

# HERE FOR HEALTH

[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au) 

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2013 - 2018 Midterm Review

March 2017



## ABOUT ACON

ACON is New South Wales' leading health promotion organisation specialising in HIV prevention, HIV support and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) health.

Established in 1985 as the AIDS Council of NSW, our mission is to enhance the health and wellbeing of our communities by ending HIV transmission among gay and homosexually active men, and promoting the lifelong health of LGBTI people and people with HIV.

We provide information on relevant health issues, and we offer a range of specific and general education programs and services delivered by caring people who genuinely understand the health issues affecting the LGBTI community.

### Our Mission

Our mission is to enhance the health and wellbeing of our communities by:

- Ending HIV transmission among gay and other homosexually active men.
- Promoting the health, throughout life, of LGBTI people and people with HIV.

### Our Values

- Courage
- Empathy
- Diversity
- Equality
- Partnership
- Community
- Adaptability

## ACON

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kath Vaughan-Davies, Ministry of Health NSW, Positive Life NSW, St Vincent's Health Australia, Mardi Gras Arts, NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, NSW Police, Family Planning NSW, Kirby Institute.

## INTRODUCTION

A mid-term review of the ACON Strategic Plan 2013–18 was conducted in 2016.

Three years into the Strategic Plan, it was timely to review and reflect on progress towards achieving the plan, and to reassess the environment in which ACON operates. The objectives of the review were to assess:

- the soundness of content of the Strategic Plan
- progress being made toward its implementation
- obstacles to implementation

An external consultant was hired to facilitate this process which included interviews with partner organisations.

The organisation's current priorities are set out in four main parts:

- Part 1: HIV and STIs
- Part 2: LGBTI Health
- Part 3: Advocacy and Social Inclusion
- Part 4: Organisational Capacity.

ACON's Strategic Plan 2013-2018 is available at

[www.acon.org.au/strategic-plan-2013-2018](http://www.acon.org.au/strategic-plan-2013-2018)



Top: [left] ACON's Strategic Plan 2013-2018  
[right] ACON's HIV Action Plan 2013-2018

## PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

**Overall, ACON is on track to deliver on the key programs and activities it set out to do within the current 5-year Strategic Plan.**

There have been many significant achievements to be celebrated, across all four parts of ACON's Strategic Plan (and beyond) since 2013. Achievements of particular strategic importance include:

- agility, integration and behaviour impact across the HIV program of work
- significant growth and successes of the Pride Inclusion programs, which supports future diversification of funding
- establishment of new services, campaigns and target groups, particularly to address women's health
- expansion of many existing programs and services
- new and strengthened partnerships and community engagement across health issues
- ongoing examples of leadership, influence and positioning across health sectors
- an increased national focus, including program delivery
- strong governance and Board processes
- improved financial strength through budget growth, increased diversification of funding sources and recent securing of 3-year funding certainty
- new client and stakeholder relationship systems for improved service delivery, digital communications and engagement

## PART 1: HIV AND STIS

The majority of the HIV and STI related aspects of the current strategic plan are currently being met. Major achievements include:

### Improved strategic partnerships

We have strengthened our engagement with Local Health Districts (LHDs) across NSW, particularly sexual health clinics for the provision of community-based testing and PrEP education and access. We collaborated with LHDs to implement local adaptations of Ending HIV messaging.

Our HIV health promotion work has benefited from close partnerships with Positive Life NSW, Living Positive Victoria, the Positive Leadership Development Institute Australia and The Institute of Many.

ACON has also built a significantly closer working relationship with the Victorian AIDS Council, leading to the sharing of strengths and increased service delivery.

Our Pride Inclusion Programs have opened up substantial opportunities to work with corporate Australia and sporting organisations, resulting in pro-bono partnerships, support for our fundraising appeals and support for our work in HIV.

ACON's Aboriginal Project has increased its partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations and groups as well as creating an advisory group to help guide the evolution of this project.

There has been a broadening of regional outreach and local partnerships across NSW, particularly in Greater Western NSW and the Hunter New England region.

### Modernised community engagement processes

The organisation has invested heavily in modernising our health promotion processes, the most visible outcome of this being the Ending HIV community engagement framework.

The complexity of our messaging on HIV has increased, but at the same time we have increased community engagement. Monitoring of community attitudes and knowledge demonstrates the success of this program.

While this modernisation has been essential, we have also taken care to retain the core principles of long established successful programs.



There has been ongoing innovative practice within ACON's women's sexual health programs, particularly through the use of arts-based engagement methodologies in the Claude project.

### **Greater integration**

Using the Ending HIV community engagement framework as the primary mechanism, we have improved the consistency of HIV messaging across the organisation. This has been particularly evident in the strong community engagement that our regional offices have with their local communities.

### **Responding to new technologies**

There have been major changes to the HIV prevention and treatment technological landscape since the launch of the current strategy.

Access to rapid HIV testing has improved, moving from research trials to being available through community-based sites and at festivals. The uptake of PrEP has been high since its introduction and the 2017 HIV notification data will give an indication of the scale of its impact. Both these new technologies have been fully integrated into ACON's services.

For further information on ACON's HIV and STI programs, please consult our annual reports, 2013 -2016, available at [www.acon.org.au/annual-reports](http://www.acon.org.au/annual-reports)

*Opposite page:  
Mardi Gras 2016 'Stay Safe' campaign activation at North Bondi Beach, promoting both condoms and Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).  
Photo: Steve Christo*

There are a number areas where work is in progress but further focus is required:

- The provision of comprehensive risk reduction campaigns needs to continue, including non-condom-based strategies. Ending HIV has shown strong results on this objective with the launch of the 'You Choose' campaign in early 2017 being the latest example.

However, updated information on condoms, undetectable viral load and PrEP, as well as other risk reduction strategies, is required on an ongoing basis.

- Development of further linkages between ACON's HIV health promotion and LGBTI health programs is required to ensure that LGBTI people with HIV who access our services are offered comprehensive options for engagement across health issues.
- Further work with our partners to continue address HIV stigma and discrimination is required. We will seek to harness opportunities that arise from the positive impacts of undetectable viral load and PrEP on the sero-divide.
- The sexual transmission of hepatitis C remains a growing concern, despite recent advancements in the treatment of this condition. This work will require us to address the health impacts of substance use, particularly related to injecting drug use and crystal methamphetamine in sexual settings.
- The advent of PrEP is already having an impact, but it will take some time for this new prevention technology to become fully embedded into the HIV response. In particular, we will need to continue to address the link between PrEP and STIs to ensure that comprehensive sexual health testing remains high.

## PART 2: LGBTI HEALTH

The majority of the LGBTI related aspects of the current strategic plan are currently being met. Major achievements include:

### New and extended services

We have increased our focus on mental health including local community health promotion initiatives, partnerships and capacity building initiatives for the mental health workforce.

We established the comorbidities project, highlighting intersections of the alcohol and other drug use with other key health issues in our community. We consolidated and grew our substance support counselling service.

We have produced two campaigns on domestic and family violence; a bystander campaign on how to intervene when you see DFV in the community and a community education campaign on how to seek help.

We had a stronger focus on the health needs of LBQ women including new health promotion programs on breast and cervical cancer for lesbian, bisexual and queer women and the smoking cessation campaign Smoke Free, Still Fierce.

ACON's LOVE Project has increased the profile of health issues related to ageing for our communities through both in-person events and online initiatives.

### Improved strategic partnerships

In the area of mental health we have had collaborations with the Hunter Institute the Mental Health Commission, the Black Dog Institute and with Beyond Blue, which have led to greater recognition of the needs of our community.

We have developed strong partnerships across the domestic and family violence sector, which is leading to opportunities for new services, including with Relationships Australia.

ACON secured a partnership with Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria and QIP as the NSW provider for HOW2 training which is a preparatory course for Rainbow Tick accreditation.

We have developed an important new relationship with the Cancer Institute which has helped ACON develop a focus on cancer prevention for lesbian, bisexual and queer women.



Top: (left) A promotional image for the 2016 Broken Heel Festival. Photo: Esther LaRovere (right) ACON's Rovers at one of the many parties during the Mardi Gras season.

Opposite: Screen grabs from Red Flags, a the short film made to highlight the early warning signs of abuse in LGBTIQ relationships as well as to promote ACON DFV project's new website Say It Out Loud.

## Improving access to mainstream services

We have provided LGBTI inclusivity training for a range of services, particularly in the mental health, alcohol and other drug and aged care sectors.

We have been working to improve access to cancer related services, although this work is still in its formative stages.

## Leadership and influence

There have been significant gains in recognition of domestic and family violence in our communities. ACON has also been working with partners to ensure that the spate of murders and deaths among Sydney's gay and transgender communities in the 1980s and 1990s are appropriately recognised.

We have been working to develop the evidence base for LGBTI specific AOD programs in partnership with UNSW.

For further information on ACON's LGBTI Health programs, please see our annual reports, 2013 -2016, available at [www.acon.org.au/annual-reports](http://www.acon.org.au/annual-reports)

There are a number areas where work is in progress but further focus is required:

- Currently program coverage for problematic alcohol and drug use is limited and expansion of these services is a priority. Some progress has been made through the tenders being offered by Primary Health Networks.
- We will pursue opportunities to expand our targeted client services addressing mental health. As part of our response to the mental health needs of our community, we are committed to developing training packages for mainstream services. Our funding for this work is limited and needs to be expanded to meet need, particularly in the area of suicide prevention.
- Further focus on specific LGBTI smoking programs and improving the inclusiveness of general population prevention services is required over the next two years, along with sustainable funding. Small, ad hoc grants are currently sustaining this work. We ran a campaign for lesbian, bisexual and queer women in our community, but funding was, unfortunately, not sustained.
- Broad scale education and health promotion activities to address healthy ageing in our communities have been limited to date. ACON's LOVE Project has been successful but further programs with a focus on planning for ageing are required.
- ACON intends to partner with other organisations to develop comprehensive responses to ensure that the needs of our communities are recognised across health systems and processes.



## PART 3: ADVOCACY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Advocacy and Social Inclusion related aspects of the current strategic plan are currently being met. Major achievements include:

### New technologies

ACON has been integrating our HIV policy work with the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) on nationally relevant issues. Two major areas of success have been changes to testing guidelines to allow rapid HIV testing to become available and the licensing of PrEP through the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

### Leadership and influence

ACON has been active in making submissions to Government inquiries and reviews to ensure that HIV and LGBTI health is considered in the development of health policy. Additionally, there has been a strong focus on having mainstream services use appropriate gender and sexuality indicators to improve the quality of information we have about the health of our communities.

### Service expansion

Pride in Diversity has expanded significantly. In the last three years membership has increased by 365%, Australian Workplace Equality Index participation has increased by 136% and Pride in Practice conference attendance has increased by 167%.

In conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Human Rights Commission, a world first national Pride in Sport program was developed with a benchmarking instrument.

For further information on ACON's Advocacy and Social Inclusion programs, please see our annual reports, 2013 -2016, available at [www.acon.org.au/annual-reports](http://www.acon.org.au/annual-reports)

While this area of work is on track based on the current strategic plan, the following areas have been identified as points of further development:

- Further advocacy, in partnership with AFAO, is required to ensure that PrEP is widely available to those that need it. A primary focus of this will be listing on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
- It is essential that HIV self-testing becomes available in Australia. Although most regulatory barriers have been removed, the implementation of this technology will need to occur in a structured context, with input from community.
- We will continue to build Pride in Sport membership and promote participation in the Pride in Sport index.
- We will be launching Pride in Health + Wellbeing to promote LGBTI inclusive service provision within health, human services and wellbeing sectors.

*Right: Participants in Pride in Diversity's Pride in Sport float at the 2017 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade.*



## PART 4: ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

The majority of the Organisational Capacity related aspects of the current strategic plan are currently being met. Major achievements include:

### Processes and technology

ACON has implemented a new client database, a new community relationship management system and digitized a range of internal processes to improve efficiencies and facilitate reporting.

### Financial strength

We have increased the number of successful grants that we receive for service delivery and we have made significant savings from efficiency measures.

### Board and governance

There have been improvements made to ACON's risk management and financial reporting processes. ACON was cited as an outstanding organisation through accreditation review with the Quality Improvement Council (QIC) in 2014. We exceeded 6 of the 18 standards.

### People

There have been major improvements in staff engagement and an improved learning and development program was implemented. We have also invested in improved disability access at our Sydney office.

For further information on ACON's Organisational Capacity programs, please see our annual reports, 2013 -2016, available at [www.acon.org.au/annual-reports](http://www.acon.org.au/annual-reports)

There are a number areas where work is in progress but further focus is required:

- While ACON's use of emerging technologies has improved significantly over the course of the Strategic Plan, further focus is required on this to ensure that the organisation's digital infrastructure remains current and responsive to changing ways of working and connecting with our community.
- ACON will be developing an organisational-wide digital strategy to further embed the use of new technologies across program areas.
- Further work is required to diversify ACON's funding base. Particularly in the sphere of LGBTI Health, developing sustainable and consistent funding sources will assist with building the profile of our communities health needs across a range of sectors and will assist with the retention staff and program continuity.



Left: ACON staff and volunteers at the 2017 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade.

## ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

Much has changed in ACON's operating environment since the Strategic Plan was finalised in 2013.

In order to respond effectively to this rapidly evolving environment, and to further leverage organisational strengths and successes, additional strategic priorities have been identified for 2017-18 and beyond. Some of these are listed below.

1. Establish a coordinated work plan and seek sustainable funding for cancer prevention, leveraging established partnerships and building on the successes to date in smoking cessation, early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer, and anal cancer research.
2. Continue to build a coordinated response to the changing HIV landscape, that considers a narrative beyond 'ending HIV' and reflects the reality that until a cure is available, continued investment in a robust, community-based and multi-faceted HIV program will be required.
3. Develop a health outcome strategy for transgender and gender diverse health to improve ACON's ability to meet the needs of these members of our communities.
4. Establish a statewide LGBTI Health coalition that cuts across key health areas including mental health, aging, drug and alcohol, domestic and family violence and cancer with the aim of developing a statewide responses to LGBTI health.
5. Continue to assess ACON's strategic opportunities and positioning within a national context, in light of fast changing environmental factors.



All areas of focus will be underpinned and strengthened by ACON's existing values, principles and partnerships. Prioritising these areas will help ensure ACON is well positioned for the next strategic planning period as a sustainable, successful organisation enhancing the health of LGBTI people and communities.

# × CLAUDE

Clockwise from opposite page: Ending HIV's 2016 'Is PrEP for you' campaign. Hunter New England local doctor who participated in the 2016 regional focused Ending HIV 'Test Often' campaign. ACON's CLAUDE project is an online sexual health resource and art project for women who play with women. #SmokeFreeStillFierce campaign targeting LBQ women. 'Stimcheck' campaign linking people who use drugs to health care. ACON Staff, volunteers and drag queens at the 2017 Afternoon Delight Sydney screening for older LGBTI people in the community. ACON's SPARK project with their new Start Making Sense workshop targeting young gay and same sex attracted men of Arabic and Middle Eastern backgrounds. Campaign models promoting the latest Ending HIV 'How Do You Do It?' campaign at Fair Day 2017. Cover of the preliminary results from the 'Sydney Asian Gay Men's Community Survey'.



