

**Death of Legendary Activist for Social Justice, Phil Carswell OAM**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Monday 18 March* – On Sunday morning, longstanding activist and Founding President of the Victorian AIDS Council (now Thorne Harbour Health) Phil Carswell OAM died peacefully at his home in Brisbane.

Thorne Harbour Health President Janet Jukes OAM said, “Phil Carswell lived an incredible life and our LGBTIQ+ communities owe him a debt of gratitude for his remarkable contribution to our collective health and wellbeing.”

“We use the label ‘legend’ for many people who have played important roles in our community, but it’s completely true and appropriate of Phil Carswell.”

From an early age, Phil was an activist for social justice. He was heavily involved in the union movement as well as the gay and lesbian liberation movement. In 1975, Phil was part of the first National Homosexual Conference at Melbourne University. The conference went on to be held annually in different Australian cities, including the Fourth National Homosexual Conference in Sydney in 1978 following the first Mardi Gras. During that time, Phil was also part of the Melbourne Gay Teachers’ Group, who notably published the booklet “Young Gay and Proud”.

In 1982, Phil was a member of the ALSO Foundation’s subcommittee on health - tasked with gathering information about Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID) - or as it would be known a year later Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

In 12 July 1983, Phil was the convenor of the Victorian AIDS Action Committee and the organisation’s first President as it became the Victorian AIDS Council a year later. Phil went on to serve in a number of leadership roles at both the state and federal level through the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Australia. He was a founding trustee of the AIDS Trust of Australia. Phil successfully bridged the gap between the community and public service sectors. Along with the late Ian Goller, Phil was the first openly gay man employed by the Victorian Health Department to work on HIV/AIDS prevention. He served on National Advisory Committee on AIDS alongside Ms Ita Buttrose.

Thorne Harbour Health CEO, Simon Ruth, said, “We are devastated to lose Phil. He was always understanding, patient, and supportive of our work. He was an incredible mentor to many who continue to carry his legacy into the work we do today.”

“Our LGBTIQ+ communities and people living with HIV will benefit from his fierce advocacy and dedication long into the future.”

After his time in Victoria, Phil moved to Queensland where he became a significant figure in the Queensland HIV and LGBTIQ+ movement for another 20 years. For his outstanding service to community health and the response to HIV/AIDS, Phil was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in June 2015.

Phil is survived by his partner of 40 years, Ian Cherry, whom he married on Stonewall Day in 2013 in New York City. Plans are underway for a memorial service in Melbourne and will be shared online by Thorne Harbour Health.

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