

Community activists honoured as VAC Award winners announced at Victorian AIDS Council AGM

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21 NOVEMBER 2016 — Community activists PrEP Access Now have received the prestigious Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) President's Award at the organisation's annual general meeting on Sunday. The group were honoured for their groundbreaking work establishing an access scheme for pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, or PrEP, the HIV-prevention pill.

Award recipients also included PASH.tm, a sexual health and HIV advocacy organisation for trans men who have sex with men, and long-standing VAC member Bev Greet, a leader in the Aboriginal community's response to HIV both in Victoria and nationally. Greet was one of four individuals given Life Membership this year, the highest honour awarded by VAC.

"This year's VAC Award winners represent the past and future of the organisation. Grass-roots activists like the committee of PrEP Access Now are part of a long legacy of community-led responses to HIV in Victoria," said VAC CEO Simon Ruth.

"VAC was founded by community activists, and we're proud to support the work of a new generation while we also look back and celebrate the people in our community who built Victoria's HIV response. We'll always be looking to the future as an organisation, but it's important we acknowledge our past."

Committee member Phillip Joffe accepted the President's Award on behalf of PrEP Access Now.

"The PrEP Access Now committee is extremely humbled to be recognised together with the incredible past winners of this prestigious award. We have enjoyed the unwavering support of VAC since our inception," Joffe said.

"We would like to thank the President and Board of VAC for honouring us with this amazing award and look forward to working closely together and achieving even more together."

The full list of VAC Award winners is below:

- Life Membership: Bev Greet — founder of Positive Women Victoria and former VAC Board member
- Life Membership: Vikki Sinnott — former VAC Board member
- Life Membership: Bill O'Loughlin — harm reduction advocate
- Life Membership: Bruce Parnell — former VAC Education Program Manager
- President's Award: PrEP Access Now — community-led PrEP access scheme
- Greig Friday Young Leader Award: Rian Branthwaite — VAC volunteer
- Media Award: Mark Kearney — Journalist, Bendigo Advertiser
- Special Service Award: John Manwaring, Jarrod Lester & Craig Burnett — featured in the Treat HIV Now campaign
- Special Service Award: Gareth D'Souza — VAC volunteer
- Special Service Award: Myka Williams — VAC volunteer

As a member of the inaugural, 1984 VAC Board, human-rights advocate Jamie Gardiner also received his Life Membership after being unable to attend last year's AGM.

Sunday's AGM also included the 24th annual Keith Harbour address, delivered this year by Associate Professor Edwina Wright, who received a standing ovation. Wright recounted her experiences working with AIDS patients as a doctor at Fairfield Hospital in the early 1990s, drawing a line from the height of the epidemic in Australia to current developments in HIV prevention and treatment.

Results of elections to the Board were also announced at the AGM, with three vacancies on the combined Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre Board filled. Chrissie Feagins and current VAC President Chad Hughes were returned to the Board, and Anthony Maynard was newly elected.

ENDS

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