

“WORLD AIDS DAY”

Statement

HON LOUISE PRATT (East Metropolitan) [6.10 pm]: Today is “World AIDS Day”, which is symbolised by a red ribbon. The theme for “World AIDS Day” in Australia this year is “let’s talk about it”. It is appropriate that “World AIDS Day” be acknowledged in the Legislative Council. It is important to acknowledge that HIV-AIDS has not gone away. There is still no cure for this disease; however, it is entirely preventable. AIDS is becoming more prevalent in Asia and Africa, unlike in Australia, where it has largely been a disease that has affected men who have sex with men. However, today, HIV-AIDS is equally likely to be spread by heterosexual contact in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. More work needs to be done to prevent the transmission of this disease in those communities. HIV-AIDS services in Australia have evolved and are well supported, particularly by the gay community. Some of the expertise in this area needs to be extended to rural and regional communities and among Aboriginal communities so that we can ensure that the scourge of this terrible disease does not increase. Interestingly, Australia has had a community-led response to HIV-AIDS, which has included community education and peer-based services. That has been very effective. That message needs to be spread to other parts of the world, particularly Africa and Asia, which tend to have a much less effective regime and a much more removed way of managing these issues. In Australia, an effective partnership approach has developed between the community, government and people who live with the disease. The evolution of the treatment of the disease has changed the prognosis for people living with HIV and AIDS, and largely means that they can live healthy and productive lives. However, more work needs to be done on minimising the discrimination that many people suffer upon acquiring HIV.

“World AIDS Day” is a global initiative that is designed to raise awareness of HIV-AIDS issues, and provides a great opportunity for us to commend the Western Australian AIDS Council for the terrific work that it does. In Australia, the annual diagnosis of new AIDS cases has dropped from about 817 cases in 1995 to 208 cases in 2001. That demonstrates that we are effectively managing the transmission of this disease by educating people. However, there has been an increase in the annual diagnosis of new HIV cases, which has been adjusted for multiple reporting, from 782 cases in 2003 to 820 cases in 2004. Interestingly, heterosexual people from non-English speaking backgrounds are less likely to recognise that they have the disease or to seek testing for it. Therefore, diagnosis of the disease happens much later in those communities and this has an effect on the prognosis for these people. That goes to show that we need to broaden our community campaign and management of this issue.

It is particularly significant that more than 385 people have lost their lives from this disease in Western Australia since the HIV-AIDS epidemic began. More than 900 Western Australians live with this disease. It is really important that we continue to support the work of organisations such as the Western Australian AIDS Council so that it can continue its community-targeted education campaigns. That is what has made the difference in Australia and is why we are not in the same situation as countries in Asia and Africa, where the disease has not been managed effectively and there has not been a strong government response to its control. Frankly, the disease in those countries has run rife through heterosexual contact. Because of the strong campaigns that have been run in Australia, that is something we have managed to prevent.