are recreational or regular injecting drug users. They use syringes. They can expose themselves to HIV and AIDS. There are young people who constitute a section of both these groups. They can expose themselves to HIV/AIDS.

By working with these groups and others, we have been able to effectively develop responses which enable us to access them effectively to provide information, education and support. Extensive, ongoing safe sex campaigns have proven invaluable in modifying the sexual practices of successive

generations. This is demonstrated by recent national studies which show there is a shift to safer sexual practices over the past five to eight years and young people are using condoms and having sex with fewer partners; only a minority never use condoms and continue to engage in high-risk practices; and student knowledge about HIV-related matters is high.

This research provides evidence that sexual health strategies based on HIV/AIDS education are making progress. But these strategies need to be expanded beyond HIV prevention to encompass other aspects of sexual health, including relationships, negotiation and protective skills. Strategies need to be strengthened to provide young people with the skills and confidence to ensure protective behaviours. Young people need to hear these messages around them—from their peers, from their parents, from the media, from the community and in the schools. These health protective measures need to be supported by practical strategies, including access to youth friendly health services, advice about safe sexual and drug-injecting behaviours, and access to condoms and syringes.

It is the timely, reality-based, practical responses which have made the difference in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Queensland. Activities, including awareness raising campaigns and needle exchange programs undertaken by a variety of community groups such as the Queensland AIDS Council, Queensland Positive People, Queensland Intravenous AIDS Association, Sunshine Coast Intravenous AIDS Association, Gold Coast AIDS Association and Injectors Newsline and Self Health for Queensland Workers in the Sex Industry.

There have been great improvements in our understanding of HIV and with this improved understanding, exciting developments in health maintenance and treatment regimes. Indeed, just last week we have been given more reason for optimism on HIV/AIDS treatment with the release of results of a study of a new vaccine.

The reality is, however, that while we are fighting the good fight against HIV/AIDS, it is not over yet. That is why we must continue to be vigilant. That is why we must continue to work collaboratively with the communities most affected. That is why we must continue to support innovative responses and developments. That is why we are focusing on young people for this year's campaign. I encourage all members of this House to show their support for AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day by purchasing and wearing the AIDS Red Ribbon.

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