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For immediate release

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Media Release

Funding Cut to Queensland's only LGBT Health Organisation

Our only LGBT health and wellbeing organisation, the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities ('Healthy Communities'), is to be defunded by Queensland Health it was announced today.

Healthy Communities held contracts with Queensland Health for HIV prevention work with gay men and alcohol, tobacco and other drugs work with the LGBT community.

Healthy Communities is a 28-year-old state-wide organisation, with offices in Cairns, Maroochydore and Brisbane and employees 35 full and part-time staff, 26 of whom will lose their jobs as a result.

Our HIV funding from Queensland Health allows us to deliver much needed HIV prevention services including; one-to-one support about HIV & safe sex, HIV prevention skills building workshops, condom & lube distribution, sexual health information line, printed resources on HIV prevention and sexual health for gay men and social marketing campaigns promoting safe sex.

Our contract with Queensland Health explicitly requires us to provide advocacy on LGBT health issues.

"We are shocked at the announcement made by Minister Springborg today. There has been no warning, discussion or negotiation with us about our current service agreements with Queensland Health, nor has there been any previous question about the quality or focus of our work" said Paul R Martin, Executive Director

"We understand that the Government is looking to find savings, and we are more than willing to work with them on that. But to cut the only HIV prevention service for gay men and the only LGBT health service is astonishing."

"Every other state and territory in Australia funds community based organisations to deliver gay men's HIV prevention services and LGBT health services. Many of these organisations deliver wider LGBT health programs in addition to HIV."

"There is clear evidence of health need, we are a well performing organisation and the only gay men's HIV prevention and LGBT health organisation in the state. Something else must be motivating this decision" said Mark Morein, President.

"As our main funding is from Queensland Health, the defunding of our current contracts with them calls into question our capacity to deliver services funded by the Queensland Department of Communities, the Federal Department of Health & Ageing and philanthropic trusts."

"We call on Campbell Newman and the LNP to continue funding the important work we do."

Background

Healthy Communities, originally the Queensland AIDS Council, has been funded by Queensland Governments, National-Liberal and Labour, since 1988 to deliver HIV prevention services for gay men, among other HIV and LGBT health programs. We are also funded by the federal Department of Health and Ageing, the Queensland Department of Communities and a number of philanthropic

groups. The organisation was established by the LGBT community in 1984 in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We are an incorporated association and Health Promotion Charity.

In 2003/04, Queensland Health changed the way it funded HIV services from grants to community organisations to a competitive tender process. The Queensland AIDS Council as we then were, won the tenders for HIV prevention work with gay men and HIV prevention work with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders, but lost the tender for HIV care & support services.

As we no longer provided those services traditionally delivered by an AIDS Council, we consulted our communities and decided to expand our remit to address a wider range of health and wellbeing issues affecting the LGBT community, in addition to HIV. This move was supported and even encouraged by Queensland Health. We subsequently changed our name to the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities ('Healthy Communities') reflecting this wider remit.

We currently hold a Service Agreement with Queensland Health for HIV prevention services for gay men, which was set for renegotiation in June 2014. The content of our funded work was agreed by Queensland Health at the beginning of the contract, a business plan is agreed annually and 6 monthly reports provided.

At no stage has Queensland Health questioned the focus or quality of our work.

Every state and territory government in Australia funds community based organisations to deliver HIV prevention work with gay men and other population groups. AIDS Councils in other states have also expanded their remit to cover Hepatitis or LGBT health, including NSW where ACON is now an LGBT health organisation.

How much does money does HIV prevention save?

For every \$1 spent on HIV prevention, \$13 is saved by the state health budget on the costs of supporting those with HIV. The average lifetime medication cost for a single person with HIV is at least \$450,000.

Why focus HIV prevention on gay men?

Gay and other men who have sex with men contribute around 65% of HIV notifications each year in Queensland, yet only make up around 5% of the population. Focusing prevention efforts on those populations most affected makes the most impact on reducing further infections and is the most economical.

Why are community based organisations best placed to deliver HIV prevention?

HIV has always affected those most marginalised in our community, especially gay men, sex workers and injecting drug users. Early in the response to HIV in Australia it was recognised that governments were not best placed to deliver HIV prevention to marginalised groups, so governments funded community based organisations to deliver peer education. This has been the corner-stone of Australia's success to HIV and is a model that has been taken up internationally, and promoted by the U.N. The partnership between affected communities, government, researchers the medical profession is at the core of our effective response.

Why is HIV prevention work more effective when delivered in the context of LGBT health?

The decisions we make about our sex lives are influenced not just by our level of knowledge and skills about sex, but by our general environment. Drugs & alcohol, mental health, relationship issues, stigma & discrimination (for example) all impact on the decisions we make and our ability to implement those decisions. By promoting the wider health of gay men, we make HIV prevention more successful. Just talking about the mechanics of sex on its own is not an effective response.