

Victoria's Gender and Sexuality Commissioner, Rowena Allen, headlines the 33rd annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

12 May 2016 – The candles will be burning bright as Melbournian's gather to remember those who lost their lives at the 33rd International AIDS Candlelight Memorial on Sunday, 15 May at 5pm at City Square.

"The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial allows us to come together to remember and honour those we have lost to the epidemic," says keynote speaker Rowena Allen, Victoria's Gender and Sexuality Commissioner. "We want everyone regardless of their HIV status to engage in breaking down current barriers of HIV stigma and discrimination and empower the next generation with vital information about HIV and AIDS."

This year's theme, 'Engage, Educate and Empower' is presented in partnership with the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC). The evening will be centred around a candle-lighting ceremony to honour the lives lost and showcase personal narratives from young HIV positive speakers as a way to share the journey of those currently living with HIV, their challenges to living well and the struggle to have access to treatment.

"While the landscape of HIV prevention is rapidly changing in light of biomedical innovations, it's important to remember that HIV still affects our community today and continues to have a massive impact globally," says Simon Ruth, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian AIDS Council. "The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is an opportunity to honour those lives lost, to reflect on where we've come from, and allow that history to inform how we continue to address the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS into the future."

Currently, there are more than 27,000 people living with HIV in Australia. Melbourne has already taken steps towards eliminating new cases of HIV including being the first city in Australia to sign on as a Fast-Track City with a commitment to reach the Joint United Nations' targets on reducing HIV. Fast-Track Cities pledge to achieve the UNAIDS 90-90-90 HIV treatment targets by 2020 – which aim to ensure that 90 per cent of people who are HIV positive know their status and are on treatment, and that 90 per cent of people on treatment have an undetectable viral load.

"HIV testing and treatment have improved but the biggest barrier to reaching the 90-90-90 goal is the stigma and discrimination that is tied to the virus," says Brent Allen, Chief Executive Officer, Living Positive Victoria. "Australia is in a good position to achieve that goal and the Memorial is another way to educate the community and allow them to be part of the solution."

Started in 1983, the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial takes place every third Sunday in May and is led by a coalition of some 1,200 community organisations in 115 countries. The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, coordinated by the Global Network of People living with HIV (GNP+) is one of the world's oldest and largest grassroots mobilisation campaigns for HIV awareness in the world.

Founded in 1988, Living Positive Victoria Living Positive Victoria is a not for profit, community based organisation representing the wellbeing of all people living with HIV in Victoria. For more information visit livingpositivevictoria.org.au

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