

NSW Minister for Health The Hon Reba Meagher MP
Speech notes - 4th International AIDS Society Conference
22 July 2007

Good evening distinguished guests, Minister Abbott, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Sydney for this 4th International Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention.

NSW is more heavily impacted by HIV, and the challenge it poses to individual and public health, than other parts of Australia.

We are home to some 58 per cent of Australians living with HIV/AIDS.

NSW was the first place in Australia to record an HIV notification.

Fortunately we responded early and energetically to the threat it posed.

Our vigilance has paid off and in NSW we have seen HIV notification rates fall by 17 per cent since 1996.

We are fortunate to have access to resources and the existence of a well-developed health system, last year alone NSW invested nearly \$90 million in tackling AIDS.

These have been great advantages in helping keep rates of infections low and producing good health outcomes for people living with HIV/AIDS.

However, access to resources alone is no guarantee of effectiveness.

Less tangible assets, such as leadership, bipartisan political support, and a willingness on the part of many to work across political, social, disciplinary and professional boundaries, have been as much a part of our success.

Meeting the challenge of HIV/AIDS required support for frank, effective education and prevention programs for those most at risk, and the reshaping of the health system to improve its capacity to respond.

Maintaining community support for NSW's Needle and Syringe Program has been a challenge for successive governments, yet this program alone has been estimated to have saved over 30,000 HIV infections since it began.

Initially, HIV was a poorly understood disease which primarily affected members of marginalised communities.

This situation demanded a strong emphasis on partnership in the development and delivery of health services and prevention programs.

A crucial part of this partnership has been the role played by clinicians, not just in providing quality care, but as committed patient advocates who worked with communities

to ensure access to high quality care where people were treated with dignity, understanding and expertise.

NSW Health invests significantly in a publicly funded network of HIV treatment centres, and supports and encourages the ongoing involvement of general practice in HIV medicine through funding to Australian Society for HIV Medicine.

NSW also remains a centre of clinical and research expertise in HIV/AIDS.

We are proud to be home to the National Centres in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research and HIV Social Research, and to the Australian Centre for HIV and Hepatitis Virology Research.

The partnership approach to HIV/AIDS has served the people of NSW well.

It has provided a framework for collaboration between government, affected communities, researchers and medicine, and has ensured that programs and services are informed by both the best available evidence and the experience of those living with or at risk of HIV infection.

Behaviour change and supporting communities to rise to the challenges brought by HIV are just one part of the picture.

We have more options open to us now than ever before in terms of how to approach prevention, treatment and care of HIV/AIDS.

There will be disappointments along the way, but there will also be successes.

Understanding these successes, and the conditions under which specific interventions are effective, is critical.

We are proud of our achievements in NSW to date.

But we are also very aware that this achievement is fragile, and stabilisation of infections is a long way from eradicating HIV/AIDS.

We will continue to need new approaches and fresh ideas, along with the open and constructive debate that events like this offer.

Your presence here today, and the quality of this conference program, reminds us of the depth and breadth of skill, talent and commitment available to address the challenges of the future.

Sydney is a beautiful city and I hope some of you will have the opportunity to spend some time here at the end of this conference.

On behalf of the NSW Government I welcome you and wish you all a challenging, engaging and rewarding conference.

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