

**ACON 30<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Reception**  
**6:30pm Tuesday 18 August 2015**  
**Strangers' Room, Level 7, NSW Parliament House**

**Acknowledgements**

- Traditional Owners - Gadigal people of the Eora Nation
- The Hon Don Harwin MLC, President of the Legislative Council
- The Hon Pru Goward MP, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Medical Research, Assistant Minister for Health, Minister for Women, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- The Hon Trevor Khan MLC, Deputy President and Chair of Committees
- The Hon Shayne Mallard MLC
- Mr Bruce Notley-Smith MP, Member for Coogee
- Mr Mark Orr, President, ACON
- Mr Nicolas Parkhill, Chief Executive Officer, ACON
- Mr Graeme Head, NSW Public Service Commissioner and foundation staff member of ACON
- Councillor Linda Scott, City of Sydney Council
- Councillor Christine Forster, City of Sydney Council
- Dr Mary Foley, Secretary, NSW Health
- Former ACON CEOs and Board Presidents

Thank you Nicolas for your warm introduction.

It is my great pleasure to be here with you all this evening to celebrate ACON's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

This is a tremendous milestone and you all have so much to be proud of.

Tonight it is an honour to reflect on ACON's accomplishments as a crucial leader in HIV awareness, prevention, care and advocacy in NSW.

And also, the significant progress that ACON and this Government have made together, as partners, in meeting the challenging targets of the *NSW HIV Strategy 2012-2015*.

But first, casting back to 1985...

ACON had a modest but passionate beginning, as a group of gay men coming together in support of their friends and loved ones who were sick and dying from AIDS.

From those early days, Sydney rapidly emerged as the epicentre of Australia's HIV epidemic.

Although the tools we had available at the time to fight the epidemic were largely limited to behavioural prevention strategies...

the partnerships forged between affected communities, the NSW Government, clinicians and researchers, had a profound effect on the course of HIV and AIDS in Australia.

From those small beginnings, ACON worked hard in caring for those with AIDS related illness and advocating for system changes on their behalf.

Over the past 30 years, ACON's voice has consistently been strong, inclusive, and collaborative.

Through sheer determination, it has helped shape national policy, influence law reform, fought against stigma and discrimination, and supported HIV clinical trials and treatment access.

ACON's pragmatic and responsive leadership has been fundamental to the success of the HIV response in this State.

Adding to this, the NSW Government has never given up on the fight against HIV, and has a strong track record in HIV prevention and treatment.

Our partnership is recognised as one of the reasons why NSW has managed to contain the HIV epidemic relatively well compared to other countries and regions.

Through the partnership between the NSW Government and ACON, we have achieved ground-breaking responses in the call to unite and take action across our state on HIV.

Highlights of this work includes...

Our work together to establish the multi-award winning 'ENDING HIV' brand for NSW, which I think by now just about everyone in Sydney city would have seen or heard about.

The creation of a community hub at Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, has also been a success, which now brings together the NSW HIV and other blood-borne viruses non-government organisations under one roof.

Together, we have also brought new approaches to HIV testing to the community through initiatives like ACON a[TEST] peer led HIV testing services.

This includes the first HIV testing shopfront in Australia, a[TEST] based on Oxford Street, which I launched on World AIDS Day last year.

The a[TEST] has made a vital contribution to the increase in HIV testing in NSW since 2012.

Especially the increase in HIV testing amongst gay men who report high risk behaviours and/or not engaging in routine testing.

A very significant achievement in just a few years.

Since the launch of the *NSW HIV Strategy 2012-2015*, significant efforts have been made to increase access to HIV testing, increase treatment uptake and retention in care, and strengthen prevention efforts.

HIV testing continues to increase in NSW, particularly among high-risk populations, with 11 per cent more testing taking place in the first quarter 2015 compared to the same period in 2013.

From January to March 2015, 93 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in NSW, a seventeen per cent (%) decrease compared with the same period in 2012, and similar to the 2009 to 2014 average for the same period.

So we have increased testing and we have seen early signs of a stabilisation in the numbers of newly diagnosed.

Together we have been working towards the virtual elimination of HIV transmission in NSW by 2020.

To achieve this, NSW continues to deliver excellent clinical services and the opportunity to work in partnership with world-class researchers and community organisations.

There are also new and exciting HIV studies being conducted in Australia and around the globe.

The international 'START' study, conducted by the International Network for Strategic Initiatives in Global HIV Trials, researched the effectiveness of the early initiation of antiretroviral treatment.

The study had conclusive evidence showing that immediate treatment of people with HIV with anti-retro-virals substantially reduced the risk of death and co-morbidities.

This news has important implications for the health and wellbeing of HIV positive people.

NSW has started a demonstration project of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for people at high risk of HIV transmission.

This project is a pivotal component of the prevention response to HIV in NSW, while not taking any emphasis away from the importance of promoting condom use.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of ACON in providing 30 years of unwavering strength in community leadership.

ACON is a community-based organisation, which means its work is done for its community, by members of its community.

This simple but powerful model is what has and will continue to underpin the effectiveness of ACON's work.

Dedicated staff, amazing volunteers, and innovative campaigns – these are just a few of the factors which have contributed to ACON's success.

Although this is a time to reflect on the challenges of this journey, and to remember those we have lost along the way....it is also a time where ACON can stand proud in the recognition of so many great achievements.

It is with increasing optimism that we can continue our journey with more dedication than ever, as we work towards our goal of the virtual elimination of HIV transmission in NSW by 2020.

I believe that, together, we can make it happen.

Thank you.

**END**