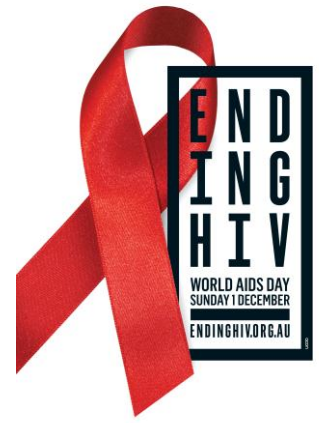


WORLD AIDS DAY LAUNCH

1 DECEMBER 2015

Custom's House



Dr Justin Koonin - Speech

- Thank you Uncle Ray for your warm and generous welcome to country. I would like to pay my respects to elders past and present and also to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples here today. As LGBTI people working towards the recognition of our dignity and our rights, we have so much to learn from the resilience and courage of the traditional owners of the land upon which we stand, who have manifested that dignity for thousands of years.
- On World AIDS Day, it is also important to recognise our own LGBTI community elders, on whose shoulders we stand, and to recognise and respect the risks they took, their efforts and their persistence in advancing the rights of our communities over many decades.
- It gives me great pleasure as ACON's new President to acknowledge Minister Skinner. Minister, thank you for your vision, and for your commitment to our community over so many years – and that you too to Andrew Kirk and James Bolster from your Office, for the able and enthusiastic support they provide. I also want to thank the multipartisan group of allies we have in NSW Parliament, many of whom are here today - Don Harwin, Jenny Leong, Trevor Khan, Penny Sharpe, Bruce Notley-Smith.
- I'd like to also acknowledge Dr Kerry Chant and other members of the NSW Ministry of Health, Bill Whittaker, leaders of the various HIV partner organisations and LGBTI community organisations represented here today, members of the media, as well as fellow members of the ACON Board and staff.
- ACON is proud to be representing our communities here today, holding in memory those we have lost. We remember the tens of millions around the world who have succumbed to AIDS-related illnesses, and honour the tens

of millions who continue to live with HIV, often in conditions far more challenging than those we face here in Australia.

- Yet we are also extremely excited, thanks to recent developments in HIV prevention, treatment and care.
- We have new science – summarised somewhat simply as ‘treatment as prevention’.
- We now know that early antiviral treatment of people with HIV is good for their health and also can essentially eliminate the possibility of transmitting HIV to others. For those negative people struggling to remain HIV free, the strategic use of antiviral treatment can help prevent them from becoming HIV positive.
- These developments have led to an enormous sense of optimism and energy in our communities, and ACON’s role is to bring these communities with us on this journey.
- In order to do this, we need to effectively communicate with our communities, which we have done through the Ending HIV community engagement framework – a key component of the NSW HIV Strategy over the past three years.
- Phase one of Ending HIV was about the new science and opportunities, and the need to come together as a community, to join the fight to end HIV and in doing so, pledge “I’m In”.
- This early work has paid off, with about 80% of men able to recall the campaign over time, with real shifts in knowledge leading to unprecedented testing among gay men in NSW.
- However, while on the whole, our communities are engaged and mobilised, we know a significant proportion of those at risk of HIV are either not testing or not testing frequently enough.

- So in this second phase of Ending HIV, we are taking the research and our experience of gay men to a more personal level, where individual barriers to testing, including fear and the lack of perception of risk, as well as reasons for testing more often, are articulated by members of our communities.
- Today I'm very proud to launch, alongside the Minister, this new phase of Ending HIV 2.0 – *Test Often*.
- A feature of the *Test Often* campaign will be the experiences of 11 members of the gay community, all volunteers and representing different cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups, and including a transgender man and an Aboriginal man.
- With their declaration – “*I'm Ending HIV*” – each of them is issuing a call to action for others to consider how they are contributing to their health, and also the health of our communities.
- The *Test Often* campaign starts today with five community members initially, with the other six to be released when the campaign is run in its second burst in the New Year and in the lead up to the 2016 Mardi Gras Festival.
- It will be featured in public spaces – including train stations, in buses and on bus shelters and street posters, but also of course online and on social media.
- While I am talking about community education efforts, I'd like to also acknowledge the NSW Ministry of Health's activation that has been run over the past few days. It is terrific to see this activation and the next phase of Ending HIV complementing each other so effectively.
- However, as we have heard, the launch of Ending HIV 2.0 and the new NSW HIV Strategy are not the only important news stories today.
- Like the Minister, I am exceptionally excited about the new prevention opportunities we have before us with Pre-exposure Prophylaxis or PrEP.

- Expanded PrEP Implementation in Communities or EPIC-NSW – is aptly named.
- The scale of the program will see 3,700 people at risk of HIV infection protected from acquiring the virus using PrEP.
- ACON is thrilled to be a partner in this historic clinical study, led by Professor David Cooper and the Kirby Institute.
- ACON will have a key role to ensure as many men at risk as possible are aware of the clinical study and that the study is rolled out as soon as possible, as the rapid nature of the roll out is critical to securing a dramatic reduction in new infections.
- We are confident our community will absolutely embrace this new opportunity. Since Truvada was licenced for use as PrEP in the USA in 2012, our community has been clamouring for access themselves.
- PrEP is a vital ingredient in the range of strategies we will need to utilise in order to virtually end HIV transmissions, and we are thrilled to hear this announcement today.
- This brings me to my final point. PrEP is one tool among many at our disposal.
- ACON welcomes the release of this comprehensive new NSW HIV Strategy today, and again commends you, Minister – and your Department – on the Strategy.
- We believe the Strategy continues to promote the foundational aspects of our response that have served us so well, while at the same time adding the best and most contemporary strategies to go beyond stable rates of infections, and to strive for virtual elimination of new transmissions.

- We welcome the stronger engagement of General Practitioners, a renewed focus on contact tracing and a strengthened approach when it comes to treating – not just early, but as soon as possible.
- We are also very mindful of the range of strategies gay men use to prevent HIV transmission. Rather than pick winners, ACON's role is to encourage all evidence based methods gay men utilise to keep themselves and their sexual partners safe from HIV.
- That's why – even in the face of such exciting potential in the form of PrEP – you will still see ACON strongly supporting the use of condoms.
- Our safe sex culture has always had condom use as a key component – that does not change. We expect, and will support, condom use by gay men as a core HIV prevention strategy.
- What will change is that given the evidence of the effectiveness of PrEP, we now will be able to talk to guys at high risk on the range of way to reduce their risk. Use of both PrEP and condoms in various situations is sensible, effective, pragmatic and responsible.
- ACON deeply appreciates the efforts of so many here today to work towards greater availability of PrEP for our communities.
- Indeed, we stand with you all in our commitment to continue to innovate and evolve our collective efforts to end HIV, as signposted by our new NSW HIV Strategy.
- It is irrefutable that NSW has the most contemporary HIV policy settings in Australia, and is a shining example of policy leadership internationally. After 30 years battling HIV/AIDS, this moment, and these opportunities, are incredibly significant.
- Together, as gay men, sex workers, injecting drug users, politicians, policy makers, researchers, clinicians, we were leaders in understanding and controlling HIV transmission. Together, we must now be leaders in ending it.

- For the tens of thousands of individuals, family members and friends throughout Australia who have been affected by the virus, there is no greater memorial we can offer.

ENDS