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MEDIA RELEASE



HIV is still here, 30 years on Cairns marks World AIDS Day 2011

Cairns residents have been urged to show their compassion for those affected by HIV as the region prepares to mark World AIDS Day on December 1.

Cairns World AIDS Day committee member Mark Mills said that the first cases of HIV infection and AIDS were reported in 1981, thirty years ago this year.

“Over the past three decades we have made significant gains in the areas of treatment and prevention in a relatively short period of time,” he said. “We have seen HIV shift from a terminal illness into a chronically manageable one for a majority of Australians.”

“However, with a total of 30,486 cases of HIV infection having been diagnosed in Australia up until December last year and more than five thousand new HIV diagnoses in the past five years, a lot of individuals, partners, families and communities are still affected by HIV today. We must continue our efforts to improve education, testing and treatments.”

In 2010, 206 Queenslanders were newly diagnosed with HIV infection. This is the highest number of HIV notifications reported since 1984.

However, the annual number of new AIDS diagnoses continues to decrease, as does the number of deaths from AIDS. This decrease is due to the use of effective antiretroviral treatment.

Local board member of Queensland Positive People, Bill Chappell, said the theme of the 2011 World AIDS Day “HIV Is Still Here” reflected the need for everyone to talk with family and friends about HIV.

“It is important to update our knowledge about HIV because a lot has changed over the past 30 years. Testing is free and confidential at public sexual health services and there are new information resources available from Health departments and community organisations.”

“After all the advances we have made in the treatment of HIV, it’s disappointing that people living with HIV are often still discriminated against. Discrimination takes a pervasive toll on the physical, mental and emotional well-being of people living with HIV who already have enough to deal with managing a chronic illness. We hope that in 2011, HIV discrimination and stigma will be challenged whenever it is encountered.”

“I encourage everyone this World AIDS Day to show your support: wear a red ribbon, talk to your friends and work colleagues about HIV or make a donation to an AIDS charity. Knowledge and compassion are some of the strongest weapons we have in the fight against HIV.” Chappell said.

A series of activities have been planned for the Cairns area, including a launch of AIDS Awareness Week on Tuesday November 22 at City Place at 10am and a candlelight vigil at the Esplanade lagoon on Thursday December 1 at 6pm.

A six metre high red ribbon balloon will provide a visual focal point for the launch and the candlelight vigil this year.

Dr Darren Russell, Director of Cairns Sexual Health Service and Councillor Di Forsyth will speak at the launch.

Mr Paul Stephenson, District Chief Executive Officer, Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Health Services and Senator Jan McLucas will speak at the December 1 event at the Esplanade.

As in previous years, landmark locations around Australia will be lit red to remember those affected by HIV and to remind Australians that HIV is still here. In Cairns the City Library in Abbott St and the Cairns Regional Council building in Spence St will be lit red for AIDS Awareness Week.

- Ends -

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World AIDS Day Awareness Week Launch

Speakers followed by morning tea.

When Tuesday 22 November
Where Cairns City Place
Time from 10.00am

World AIDS Day Information Stalls

Wednesday 23 November 2011	10am – 4pm, Raintrees Shopping Centre
Saturday 26 November 2011	9am – 5pm, Cairns Central Shopping Centre
Sunday 27 November 2011	9am - 2pm, The Tanks Markets
Thursday 1 December 2011	9am – 11am Earville Shopping Centre
Thursday 1 December 2011	12noon – 7pm The Lagoon Esplanade

World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil

When Thursday 1 December
Time from 6.00pm
Where The Lagoon Esplanade