

AUTUMN 2018

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE VICTORIAN AIDS COUNCIL

No 18

IT'S NO JOKE – PrEP ON PBS FROM 1 APRIL

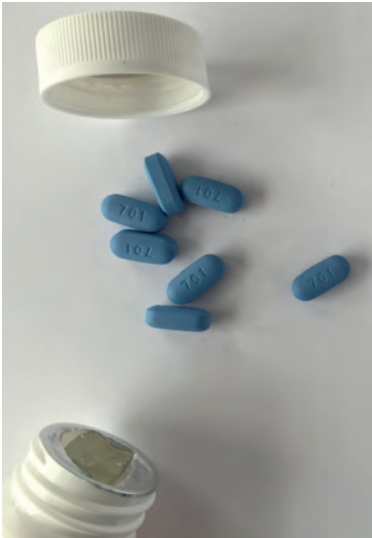


Photo Illustration by: Caleb Hawk

In one of the most significant developments in HIV prevention in Australia, the Federal Government has announced that pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) will be listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from 1 April 2018 – putting Australia in reach of being one of the first countries in the world to end new transmissions of HIV.

The announcement follows the 9 February 2018 decision by the Pharmaceutical Benefit Advisory Committee (PBAC),

which recommended that PrEP be listed on the PBS – making the gamechanging tool for HIV prevention accessible across Australia. In reaching its decision, PBAC stated that PrEP provided “a significant reduction in the risk of sexually-acquired HIV” and should be considered as one of a number of approaches to safe sex practices.

In response to the PBAC decision, VAC President Chad Hughes said, “There’s no doubt that PrEP is a highly effective tool in HIV prevention. The challenge has been making sure it’s accessible and affordable.”

“Today’s decision allows for a way forward, to fully realise PrEP’s potential in helping us see a future with no new transmissions of HIV in Australia.”

The listing of PrEP on the PBS and its government-subsidised status, means that an individual will pay a maximum of \$39.50 per script.

In May 2016, the Therapeutic Goods Administration approved PrEP for use in Australia, but the drug remained expensive to acquire. Meanwhile, demonstration trials launched across the country to make PrEP available to those communities most at risk of acquiring HIV. These trials have played an important role in making PrEP accessible until it could be listed on the PBS, but with each state independently launching trials, access has been inconsistent nationally.

Victoria has seen a significant community interest in PrEP in recent years and VAC has worked alongside community organisations, researchers, politicians, and consumer groups to work toward making this important HIV prevention tool within reach.

VAC CEO Simon Ruth remarked, “The community demand for PrEP is undeniable. Victoria’s PrEP-X trial became one of the fastest enrolled PrEP trials in the world and has seen the trial expand into South Australia and Tasmania. The communities we’re working with have made it clear that they want to be able to look after their sexual health. PrEP allows them to do so with confidence.”

For more information check out: vac.org.au/prep

Phillip Rowell is a volunteer Content Creator for VAC.

COMMUNITY LOSES LONGSTANDING CHAMPION

On 8 March, we lost a longstanding and dedicated champion in the response to HIV and AIDS with the passing of Tony Maynard. Serving on the current VAC board, Tony’s longstanding commitment to addressing HIV in Australia goes back over 30 years — as does his involvement with VAC. Tony passed up a scientific career to become VAC’s first Treatments Officer during the height of the epidemic because in his words, “this is far more important for the community.”

Tony was passionate about ensuring no one was left behind in the HIV response and that everyone could access the treatment, care and support they needed. Tony served at the Senior Education Officer at the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM). He worked with ACON in the Enhanced Primary Care Project as well as with the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA) as their Treataware Project Officer. He also worked together with pharmaceutical companies to help bring vital HIV drugs to market in Australia.

In 1993, Tony started as VAC’s Treatments Officer. During this time, the Treatments Action Group was formed. Comprised of VAC volunteers, the group focused on the latest research

around treatment advances. Supported by this group, Tony used his existing international contacts to establish a buyers club that worked with those on the west coast of the US to get Australians living with HIV and AIDS access to new generic protease inhibitors.

In the 1990s, Tony’s work in the PLWHA program at VAC (when deaths from AIDS were a weekly, sometimes daily, occurrence) was characterised by sensitivity, care, generosity of spirit and genuine regard for the clients — many of whom were friends of Tony’s from the community. He could often be seen sharing a meal or a coffee with clients, talking through treatment options and encouraging people to never give up hope - often in the face of seriously debilitating illness and the tragic reality of facing death. For his own part, he never allowed the toll of the epidemic to show,



Tony Maynard

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Continued from page 1...

always cheerful with a wicked sense of humour he was always ready with a smile and a welcome, no matter how difficult the circumstances he was facing with his clients and friends.

Looking back on his career, a colleague recounted how Tony assisted a young HIV positive couple to access vertical transmission prophylaxis, prior to the publication of the landmark study, so that they had a healthy, HIV negative baby. In a world before the internet, knowing that this information was out there before publication was truly remarkable. Tony was incredibly knowledgeable and he genuinely cared about people.

With an established focus on HIV treatment throughout his career, Tony was excited to join the VAC Board in November 2016 — at a time when biomedical prevention's role in ending HIV was being fully realised with the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and the impact of an undetectable viral load in people living with HIV.

"We've lost piece of our history and our legacy," said VAC CEO Simon Ruth. "As a community-led organisation, we are indebted to LGBTI community elders like Tony who have stayed with us — from our formation in response to HIV through to our current battles to ensuring the ongoing health and wellbeing of our LGBTI communities."

VAC President Chad Hughes added, "Tony brought a wealth of experience and wisdom to VAC. His legacy is woven into the fabric of so many of the organisations that played a vital role in the Australian response to HIV and AIDS. We will miss his unwavering dedication but will feel the impact of his valuable contribution in perpetuity."

HAVING A BALL

In addition to some of the community partnerships we covered in our last newsletter, VAC also supported *The Coming Back Out Ball*.

The inaugural *Coming Back Out Ball* was held at the Melbourne Town Hall in October 2017. This spectacular social event celebrated Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) elders. Hosted by the much-loved Australian arts icon Robyn Archer, *The Coming Back Out Ball* was free for LGBTI elders 65+.

Each guest enjoying a three course dinner, drinks, and headline performers including: Robyn Archer, Carlotta, Deborah Cheetham, Toni Lulich, Gerry Connolly, Lois Weaver (and many others) supported by *The Coming Back Out Ball* orchestra conducted by Kathleen McGuire.

Created and produced by All The Queens Men, *The Coming Back Out Ball* was designed to honour LGBTI elders; pioneers who have led the way and shaped our community, as well as elders who have struggled to live their true sexual, gendered or cultural identity. Over 600 + people attended this historic event.

For more info on this fantastic initiative, head to:

www.comingbackoutball.com

A TIME FOR 'LITTLE PRICKS'



Over the past few weeks you may have heard some community chatter about vaccinations or getting immunised. So what is all this chatter about? Well it's actually pretty important. Over the past couple of months there has been an increase in cases of particular viruses and diseases amongst gay and bisexual men. For instance, there is an outbreak of hepatitis A and meningococcal cases have been on the rise. When left untreated, these can have some pretty nasty health outcomes. The good news is that they are preventable

We can stop the spread of these diseases and prevent these nasty health outcomes by getting vaccinated. Vaccinations are the best way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A and meningococcal. Furthermore, there are other diseases which you can get vaccinated for, including hepatitis B and HPV.

In response to the number of increasing cases within gay and bisexual communities, the Department of Health and Human Services have made all of the vaccinations free for gay and bisexual men, with the HPV vaccine free to those aged below 26. Getting vaccinated can help protect yourself, others and your sexual partners. Take advantage of this opportunity!

To help promote these free vaccines to gay and bisexual men in Victoria, VAC developed the 'Little Pricks' campaign that you may have seen or heard about. We've shown it on apps, such as Grindr and Scruff, websites such as AusSiemen and Squirt, on screens through Melbourne Queer Film Festival sessions and on the radio through advertisements on JOY 94.9 or our sexual health program *Well, Well, Well* on Monday nights.

The vaccines are free until the end of the year, but the earlier you get in the better. The great thing about this immunisation program is that you can speak to or book in with your local GP. You don't need to head to a 'gay' clinic to get the vaccines. Each GP clinic in Victoria has been contacted and advised of the immunisation program, and that it's free to all gay and bisexual men in Victoria.

For more information on what is involved in getting the vaccines or about the diseases then check out: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

More of an auditory learner? Listen to recent episodes of *Well, Well, Well* on the hep A outbreak, HPV, and Meningococcal at joy.org.au/wellwellwell or [download them on iTunes](#).

Adam Hynes is VAC's Team Leader of Health Promotion

LGBTIQ WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE IS RETURNING TO MELBOURNE IN 2018



Planning for the fourth LGBTIQ (formally LBQ) Women's Health Conference is underway and the working group is now calling for abstract submissions.

The conference, which VAC initiated in 2015, is the only national summit for LGBTIQ women's health in Australia and includes presentations, panels, workshops and esteemed key note speakers. The event offers attendees a wide range

of opportunities to discuss, engage with and explore LGBTIQ women's health issues as well as profile new and emerging research, innovative programs and services being delivered to address these needs in our communities.

The conference was born out of the realisation that LGBTIQ women's health had been largely overlooked by both LGBTIQ and mainstream organisations. The conference was also prompted in response to research which had targeted LGBTIQ women.



Studies have found concerning health outcomes for queer women's communities in a significant number of areas including alcohol use, smoking and a lack of regular screening for diseases such as cervical cancer.

In 2016, VAC partnered with ACON to co-present the conference and now in its fourth year, it is a two-day event which attracts over 300 attendees from all over Australia.

KEY DATES

- Now - Registrations Open - lbq.org.au
- 8 April - Abstract Submissions Close
- 30 April - Scholarship Applications Close
- 12 & 13 July - LGBTIQ Women's Health Conference

This year the conference underwent a name change due to community feedback and to reflect previous years' program content which has always been inclusive of all LGBTIQ women.

This year's theme 'Research, Resilience, Respect' is aimed at exploring existing research into LGBTIQ women's health and to highlight the need for further research, to acknowledge the resilience and strength of LGBTIQ women and to pay respect to all LGBTIQ women's communities.

Submission ideas are extremely diverse and include (but are not limited to) topics such as Aboriginal health, LGBTIQ women's histories, BDSM, ageing, mental health, activism and feminism, art and creativity in health promotion, breast and cervical cancers, trans experience, living with disabilities, leadership, ageing, alcohol and other drugs, rainbow families, domestic and family violence, sex work, marriage equality and the refugee and migrant experience.

Scholarships are also open for those who may need financial assistance to attend or present at the conference. The scholarship program is designed ensure the greatest possible diversity of conference delegates. These scholarships are open to organisations and individuals from all states and territories of Australia, including the Tiwi Islands, NT.



LGBTIQ Women's Health Conference will be held on 12-13 July 2018 at the Jasper Hotel, 489 Elizabeth Street Melbourne. Head to lbq.org.au for more information.

*Rachel Cook is VAC's LBQ Women's Health Project Lead
Photos by Robert Knapman*



VAC WOMEN - WORKING TOGETHER

Hot on the heels of International Women's Day, we released this clip featuring a few of the great women of VAC making a difference to the health and wellbeing of our LGBTI communities. As a community-led organisation, lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women have played an important role in establishing VAC. That tradition continues in what we do today! Our role as an LGBTI health organisation is continuing to grow to help meet the health service needs of the women in our community.

Have you seen the clip yet? Head to VAC's [Facebook Page](#) or watch it on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/0dhVRdMote8>

MIDSUMMA CARNIVAL



At Midsumma Carnival, we had our biggest stall yet! With the Melbourne Gay Community Periodic Survey running out of one side, the PRONTO! Rapid Testing vehicle next door, and an army of staff and volunteers on hand to answer questions and hand out free swag — it was all happening! We brought back the chill space with plush beanbags and a bit of shade for people to relax and socialise. Our *HIV Still Matters* campaign was in full swing reminding us that “HIV Affects Everyone”. And a big THANK YOU to all the people that took pictures in our #imwithvac photoframe and shared them online. As a result, our hashtag was the highest trending hashtag across all of Midsumma Carnival! *Photos by Mel Butters*



QUEER POOL PARTY



To wrap up Midsumma 2018, our Queer Pool Party was a social, alcohol-free recovery Sunday session at Prahran Pool. The community turnout of over 600 people was incredible with the queer crowd getting into the bold and colourful spirit of the event to enjoy some sunshine, a sausage sizzle and a tunes from the Pop Chops DJs. Plus our faithful crew from the Melbourne Surge Water Polo Club turned up lend a hand and help Water Polo Victoria run rounds of "Bumpa Polo". Keep an eye out for this event during next year's Midsumma line up. *Photos by Dean Arcuri (more photos on page 8)*



MEET MATT



The SAMESH team over in Adelaide have welcomed Matt Tyne as their new team leader. Matt brings a wealth of experience in the HIV and international development sectors. Matt's career has spanned over 20 years in the field working both locally and internationally.

Matt's career has taken him all around the world with a work history that includes time with Uniting World, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), SHIFT (based in Bangkok) which extends support to much of South and South East Asia, and as the executive director of the Red Nose Foundation in Jakarta.

Matt's career in international development began early when at the age of 15 he saw an advert from the Overseas Services Bureau (now Australian Volunteers International). Soon after, he began volunteering in Sri Lanka, eventually leading to studying a Masters in International Development at RMIT.

"Ever since I was young I've been interested with working with people overseas. Then the work that I had done prior to going to Sri Lanka was in palliative care and in the HIV field, and so I was able to combine those in Sri Lanka. Ever since that it's been a field of interest."

In the 1990s, Matt spent time volunteering with the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) working as part of a Care Team, providing support to people living with HIV and those experiencing AIDS defining illnesses.

Matt is coming back to VAC as the SAMESH team leader with a vision for the future that builds on what's been achieved by SAMESH's previous team leader, Willis Logue.

"The thing that stands out for me (about SAMESH) is the amount work that's been done, and not just in the terms of programs and projects, but the amount of goodwill that's been developed in such a short time. Just under 3 years to have a such a strong relationship with other services, I think that is a significant achievement."

"Maintaining and strengthen those relationships with other queer groups, working with Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal gay, queer and trans people and people from diverse backgrounds."

"I want look at how we engage with positive people... not just engaging but supporting them — support of their organisations, looking at it as a community development program. That's going to take time, but it's of critical importance."

Check out the latest happening at SAMESH online at samesh.org.au or follow them on Facebook: [facebook.com/samesh.org.au/](https://www.facebook.com/samesh.org.au/)

A FULL MOONING



Dean Arcuri opens Mooning 2018 to a sold out crowd.

Photo by Chris Tait

'Oh Jesus, right in my eye!'

Dean Arcuri, the recognisable and ever-ubiquitous personality across Melbourne's LGBTIQ scene, experienced some collateral water splashback as he compèred the 'Wet Jock' round in front of an excited throng of men at the Laird. It was Australia Day evening and annual Mooning event during Midsumma was underway.

Explaining Mooning in broad terms (like I would to my Mum, for example) is not particularly difficult: it's one of the festival's tentpole affairs, having raised tens of thousands of dollars for HIV/AIDS-related causes over 20+ years. And it is, essentially, a 'best arse' competition. Providing more comprehensive information about Mooning, including describing the often-impressive feats undertaken by contestants during its usually (very) entertaining 'Talent' segment, might require some degree of discretion, depending on your audience.

Early on there was an element of unpredictability to this year's Mooning; six of the event's seven contestants had failed to show up, which meant that six noble and unprepared Mooning attendees – men who had walked through the Laird's front door earlier that evening anticipating a drink or two and some innocent arse-judging over the next few hours – stepped up to the challenge at the very last minute. As Dean explained to me later, these Mooning novices "were nervous at first but they dove right in. That's what's really special about this event – the community really gets behind it. It's very cheeky, but it's done in such good spirit."

The crowd was soon introduced to each competitor. Or, to be more accurate, to their groin region. One-by-one they stood on the stage behind a tall black partition with a removable mid-section. The panel would slide back to reveal a pair of man-cheeks, usually clad in some form of tight underwear – but not always – and dancing around for the fans. The crowd obviously loved the display; the flashes from mobile phone cameras were incessant. "Wouldn't it be great if we looked at dicks like we used to," Dean observed with nostalgic air, "With our eyes."

Not to provide too much detail about how this year's winner secured victory with their 'talent', but it involved an impressive length of coloured flags (six metres, I'm told) pulled from somewhere I wouldn't normally consider to be a typical flag-storage area. In a mark of impressive patriotism, the very last of the chain of flags was our very own Australian ensign, reminding the crowd that it was January 26th ('This one's for Malcolm Turnbull!' Dean hollered).

One hundred percent of funds raised from Mooning go to the David Williams Fund, provides emergency financial assistance to people living with HIV who are experiencing financial hardship. For more info on the David Williams Fund, head to: vac.org.au/dwf.

Brendan Quinn is a volunteer Content Creator for VAC.

SEX, DRUGS & A MIDSUMMA FORUM

“Let me be very clear, pill testing works. It saves lives”

“We would love pill testing in Victoria, we’ve been pushing for it for a long time.”

Owen Hall, a volunteer peer educator with Dancewise Victoria is speaking as part of the Sexually Adventurous Men (SAM) Project’s community drug forum.

The argument in favour of onsite pill testing for clubs, parties and festivals has been building for a number of years. And following several high profile incidents in the LGBTIQ and wider communities of late, the conversation is becoming increasingly more significant.

Statistics taken from abroad, namely the UK and Netherlands show a strong positive impact in terms of harm minimisation and community awareness.

As it stands, politics and legal technicalities continue to block advances and lives continue to be needlessly put at risk while they do so.

It’s a Thursday night in Collingwood and we’ve gathered in the evocative surrounds of The Company of Men exhibition, a visceral exploration of sex, drugs and masculinity as part of the Midsumma Festival, a fitting backdrop for the evening’s content.

VAC’s SAM Project (short for Sexually Adventurous Men) works to educate and inform with respect to sexual health and adventurous practices including drug use particularly in the MSM community. The focus tonight is on drug use and harm minimisation.

Statistically speaking, drug use is higher within the queer community when compared to the wider population.

According to the National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016 shows same sex attracted people are 5.8 times more likely to use ecstasy and meth/amphetamines than their straight counterparts.

Figures like these are unlikely to surprise anyone who has spent time in the bars and clubs not just in Melbourne but around the world and while the precise reasons for the higher use rates are unknown, theories abound.

Joel Murray, senior officer policy and research Living Positive Victoria rejects the notion of a singular cause and instead suggests there are a number of influencing factors.

While discussing the higher rates of use, conversation moves onto community literacy.

“One of the things the gay community does really well is educate itself.” Says Hall.



Panelists: (L>R) Joel Murray, Craig Bascand, Owen Hall. Photo: Michael Whelan

He is optimistic this trait can help to minimise negative incidents within the scene.

“Because you have the information, you can hopefully do it as safely as possible”

Education is a recurrent theme tonight with the panel taking care to ensure those in attendance are aware of their rights in the event of an emergency.

Later, SAM’s Craig Buscand reiterates an earlier point that Australia employs a “no fault” health system, providing reassurance that a call to the emergency services for drug related matters poses no legal risk.

“The only reason the police would come is if there’s a threat of violence.”

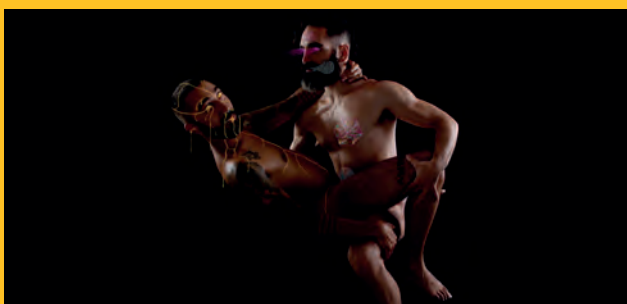
His advice for anyone in such a situation is simple. When speaking to emergency services simply “be calm... tell them exactly what’s happened and listen to them.”

“If you can’t get a response out of someone... if they’re not waking up, just ring the ambulance.”

VAC offers a variety support services relating to AOD (Alcohol and Other Drug) including counselling, recovery support and therapeutic groups visit vac.org.au for more or call (03) 9865 6700.

Further resources covering a range of topics including harm minimisation, pharmaceutical interactions, the use of drugs in sexual practice and dependency are available from downanddirty.org and touchbase.org.au

Mark Nunan is a volunteer Content Creator for VAC.



COM-MISSIONED WORKS

As part of Company of Men 2018, we commissioned a local artist to create a series of works exploring men who have sex with men and their relationship with alcohol and other drugs in their sexual pleasure seeking. The successful artist, Phil Solomon exhibited the series “I’m not here” exploring the connection/disconnect of men engaging in drug use during sex.

Photo: Phil Solomon’s I’m Not Here #3

WHATS ON!

30 MARCH - 3 APRIL

EASTER LONG WEEKEND -SITE CLOSURES

Over the upcoming long weekend, keep in mind that all services and offices at 615 St Kilda Road (formerly at the Peter Knight Centre), the Positive Living Centre, Centre Clinic, PRONTO!, Equinox, and VACountry will be closed from Friday 30 March through Tuesday 3 April. Regular Hours will resume at all sites from Wednesday 4 April. For regular hours of operation across all VAC sites, head to: vac.org.au/contact



31 MARCH

Transgender Day of Visibility

Every year, Int'l Transgender Day of Visibility celebrates the trans community, their achievements, and raise awareness of the transphobic discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide. [#transthriving](https://www.instagram.com/transthriving)



10 APRIL

Briefs - VAC Fundraiser

The motley crew at *Briefs* are back in town for Melbourne Comedy Festival, and on April 10, VAC receives the funds raised from the nightly raffle. comedyfestival.com.au/2018/shows/briefs

13-15 APRIL

GEELONG QUEER FILM FESTIVAL

We're thrilled to be a gold sponsor for the inaugural Geelong Queer Film Festival - bringing more diversity and LGBTI stories to the regions big screens. GQFF will include both feature and short films bringing contemporary and classic LGBTI themed films to the screen at local venues. For more info, head to the festival's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/GeelongQueerFilm



17 APRIL

VOLUNTEER INFO SESSION

Volunteers keep us going! Get an intro to the array of volunteer roles available.

<https://victorianaidscouncil.typeform.com/to/gq1AvU>

25 APRIL

ANZAC DAY

All our sites will be closed during the ANZAC Day Public Holiday on Wednesday 25 April. For regular hours of operation across all VAC sites, head to: vac.org.au/contact



31 MAY

L.O.V.E. II

Along w/ Switchboard & JOY 94.9, we're recognising the vital work of our community volunteers with the 2nd LGBTI Organisations Volunteer Event or 'L.O.V.E.' for short.

volunteers@vac.org.au



You can stay up to date on all the latest across the organisation including news and events online at vac.org.au or check us out on facebook.com/VAC.org.au or follow us on [@VACorg](https://twitter.com/VACorg) or [Instagram @vac.org.au](https://instagram.com/vac.org.au)

Queer Pool Party - Photos by Mel Butters