

Casey Conway heads groundbreaking new campaign tackling rising STI rates across the Northern Territory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

30 NOVEMBER 2016 — Leading Aboriginal model and youth and family practitioner Casey Conway is the star of a new campaign from the Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council (NTAHC) and the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) to encourage increased sexual health testing in the NT.

The campaign is a response to rising rates of HIV and other STIs in the Northern Territory, leading to the territory having the highest STI rates in the country. A syphilis outbreak in the Top End has seen over 300 cases in the Northern Territory alone.

“An increase in HIV infections and the high rates of STIs demonstrate a serious issue about equal access to health and education in the Northern Territory,” said NTAHC Executive Director Kim Gates.

“Aboriginal people, particularly those living in remote and very remote communities, often have little or no understanding of the importance of maintaining their sexual health. Health clinics are under-resourced and over-burdened by conflicting and competing health needs, which often results in sexual health taking a back seat.”

“The school health curriculum does not include education around STIs and blood-borne viruses and the only reference to using condoms is to prevent pregnancy.”

Adapted from VAC’s award-winning ‘Drama Downunder’ campaign, the new campaign aims to remove the stigma from sexual health by taking a light-hearted approach to testing. Casey Conway, an openly gay man and former rugby league player, appears in his underwear along with the message: “Wet or dry—any season, sexy health is deadly! Get tested, get treated no drama!”

“We have to do something about STIs in the Northern Territory, and among Aboriginal people in particular,” said Conway.

“I really hope the campaign will get people testing every three-to-six months—once in the wet and once in the dry. As the campaign says, get tested, get treated, no drama.”

In 2015 VAC developed a ‘Seasons’ version of their long-running campaign, which encouraged people to use the changing seasons as a prompt to get a sexual health check. Posters and advertisements featuring summer, autumn, winter and spring encourage testing four times a year.

VAC CEO Simon Ruth recalled an early conversation he had with NTAHC Executive Director Kim Gates about working together on a campaign.

“When I first talked to NTAHC about bringing our seasonal testing campaign to the Northern Territory, Kim reminded me they don’t have four seasons up north—it’s just wet and dry,” Ruth said.

“There’s a good lesson here in the ways health promotion campaigns developed by the large HIV organisations down south don’t always take into account the specific needs of communities in the Top End. It’s been great to work with NTAHC to adapt a successful campaign like the Drama Downunder for a new audience.”

ENDS

Confidential testing and treatment is available from Clinic 34, your GP, your Aboriginal Medical Service or community health clinic.

For more information on the Drama Downunder campaign, visit: <http://www.thedramadownunder.info/>

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