

ACON  
REGIONAL AND RURAL  
ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010



BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S  
HEALTH & WELLBEING



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# DEAR FRIEND,

**There is a great need for health services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities and people living with HIV/AIDS in regional and rural New South Wales.**

**Access to health programs in these areas, particularly HIV/AIDS and sexual health services, can be complicated by concerns about confidentiality, homophobia and related discrimination. In addition, restricted access to supportive social networks may also impact on a person's capacity to acknowledge and address their broader health needs.**

Mobility and travel have been identified as significant issues in the progression of health conditions in many parts of the world.

ACON works with communities in regional and rural New South Wales to ensure that:

- there is good and timely access to health services;
- there are community development programs in place; and
- appropriate health promotion efforts are maintained for our communities.

In 2005 ACON undertook a review of its regional and rural program with the aim of improving service delivery.

Underpinning this review was the opportunity for service providers, ACON service users and ACON's communities to contribute to and participate in the review process.

The review identified a number of strategies to be used by ACON to address its responsibilities as a state wide non-government organisation promoting the health and wellbeing of a diverse gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community and leading agency in HIV/AIDS policy development and program delivery.

ACON recognises that while the majority of HIV cases are concentrated in South Eastern and Central Sydney, GLBT communities in regional and rural areas have particular needs in relation to HIV. GLBT communities also have other health and well being needs, such as drug and alcohol service provision, mental health care, and care for ageing populations.

Over the next three years ACON will continue to build and refine its efforts to service communities in regional and rural New South Wales. It will also introduce a number of new programs.

**Adrian Lovney**  
ACON President

# WELCOME TO ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## **Our Mission**

**ACON is a community-based non-government organisation promoting the health and wellbeing of a diverse gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community, and a leading agency in HIV/AIDS policy development and program delivery.**

ACON, formerly known as the AIDS Council of NSW, was established in 1985 as a major part of the community-based response to the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Since then ACON has grown to become the leading health and welfare organisation for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) communities in NSW.

ACON's programs span HIV prevention, care and support, sexual health, mental health, drug and alcohol use, housing assistance, and a range of health promotion programs such as encouraging cancer screening.

These programs are predominantly provided for members of our GLBT communities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people who use and inject illicit drugs, sex workers and all people living with HIV/AIDS. ACON also provides programs and services to people who associate with, but do not necessarily identify, as part of our communities.

ACON is a state-wide service with offices in Sydney, Illawarra, Northern Rivers, the Hunter and the Mid North Coast and an extensive range of outreach services. ACON is also home to Community Support Network (CSN), the Positive Living Centre (PLC), the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project (AVP) and the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP).

ACON recognises that there is very real and significant need for health services for GLBT communities and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in regional and rural NSW. In response to this, ACON works with our communities to put in place programs and services that protect and advance the health and wellbeing of GLBT people and PLWHA in these areas.

Research demonstrates that many gay men from regional centres travel to Sydney and often seek out casual sexual partners while visiting. Therefore relevant and culturally appropriate interventions for regionally-based gay men are important to increase their health literacy about risk taking in their own area and while travelling.

Locally relevant and accessible services, which respond to the needs of regional communities, are required.

ACON recognises that it cannot be responsible for the delivery of all services to these communities across NSW and needs to work in partnership with area health services, other government departments and community groups.

It remains important that all service providers continue to recognise their role in providing an appropriate mix of clinical services and health promotion programs to priority population groups across NSW, including GLBT communities and PLWHA.

# REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

There are different challenges facing HIV health promotion programs in working with gay men in suburban, regional and rural areas. Overall these may have limited or non-existent gay community infrastructure, which reduces opportunities for site-based health promotion. There may also be differences in the nature of gay community attachment in suburban, regional and rural areas. Concern about homophobia, or a desire for privacy and anonymity, may reduce participation in community organisations and access to health services among this population of gay men. The smaller numbers of gay identified men may make community building more difficult due to lack of critical mass.

*NSW HIV/AIDS Strategy Environmental Scan 2006 – 2009*

Data from the National Centre in HIV Social Research on the behaviours of rural men who access Sydney gay community venues and events show that homosexually active men in rural areas tend to be less likely to identify as gay (92 per cent of gay men in Sydney and 89 per cent of gay men in rural areas), and less likely to have been tested for HIV (91 per cent vs 88 per cent), though just as likely to be HIV positive (Prestage, unpublished data). There is little difference between city men and rural men with regard to the likelihood of engaging in unprotected anal intercourse with either a casual or regular partner. Behavioural data indicate that non-gay identified men who have sex with men are less likely to practice anal intercourse and, in particular, are less likely to practice receptive anal intercourse.

*NSW HIV/AIDS Strategy Environmental Scan 2006 – 2009*

During ACON's 2005 review of rural and regional services, community members and service providers identified a range of issues where they thought ACON could continue to assist. While these varied to some extent from area to area, there was a degree of commonality among the issues identified. These key issues included:

- advocacy;
- addressing homophobia;
- providing support to same sex attracted young people;
- supporting isolated people with HIV/AIDS;
- fostering and supporting GLBT community groups;
- counselling;
- ageing among gay and lesbian community members;
- safe sex education; and
- addressing mental health and drug and alcohol issues.

The above list provides a general indication of the interests and issues that service providers and community believed ACON could make a contribution to addressing in regional and rural NSW. This list does not provide specific and concrete actions. However it does provide some indication of the issues that have saliency in regional and rural areas.

Key actions for improving service delivery to GLBT communities in regional and rural NSW sit under the following broad areas for action:

1. HIV/AIDS and STI prevention and education
2. HIV/AIDS care and support
3. GLBT community health
4. Minimising drug and alcohol harm
5. Expanding our service reach
6. Evaluation

These actions will all contribute to the seven strategic goals for ACON, as established in the ACON Strategic Plan 2006 – 2009:

1. Reduce rates of HIV and sexually transmissible infections among gay men and other men who have sex with men.
2. Promote the health and wellbeing of people living with HIV/AIDS.
3. Minimise the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use in the GLBT community and amongst people with HIV/AIDS.
4. Promote the mental health of the GLBT community and people living with HIV/AIDS.
5. Generally promote the health and wellbeing of the GLBT community and people living with HIV/AIDS.
6. Provide leadership on HIV/AIDS and GLBT health issues in NSW.
7. Develop the capacity of the organisation to deliver excellent programs and services.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL SERVICES – AN OVERVIEW

**ACON delivers a range of programs in areas outside of inner-city Sydney where there is an established or emerging GLBT community which has identified a need for such services or where there are significant populations of people living with HIV/AIDS.**

Historically, programs and services delivered to communities in Western Sydney sat within the Regional Service structure and these were coordinated by a Western Sydney branch. This activity is now managed out of the ACON head office in Commonwealth St, through an outreach model of service delivery.

It should be noted that this plan does not address issues relating to Western Sydney. It specifically addresses ACON service provision to communities residing outside of greater Sydney.

In addition to ACON's Sydney head office, there are three regional branches – Illawarra, Northern Rivers and Hunter/Mid North Coast (incorporating the Mid North Coast (MNC) Outreach Project based in Port Macquarie).

#### **The Hunter/Mid North Coast (MNC) Branch**

The Hunter office is located in Newcastle. The manager of the Hunter/MNC branch is also responsible for the management of the Mid North Coast Outreach Project based in Port Macquarie, which services the area from Forster Tuncurry through to north of Coffs Harbour. This branch delivers a range of programs including education and community development, care and support projects, counselling, HIV health promotion and positive living project, lesbian health promotion, GLBT youth projects, a sex worker outreach project, a needle and syringe program as well as Central Coast and Mid-North Coast outreach.

#### **The Northern Rivers Branch**

The Northern Rivers branch is located in Lismore. The Northern Rivers Branch delivers a range of programs including education and community development, a care and support program, HIV health maintenance, lesbian health promotion and counselling, needle and syringe program, and the Tweed Valley and Grafton Outreach Project.

#### **The Illawarra Branch**

The Illawarra branch is located in Wollongong. The Illawarra branch provides a range of programs including education and community development, HIV health promotion, lesbian health promotion, a Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre, Youth Project and needle and syringe program.

# ACON'S KEY PARTNERS IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Good partnerships are essential to the programs and services that are run by ACON in regional and rural NSW.

ACON works in partnership with a range of organisations and community members to create and improve on service delivery in regional and rural NSW.

ACON actively fosters these partnerships to ensure that work is carried out in a collaborative, effective and cost efficient manner and that the quality of service delivery is maximised for our constituent communities.

To ensure good partnerships are established, ACON consults widely in program and service design, delivery and evaluation. Key partners working with ACON on the delivery of regional and rural services and programs include:

- **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Groups:** ACON recognises that our work with GLBT community groups, such as Hume Phoenix Inc. is essential to extending the reach of our programs and services across NSW.
- **Mainstream community groups** and organisations, such as Family Planning NSW, NSW Cancer Council, etc.
- **NSW Area Health Services:** Area Health Services work with ACON to provide health promotion programs, needle and syringe services and other harm reduction initiatives and clinical services. Areas are responsible for ensuring that local services implement state policies in a way that is consistent with and appropriate to the needs of the local population.

- **The NSW Department of Health and other NSW Government agencies.** Under the terms of the Public Health Outcomes Funding Agreement, state governments and state health departments have core leadership responsibility with regard to HIV/AIDS and STI policy, funding and program development. Other NSW departments such as the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Housing and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care also share responsibility for contributing to HIV/AIDS and STI related outcomes.
- **Local Government:** Local Government has a unique contribution to make to the creation and maintenance of physical environments and planning infrastructures that improve the health of local populations. Local government is responsible for key public health activities, including the processing of development applications relating to the sex industry and for the regulation of sex on premises venues. It is also responsible for maintaining some sites that are used as beats, such as parks and public toilets.
- **Aboriginal Sexual Health Workers** who are based in Area Health Services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.

## Beats Project with Newcastle City Council

As part of the implementation of ACON Hunter's and the Hunter New England Area Health Service Population Health's sexual health testing campaign - *Relieve Yourself* - it was planned to implement the poster campaign in a number of beats around Newcastle. The opportunity during the campaign to negotiate this with Newcastle City Council (NCC), that manages a number of the sites where beat activity occurs, didn't readily arise.

Early in 2006 the local press ran an article about a council park under the heading "A new gay sex haunt". As a result, ACON was able to initiate a series of meetings with relevant council staff about ways we could work together to achieve positive outcomes around shared space, health and safety issues at beats. These discussions culminated in a meeting between a group of local councillors (including the Lord Mayor), relevant council management, police representatives and ACON.

This meeting agreed on three key actions including:

- ACON would pilot a workshop with council staff who work in the vicinity of beats (mostly Parks & Gardens staff) around shared space, health and safety issues.
- Council would support the placement of appropriate sexual health promotion posters in the public toilets at selected beats across Newcastle.
- ACON would use its community contacts to pilot a project that involves "beat nannies" – regular beat users who understand a local beat and its particular culture and clientele – to promote the desired shared space, health and safety outcomes.

The partnerships continue to implement each stage of these three actions.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## **KEY ACTION AREA 1 HIV/AIDS AND STI PREVENTION AND EDUCATION**

ACON undertakes extensive health promotion programs with priority population groups, in particular gay men and other homosexually active men.

As stated in the NSW HIV/AIDS Strategy Environmental Scan 2006 – 2009, “within suburban, regional and rural areas, gay men and other homosexually active men are the population at highest risk of HIV infection. In 2004, 18 per cent of HIV notifications were attributed to male-to-male sexual activity among residents of suburban, regional or rural NSW. This includes both gay-identified and non-gay identified men”.

The aim of these efforts is to provide ACON communities with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to prevent the transmission of HIV, blood borne viruses, STIs, as well as to recognise the symptoms of STIs, to seek regular testing for HIV and STIs, and to seek treatment for HIV and STIs.

ACON runs a range of health promotion activities including social marketing campaigns, peer education workshops, community development activities, service provider training and advocacy.

A reduction in rates of HIV infection in NSW after two years of increasing HIV notifications points to the positive contribution that ACON's recent initiatives have made in raising awareness of the increase and in promoting condom use and STI testing in at risk populations.

ACON acknowledges that due to a variety of socio-demographic factors it has been and remains challenging to ensure that all its education and other health promotion activities are relevant to all ACON's communities.

Obviously a large proportion of ACON's HIV prevention activities need to be focused on the group most at risk, inner-city gay men. However, as a state-wide service, this cannot be an exclusive focus. In order to address some of these issues, regional and rural communities will be consulted, as much as is practicable, in the development of prevention education materials to ensure a level of geographic applicability for relevant issues.

## Relieve Yourself – Sexual Health Testing Campaign

An effective partnership between ACON Hunter/MNC and Hunter New England Population Health saw a locally developed social marketing campaign run in the Hunter in 2005. This campaign urged regional gay and other men who have sex with men to look after their sexual health. The creative material used a smiling (and greatly relieved) local model, standing on a Newcastle beach (with the easily recognisable Nobby's Head lighthouse in the background) to demonstrate how much satisfaction men can get by engaging in regular sexual health check-ups.

As well as being promoted in a gay pub, sex on premises venue and adult bookshops the campaign appeared locally in the classified sections of the Newcastle Herald and The Post newspapers for a couple of months. The biggest mainstream coup was the large campaign advertisements on the outside of ten local buses driven around Newcastle for a month.

The appeal of this cheeky campaign was its local context and getting the balance just right so that it was 'sexy' enough to grab gay men's attention but 'mainstream' enough to be displayed in shared homosexual/heterosexual spaces. These shared spaces are where regional gay men live out their every day and sexual lives.

This project demonstrated the value of working in partnership, and illustrated how the complementary approaches of Area Health Services and ACON can work to the benefit of GLBT communities in rural and regional NSW.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## KEY ACTION AREA 1 (cont.) HIV/AIDS AND STI PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

### Key future actions:

- 1.1 ACON will modify at least one annual HIV/AIDS prevention campaign to reflect regional/rural cultural factors.
- 1.2 ACON will facilitate at least one annual campaign launch in a rural area (Greater Southern or Greater Western Area Health Services) where a significant gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender community exists (eg Albury, Orange, Wagga Wagga, etc).  
This launch is to occur in partnership with relevant service providers and community groups.
- 1.3 ACON will explore the promotion of an HIV/AIDS prevention campaign utilising mainstream media in rural NSW, as occurred with the Hunter/ MNC Branch and HNEAHS '*Relieve Yourself*' campaign.
- 1.4 ACON will review current strategies to promote and distribute ACON resources in areas not currently covered by an ACON branch and establish appropriate distribution mechanisms for future campaigns.
- 1.5 ACON will work to further build relationships with local sexual health services and promote the role of these services for our communities.

1.6 ACON will endeavour to ensure that our work with specific population groups of gay men such as young gay men, older gay men and Aboriginal gay men includes a strong focus on HIV prevention and sexual health issues and that the content of this health education is consistent across the state.

1.7 ACON will explore models for the delivery of peer education workshops and forums across key areas in rural and regional NSW.

### Syphilis in the Illawarra Campaign

In early 2007 there was a significant increase in notifications of new syphilis cases in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven compared to 2005 and 2006. Most of these new cases were gay men or men who have sex with men.

In response to this immediate issue of new infections, ACON developed a specific, Department of Health approved poster campaign to raise awareness concerning the current outbreak of syphilis infections in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

The target audience for the campaign was sexually active men who have sex with men in the Illawarra and the aim was to reduce the incidence of syphilis by:

- increasing awareness of the prevalence of syphilis amongst the target population;
- encouraging testing; and
- providing referral pathways for further STI information, testing and clinic locations.

The imagery for the campaign was drawn from two recent and well received campaigns: *Right Here Right Now* and *Whytest*. This approach was chosen to ensure that the target audience recognises that the campaign is aimed at them and that they understand the immediacy of the message.

The campaign was widely distributed through GP's, medical centres, local health and sexual health services along with gay venues in the Illawarra.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## **KEY ACTION AREA 2** **HIV/AIDS CARE AND SUPPORT**

ACON provides information, education, care and support services to people living with HIV/AIDS and other members of ACON's communities at risk of HIV and other blood borne viruses or STI transmission across NSW.

A major focus of this work is ensuring that individuals have the information, skills and support to make informed life and health choices. ACON's work in this area seeks to ensure that services are appropriate, accessible, client-focussed, integrated and responsive to changing needs.

ACON also provides information on HIV health maintenance, treatments and side effects management, and assists people to work through their personal treatment decisions.

## Shared Care Coordination Project

In the Hunter there are a variety of specific HIV service providers supporting people living with HIV/AIDS (ACON, Karumah PLC, HNEAHS Immunology and Infectious Diseases Unit and Newcastle Sexual Health) as well as numerous other mainstream services which work with PLWHA on an 'as needed' basis.

Since July 2005 the four specific HIV service agencies have been operating initially as the working group to develop the framework and protocols for the Shared Care Coordination Project and subsequently as the Coordination Group to improve cross agency service delivery for Hunter PLWHA.

As a result of this partnership there is now a structured agreement with all facets operating in a smooth and collaborative way. This has resulted in:

- regular shared care coordination meetings between relevant service providers;
- common core cross agency intake and assessment protocols for any new client no matter with which agency that client first connects;
- appropriate cross agency referral systems;
- a case manager (from the most appropriate agency) allocated to each shared care client;
- increased access to relevant services through case conferencing;
- increased opportunity for active involvement of clients in their shared care coordination; and
- a reduction in dependency producing over-servicing.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## **KEY ACTION AREA 2 (cont.) HIV/AIDS CARE AND SUPPORT**

### Key future actions:

- 2.1 ACON will promote the availability of existing ACON HIV/AIDS state wide services (e.g. 1800 numbers, websites), via the HARP Managers network with particular reference to Greater Southern and Greater Western Area Health Services.
- 2.2 ACON will explore the feasibility of providing HIV/AIDS support in partnership with sexual health services and other service providers, in Greater Southern and Greater Western Area Health Services.
- 2.3 ACON will assess and, if necessary, work with Area Health Services to provide service provider training in regional and rural areas regarding HIV/AIDS care and educational requirements, with particular reference to Greater Southern and Greater Western Area Health Services. This activity should also include the needs of local GLBT groups in these areas.
- 2.4 ACON will work with the Divisions of General Practice to improve services for people living with HIV/AIDS outside of high HIV case load practices.

- 2.5 ACON will conduct campaigns to increase the visibility of a diverse range of people living with HIV/AIDS and promote programs to relieve social isolation.
- 2.6 ACON will provide specific and culturally appropriate programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV/AIDS.
- 2.7 ACON will develop a comprehensive website covering a broad range of issues impacting on the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS.

### HIV Specialist Clinics – A Partnership Approach on the Mid-North Coast

Rural service provision for People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) provides many challenges for service providers.

Often PLWHA have relocated from a city area where there are many services which can be easily accessed. In regional areas, similar services often need to be delivered in partnership with Area Health Services and other support services that exist in those communities.

The ACON Mid North Coast Outreach Service covers an area of around 22,000 sq km and employs two fulltime outreach workers. An Education and Community Development Officer and a Care and Support Worker/ Aboriginal Community Development Officer provide services for PLWHA, the Aboriginal communities and GLBT communities.

ACON staff work very closely with local Area Health Services, other government departments and other NGOs.

Often distance and isolation are major issues for clients living in rural areas so accessing services may often be difficult to coordinate when travelling into the townships to use these services. This is where working in partnership with other services can benefit the client and also provide a more holistic approach.

An example of a successful model is the range of HIV specialist clinics that are conducted monthly by the local Area Health Service on the Mid North Coast. Once a month, a visiting HIV specialist travels to the region to provide clinical services for PLWHA. The clinic days are set up in a way that provides a one-stop-shop type service for the client when attending the HIV clinic. ACON staff are placed within the clinic as well as a comprehensive team of other specialist staff from the Area Health Service. A case management framework is used to bring services together to provide the maximum outcome for the client.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## **KEY ACTION AREA 3 GLBT COMMUNITY HEALTH**

People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender are frequently hidden within the broader community. Those aspects of their identity which relate to being GLBT may not be of major significance in relation to other family, work-related, social or political roles that are played out everyday. Nevertheless there is now a significant body of anecdotal evidence that GLBT people experience considerable marginalisation and stigmatisation as a result of their identity and that this has a negative impact on their health and health care.



ACON recognises the wide variety of health and wellbeing needs of GLBT communities.

ACON acknowledges that there are key social factors or determinants that can impact on an individual, a community or a broader population group's health and wellbeing. While this is largely recognised in relation to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender and geography, it is increasingly recognised that programs need to be put in place to address the social determinants of health in relation to sexual orientation.

ACON, in partnership with other agencies, has undertaken education and client care programs on broader health issues for its communities, including drug and alcohol and anti-violence programs.

ACON is committed to putting in place programs and services that protect and build the health of GLBT communities and will continue to address priority health issues.

## End Violence to Sex Workers Day 2005

Sex workers are a marginalized and stigmatized group of women, men, youth and transgender people. Violence committed against this group is a human rights issue.

In the period March 2004 to July 2005, 76 incidents of violence upon sex workers were reported to SWOP Hunter branch. Only eight of these occasions of assault had been notified to local police.

ACON Hunter conducted *The Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers* campaign on 17 December 2005 and 2006. This campaign involved sex workers, local health services, businesses and police promoting anti-violence messages in the form of badges and posters to engage a community response to reduce the violence.

In addition, a forum was held that included representation from sex industry workers, ACON clients, other related service organisations, and local community members.

The project was effective in initiating broad discussion on this issue by a wider audience and encouraged the investigation of alternative methods to current work practice. Responses from the other service providers and police revealed that the forum provided an opportunity to work with sex industry professionals and learn first hand about the issues.

A reduced number of assaults in 2006 (compared to 2004 and 2005) subsequently occurred. Two reports of assault were made to SWOP in January 2006, compared to 12 in the previous year.

An increase in support and referrals also took place in the months following the project.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## KEY ACTION AREA 3 (cont.) GLBT COMMUNITY HEALTH

### Key future actions:

- 3.1** ACON will undertake a community needs assessment in Greater Southern and Greater Western Area Health Services to:
- (a) Assess current levels of awareness of ACON's broadened health agenda; and
  - (b) establish health needs, within ACON's current sphere of service and program provision, of community members in these areas. ACON will work to establish a partnership between ACON and relevant Area Health Services to undertake this activity. The results of the needs assessment will determine the GLBT community health agenda in these areas.
- 3.2** ACON will explore options for establishing stronger partnerships with local GLBT community groups in regional and rural areas to increase the reach and impact of services and programs. Models such as the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities' (QAHC) newsletter support program will be explored, along with other community support models.

- 3.3 ACON will promote the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statewide project across regional and rural NSW through a range of activities informed by a statewide strategic framework for our Aboriginal health work.
- 3.4 ACON, in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Area Health Services, the Aboriginal Sexual Health Workers Network and other stakeholders, will identify future opportunities for partnership work in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across regional and rural NSW.
- 3.5 ACON, in consultation with the NSW Health Department and Area Health Services, will investigate ways to improve GLBT access to mental health and drug and alcohol services.
- 3.6 The Sex Workers Outreach Project will work with Area Health Services to improve service delivery to sex workers in regional and rural NSW and to strengthen partnerships with sexual health services.

### The Lismore Safe Place Project

A recent survey undertaken by ACON Northern Rivers found that 53% of the gay and lesbian community had experienced homophobic related harassment and/or violence.

In response to this, ACON Northern Rivers worked in partnership with a local steering committee to target gay and lesbian friendly businesses in the local area to sign up for the *Safe Place Project*.

The project has identified businesses in Lismore who will provide a 'safe place' for gay or lesbian people experiencing homophobic violence or harassment.

Originating in Sydney in 1991, *Safe Place* is a community program promoting street safety for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community members.

Participating businesses have a *Safe Place* pink triangle put on their door or window to identify them as a safe haven for people who feel that their safety is threatened.

The *Safe Place* Project was launched in Lismore in September 2006, with over 60 businesses and organisations participating. The project, funded by the Lismore Workers Club and Goonellabah Workers Sports Club, via the Community Development and Support Expenditure Scheme, has the support of the local police, Lismore Unlimited Opportunities, Lismore City Council and many community groups and other businesses.

The *Safe Place* Project is an initiative of the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## KEY ACTION AREA 3 (cont.) GLBT COMMUNITY HEALTH

3.7 ACON will participate in the Rural Mental Health Network created by the NSW Farmers Association to ensure that the mental health needs of GLBT farmers are considered.

3.8 ACON will seek funding to develop a regional and rural mental health program that includes three primary components:

- a social marketing campaign;
- increased access to support services through web and phone based counselling; and
- a research partnership with the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health.

3.9 ACON will continue to promote support groups and social environments to assist people who are coming out, especially those who are young or ageing. These activities will be sex positive and empowering.

3.10 ACON will improve and expand our programs for young gay men, young lesbians and other same sex attracted young people as part of a coordinated statewide effort to expand our activities for this group. These programs should be based on a common set of principles that centralise the participation, decision-making and leadership of young people and value this position as a key outcome of our work with young people.

**3.11** ACON will develop and implement a statewide strategy for all of ACON's work with Aboriginal communities including our client services and health promotion work.

**3.12** ACON will develop and implement a comprehensive statewide Lesbian Health Strategy with participation in the development process by our Lesbian Health Project Officers across NSW, and consultation with lesbians in several areas outside of Sydney.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## KEY ACTION AREA 4 MINIMISING DRUG AND ALCOHOL HARM

ACON has a long history of working to reduce the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use.

Work in this field began in the late 1980s with a focus on preventing the transmission of HIV through injecting drug use and discussions of the possible impact of alcohol and drug use on sexual behaviour.

Since that time, ACON has further developed our services to include health promotion programs and education campaigns, fixed site needle and syringe programs (NSP), outreach NSP and community education and support at dance parties as well as providing limited counselling and referrals to drug and alcohol services.

ACON's work is developed with the understanding that:

- drug use occurs widely in GLBT communities;
- evidence and experience suggests drug use impacts on the health of our communities in multiple and significant ways that are culturally specific; and
- ACON is uniquely positioned to respond to the challenges associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs in our communities in ways that are culturally appropriate and will improve health and wellbeing.

At present ACON is the only NSW agency leading a response to managing drug and alcohol use in the GLBT community, despite the overwhelming evidence of need.

ACON recognises that the use of alcohol and other drugs has and remains a key issue for the GLBT community.

Research shows that gay men and lesbians use more drugs in higher quantities and frequencies than the heterosexual community. There are varying reasons as to why this is the case. Historically the GLBT community has met within bars and clubs which can be conducive to the use of alcohol and illicit drugs. In addition, these substances may play a pivotal role in self and community management of discrimination and oppression.

ACON recognises that many GLBT people who use drugs view such use as non-problematic. However, ACON also recognises that not all alcohol and other drug use is non-problematic and that harm does exist.

Over time, ACON has produced education campaigns to reduce the harms associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs, has developed partnerships with external services, undertaken research and has lobbied for quality services for the GLBT community.

ACON has also historically been a provider of needle and syringe programs (NSPs) to the GLBT community from its offices statewide and on an outreach basis at large dance parties.

While ACON has a strong track record in the area of alcohol and other drugs work, in more recent times it has been recognised by ACON's constituents that a more focused, coordinated and holistic response is required.

### Key future actions:

- 4.1 ACON will develop funding submissions to ensure that timely localised programs and services can be put in place to respond to trends in GLBT community drug and alcohol issues in rural and regional areas.
- 4.2 ACON will coordinate community forums across NSW to explore the relationship between drug use and sexual risk behaviour in GLBT communities.
- 4.3 ACON will develop a state wide GLBT education campaign that focuses on drug use and sexual risk.
- 4.4 ACON will advocate for having GLBT demographic questions included in data collection tools that examine drug and alcohol use in rural and regional areas.
- 4.5 ACON will, with rural and regional populations, explore the barriers regarding access to clean injecting equipment for GLBT people who inject drugs.
- 4.6 ACON will explore opportunities to run family and carer drug and alcohol support programs in rural and regional areas for GLBT communities, in partnership with relevant local agencies.
- 4.7 ACON will explore the establishment of partnerships with drug and alcohol services in rural and regional NSW. This will assist us to build our capacity to provide drug and alcohol support to GLBT communities as well as increase the sensitivity of partners in providing services to GLBT communities.
- 4.8 ACON will continue to train volunteers to assist in delivering drug and alcohol programs in regional and rural areas, such as ACON Rovers at the Tropical Fruits dance party.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## KEY ACTION AREA 5 EXPANDING OUR SERVICE REACH

Local GLBT community groups are active in regional and rural areas in NSW. The primary focus of these groups is to organise regular social events for the local community. The level of activity varies from community to community.

Where there are ACON branches, ACON staff work with the local gay and lesbian community groups. ACON recognises that community development is a valuable strategy to build healthy and resilient gay and lesbian communities. ACON also recognises that social isolation and marginalisation is an important influence on health.

In areas where there are currently no ACON offices, the Area Health Service sexual health and HIV/AIDS professionals play an important role in supporting the functioning of local gay and lesbian groups. The level of support varies from area to area and depends on the capacity of the local Area Health Service and needs of the community.

In areas where there is no ACON office there has been an increasing recognition by ACON of the need to provide support to other gay and lesbian groups. These groups have also indicated that they are willing to support ACON and its work.

ACON recognises the importance of addressing its responsibilities as a state-wide service provider and will explore options for working with Area Health Services and community groups in regional and rural areas to expand the reach of its activities.

ACON has a commitment to addressing issues of equity and access for the communities it serves.

In developing programs to expand its reach to areas not currently covered by a Branch office, a range of factors will be considered including the:

- current funding environment;
- identified need (HIV and STI epidemiology);
- role of Area Health Services; and
- expectations from service providers and the community.

ACON cannot assume responsibility for addressing all gaps in service delivery to communities not currently covered by an ACON branch. In some cases these gaps need to be addressed by the local Area Health Service or other organisations.

#### Key future actions:

**5.1** ACON will explore ways to deliver services in areas not currently covered by an ACON office or outreach project. This will focus on local partnership building, the brokerage of services, potential community development models, potential outreach models and management and service structures that continue to support statewide service delivery.

**5.2** ACON will develop an outreach model to facilitate service provision to rural and regional areas where ACON does not have a branch. This will include:

- identification of local need – in partnership with local services and communities;
- initiatives to be implemented by ACON in the local area;
- processes to enhance access to ACON services or programs;
- costing and funding;
- support required from the Area Health Service, sexual health service and GLBT community;

- schedule of visits by ACON; and
- review and evaluation strategies.

**5.3** ACON will develop, implement and evaluate communication strategies to promote its regional and rural service provision in NSW, including the use of mainstream media, websites and community groups.

**5.4** ACON will develop, implement and evaluate proactive communication strategies with local regional media that promote GLBT human interest stories.

**5.5** ACON will review the profile and accessibility of its regional services on the organisation's website.

**5.6** ACON will review each ACON branch's newsletters and make recommendations for improving these local communication tools, including the need for certain sections to be streamlined so information can be standardised across NSW.

**5.7** ACON branches and outreach projects will consider local transport issues in project planning processes to improve access to services and programs.

**5.8** ACON will investigate the possibility of a reciprocal staff secondment program between ACON and Area Health Services to increase service provision to geographic areas not currently serviced by an ACON branch.

**5.9** ACON will develop a Regional and Rural Information Technology Strategy to improve utilisation of IT systems and processes including IT support.

**5.10** ACON will continue to improve our networking with existing groups and services including Area Health Services, Aboriginal communities and organisations and local GLBT community groups.

# ACON'S REGIONAL AND RURAL ACTION PLAN 2007 - 2010

## **KEY ACTION AREA 6 EVALUATING REGIONAL AND RURAL SERVICES**

To maximise efficiency and to ensure the effectiveness and continuing relevance of its programs and services, ACON will evaluate its activities.

ACON recognises that monitoring and evaluation are required to determine progress toward identified targets and objectives, and to account to government and stakeholders on the effectiveness and efficiency of our programs in achieving outcomes and administering funding.

### Key future actions:

- 6.1 ACON will continue to collect information regarding evidence of client satisfaction, demographics, program appropriateness, program and service reach, settings, quality of information, relevance of information, and partner capacity. This will be done through a variety of mechanisms including surveys, phone interviews, and stakeholder feedback.
- 6.2 ACON will analyse information in relation to better understanding key issues and message acceptability of campaign/resource materials in rural and regional communities.
- 6.3 ACON will continue to analyse qualitative and quantitative data looking at quality of life, client satisfaction, changes in knowledge, attitude and behavioural intentions in rural and regional areas.

- 6.4** ACON will improve the evaluation of programs and services in regional and rural NSW to ensure that programs and services are meeting the minimum performance criteria established for each program and service.
- 6.5** ACON will streamline tools that are used to measure community needs and the capacity to meet these needs so a consistent understanding is achieved across regional and rural areas.

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