



mediarelease

Health group warns of AIDS epidemic in Aboriginal communities

The nation's peak Aboriginal group has warned of a looming HIV/AIDS epidemic in remote communities unless Canberra urgently and appropriately resources HIV/AIDS programs.

NACCHO Chairperson, Henry Councillor, said the action was necessary to prevent an epidemic of the disease like that which has occurred in some Indigenous Canadian communities.

"Canada's response to HIV/AIDS has failed, both financially and culturally, and has caused a dramatic rise in the transmission of the disease," Mr Councillor said on the eve of World AIDS Day.

"While Indigenous people in Canada make up only 4% of the population, they account for 22% of reported HIV infections and that's a frightening statistic.

"We must ensure that a comprehensive, Aboriginal-led approach to HIV/AIDS is implemented — with enhanced primary health care, health promotion, treatment and support — to prevent such a dramatic rise in transmission, here in Australia."

Mr Councillor said the theme of World AIDS Day — *Let's Talk About It* — was relevant to many Aboriginal people who often had difficulty discussing HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

"This is not a 'gay' or a 'white' disease, as some people think — it's a virus that can affect anybody! This is one of the messages that our HIV/AIDS programs need to convey!"

Mr Councillor called for an urgent meeting with the Health and Ageing Minister to discuss the appropriate sponsoring of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS programs.

1 December, 2006 — World AIDS Day

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