

QuAC Position Paper:

World AIDS Day / AIDS Awareness Week

This paper outlines the Queensland AIDS Council's (QuAC) position in relation to annual World AIDS Day / AIDS Awareness Week (WAD/AAW). It provides some notes on the context for the events, and then describes QuAC's role and commitments in relation to WAD/AAW.

The paper was originally written in 1999 as part of a response to some strong criticisms about QuAC's reduced role in 1998 WAD/AAW. The paper was then updated in early 2002 following some disappointment expressed by QuAC Directors involved in coordinating the 2001 activities. The core issue of concern was the relatively modest level of (community awareness or fundraising) outcomes achieved through WAD/AAW despite the considerable amount of energy and resources dedicated to it each year.

Background

World AIDS Day / AIDS Awareness Week (WAD/AAW) was established by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to raise global awareness of HIV/AIDS. It provides an annual opportunity for groups and individuals around the world to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS issues. It is one of the few times of the year when Australian HIV/AIDS campaigns target the general community.

While WAD/AAW is, broadly, a popular initiative, some working in HIV/AIDS in Australia have raised a number of concerns, including:

- The annual theme (developed by WHO) has often not reflected the real nature of the Australian epidemic: no focus on gay, IDU, sex worker issues; frequently focussing on children, general community epidemic.
- Significant levels of resources of HIV/AIDS services are diverted away from the priorities of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy in order to conduct WAD/AAW.
- That so-called "AIDS-fatigue" means that many in the general community are tired of hearing about HIV/AIDS and the awareness goal may be no longer relevant. Similarly, the media and politicians are no-longer inclined to provide the level of support to WAD/AAW they were previously.
- Despite the intended general community focus, the reality of recent years appears to be "a preaching to the converted" - possibly having a negative impact on awareness and support.
- The focus has often been on creating fundraising/awareness *events* which do not raise significant funds and attract only those already associated with HIV/AIDS organisations.
- Although the Fourth National HIV/AIDS Strategy recognises the importance of all Australians being aware about HIV/AIDS, since the Second National HIV/AIDS Strategy which ceased in 1996, HIV/AIDS education in the general community has been the responsibility of mainstream health and welfare services.

Recent Experience

Since the mid 1990s it has become increasingly difficult to create a significant impact in Australia through WAD/AAW. In the early days of the AIDS response, considerable resources were dedicated to HIV/AIDS awareness. AIDS was constantly in the media, it was surrounded by controversy and it soon became the hottest issue of the day. Also, the Grim Reaper had insisted HIV/AIDS was a threat to literally everybody and individuals from all walks of life became passionate about it.

Unfortunately, the level of community interest in HIV/AIDS has changed dramatically and there is no longer so much attention and enthusiasm directed towards HIV/AIDS issues. Naturally, AIDS is no longer such a prominent issue in the community and for many it is an issue they have heard

more than enough about already. The changed nature of the epidemic and the relative success of new treatments have also changed the perceived importance of HIV. The media is no longer so interested in HIV/AIDS and very little of the work of AIDS organisations and or the issues they deal with gets mainstream media coverage. Clearly, some of the successes of WAD/AAW in previous years are no longer possible. Indeed some are no longer relevant.

QuAC's Role

Until 1998, all QuAC regions were authorised to dedicate a great deal of QuAC's resources to WAD/AAW activities. This level of resourcing achieved great success however it was at the cost of core support and education services for a long period. QuAC does not receive funding for general community education - including projects such as the annual AIDS Candlelight Vigil and World AIDS Day / AIDS Awareness Week. QuAC's core grant has the following goals:

- _ To reduce the annual number of new HIV infections in Queensland among gay and non gay-identified men who have sex with men;
- _ To strengthen the capacities of people living with HIV/AIDS to enhance their health and well-being;
- _ To reduce the impact of HIV infection on people living with HIV/AIDS and significant others in Queensland;
- _ To provide the administrative, infrastructure and management support required for achieving the above objectives.

Despite the absence of funding, QuAC accepts a role for ensuring the appropriate coordination of WAD/AAW activities in Queensland. This is based on:

- No other organisation in Queensland is specifically funded for this role;
- There are expectations among many of our members, volunteers and other stakeholders that we should take on this role;
- With no other resources targeting the general community, this is an annual opportunity to get the attention of the broader population;
- Strategies to advance our core priorities can be included in WAD/AAW activities;
- WAD/AAW provides opportunities to raise funds which go towards achieving our core priorities.

Since WAD/AAW is not a funded or core activity for QuAC, the amount of resources dedicated to its WAD/AAW role will be limited to:

- Liaising with Queensland Health and the AIDS Trust of Australia re print campaign resources and the National WAD project;
- Coordinating WAD/AAW Committees in Cairns, Townsville, Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and Gold Coast to oversee local activities;
- Contributing limited staff time as follows:
 - > Statewide Fundraising Coordinator to support Brisbane Committee, assist with Brisbane events management, coordinate print resource distribution, coordinate statewide publicity and promotion
 - > Production of statewide advertisements and a mail-out of a WAD/AAW newsletter
 - > Regional Coordinators/Team Leaders to establish and support local Committees and assist with local events management
 - > Educators to organise one gay community activity in each region
 - > Encouragement and support of our volunteers in contributing to WAD/AAW
 - > Production of Red Ribbons and related marketing materials

- > Supporting the efforts of other groups and individuals in their WAD/AAW activities.
- QuAC is committed to ensuring that WAD/AAW activities are coordinated in partnership with other relevant services and organisations. QuAC also expects that these other services and organisations will contribute to time and energy to WAD/AAW activities.
- WAD/AAW projects should focus on:
 - Distribution of posters and other resources
 - A key public activity (launch, forum, etc.) on World AIDS Day
 - The annual Candlelight Memorial (launching AAW or on World AIDS Day)
 - A key fundraising activity on during AAW
 - A key gay community event on WAD or during AAW
 - Distribution and sale of Red Ribbons on WAD and during AAW
 - Encouraging and supporting other services and media to join the awareness and fundraising efforts

Conclusion

WAD/AAW projects should recognise the repeated experience in recent years that events and similar activities require significant amount of energy and do not often deliver the fundraising and awareness outcomes expected. In planning activities, each project should be careful to consider the amount effort required in any initiative compared to the amount of fundraising and awareness outcomes that are likely to be achieved. Particular attention should be paid to the experience of previous WAD/AAW projects, and the general rule is to keep it simple.