

Gay, bi and queer men's stories of meth use encourage healthy conversations in new VAC resource

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

23 FEBRUARY 2017 — The Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) has launched 'Be-Longing for It', an online resource to encourage gay, bisexual and queer men to have conversations about taking care of themselves and each other when it comes to methamphetamine use, sex and intimacy.

The resource is based on an exhibition held by VAC during the 2017 Midsumma Festival. VAC worked with community-based artists Sam Wallman, Michele Vescio and Bailey Sharp to develop the exhibition, which drew on real gay, bi and queer men's stories of meth use within the community. The artists worked with these stories to create animated videos and audio stories exploring the men's experiences.

The resource and the exhibition are a response to the ongoing conversation about meth use within gay, bi and queer male communities. According to the 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey gay and bisexual respondents were almost three times more likely to have used meth recently than their heterosexual counterparts.

"Gay, bisexual and queer men enjoy drugs at much higher rates than the general community, particularly methamphetamines. When drug use becomes problematic it can have a severe impact on people's health and wellbeing," said VAC CEO Simon Ruth.

"We consider peer stories to be a valuable tool in reducing the harms associated with methamphetamine use. They capture the complexities of meth use in our communities and make understanding them more accessible to everyone. This project will foster important conversations between our communities and alcohol and drug services."

Jeremy Wiggins from VAC coordinated the project and interviewed the men involved about their meth use.

"I interviewed eight men about their experiences with methamphetamine use for Be-Longing For It. Some of the men felt their use was really destroying their lives, while others had developed tools and strategies to manage their use within particular personal boundaries," said Wiggins.

"The stories are very individual, but a common link between them all was about a desire to belong and to feel connected."

'Russell' (not his real name) was one of the eight participants who shared their real-life stories of methamphetamine use for the project.

"For me it was a crucial opportunity to convey my own experience through a different medium to reach and impact a broader audience and engage people around complex issues like drug use, addiction, social isolation, sexual activity and identity among gay, bi and queer men," Russell said.

"The raw and sometimes confronting material conveys powerful truths in an entirely accessible way and leads to candid and unexpected insights and crucial conversations around reducing harm and addressing problematic use."

ENDS

The Be-Longing For It stories are available as part of VAC's TouchBase website, a national resource on alcohol and drugs for LGBTI communities. Find the stories here: <http://touchbase.org.au/stories>

For more information about gay and bisexual men and drug use, see the National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report, p. 95–96: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129549848>

For media enquiries, contact:

Benjamin Riley, Media Officer: benjamin.riley@vac.org.au / 03 9865 6700 / 0401 267 024

VICTORIAN AIDS COUNCIL

Peter Knight Centre
6 Claremont Street
South Yarra Victoria 3141
P 61 3 9865 6700
F 61 3 9826 2700
Toll Free 1800 134 840

Positive Living Centre
51 Commercial Road
South Yarra Victoria 3141
P 61 3 9863 0444
F 61 3 9820 3166
Toll Free 1800 622 795

Centre Clinic - St Kilda
Rear of 77 Fitzroy Street
St Kilda Victoria 3182
P 61 3 9525 5866
F 61 3 9525 3673

PRONTO!
Rapid Testing Service
175 Rose Street
Fitzroy Victoria 3065
P 61 3 9416 2889

ABN: 52 907 644 835