

ACON PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024-25

March 2024





About ACON

ACON is NSW's leading health organisation specialising in community health, inclusion and HIV responses for people of diverse sexualities and genders. Established in 1985, ACON works to create opportunities for people in our communities to live their healthiest lives.

We are a fiercely proud community organisation, unique in our connection to our community and in our role as an authentic and respected voice.

Members of Australia's sexuality and gender diverse communities experience health disparities when compared to health and wellbeing outcomes experienced by the total population. They may also face significant barriers to accessing traditional healthcare pathways.

We recognise that members of our communities share their sexual and gender identity with other identities and experiences and work to ensure that these are reflected in our work. These can include people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; people from culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse, and migrant and refugee backgrounds; people who use drugs; mature aged people; young adults; and people with disability.

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ACON acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work. We pay respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

Introduction

ACON welcomes the opportunity to provide a pre-budget submission to the NSW Government ahead of the 2024-25 budget. ACON provides health initiatives and health promotion for sexuality and gender diverse people in NSW, and advocates for the opportunity for people in our communities to live their healthiest lives. This submission, therefore, advocates for necessary resources to improve the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people in NSW.

Ahead of the 2023 NSW election, ACON and our partners across the LGBTQ+ and blood-borne virus sectors posed a series of questions to each of the major parties in order to secure commitments from the incoming NSW Government. At the time NSW Labor committed to a number of actions for which we are very grateful, and acknowledge that many of these commitments are well underway. However, there are a number of commitments we wish to draw your attention to in this submission, as they require resourcing to be realised. This budget will finish at the halfway point of the Government's term, and so it is imperative that these commitments are realised with expediency.

Furthermore, many of the legislative commitments we sought ahead of the 2023 election, that NSW Labor agreed it would review, are contained within the provisions of the Equality Legislation Amendment (LGBTIQA+) Bill 2023. We understand this Bill is due to be debated in Parliament in the coming weeks, and we urge your Government to support it.

LGBTQ+ communities experience disproportionately worse health outcomes compared to the general population in Australia¹ due to a number of systemic and societal factors. These disparities are, in many cases, a result of stigma, discrimination and a fundamental lack of understanding about the lives and bodies of people of diverse sexualities and genders.

After decades of advocacy, ACON has seen greater recognition of the health disparities for sexuality and gender diverse people. LGBTQ+ people are recognised as a priority population across many State and federal Health Strategies. The *NSW LGBTQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027* provides a framework for NSW Health to provide high quality, safe, and inclusive health services for all LGBTQ+ people in NSW. The positive change we have seen since the Strategy was implemented is in early stages, but cannot be understated, and must continue.

Other Strategies based on health issues (including HIV, STIs, cancer, mental health and suicide prevention), geographical regions (including rural and regional NSW), and other population groups (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people, women, men, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) all recognise the unique needs of sexuality and gender diverse people, and the need for tailored health promotion, programming and services to apply an equitable framework and improve health outcomes for all people in NSW.

We understand that the health budget may be impacted by the Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding. ACON provided a [written submission to the Commission in October](#), outlining the importance, benefit, and effectiveness of partnerships between community organisations and NSW Health.

However, the NSW Health system, and by extension its funding, is complex and overlaps with many state government portfolios and budgets. Preventative health and models that consider the social determinants of health have significant crossover with a broad range of government portfolios, including community services, justice, transport and infrastructure, and education.

While this submission largely relates to services and programs that will positively impact the health and wellbeing of sexuality and gender diverse people in NSW and therefore most relate to healthcare funding, we recognise that these programs and services may fall under a number of diverse portfolios. ACON and our partners have advocated for a centralised portfolio, Minister, and Strategy for a whole-of-government approach to LGBTIQ+ communities to streamline service provision.

This submission focuses on some of [the commitments NSW Labor made to our coalition of organisations in the lead-up to the 2023 elections](#), each of which will contribute to a better NSW, as well as some core priorities for the LGBTIQ+ communities in NSW, including our safety and our relationship with the NSW Police Force, and the recommendations of the [Australian Government's National HIV Taskforce](#).

Recommendations

This pre-budget submission recommends that the NSW Government:

1. Fund the commitments NSW Labor made prior to the election to ACON and the LGBTIQ and BBV sectors, including:
 - a. Five-year funding arrangements and greater certainty for LGBTIQ+ organisations
 - b. Investment in the peer workforce
 - c. A resourced drug summit, including resources to implement its recommendations
 - d. Ongoing implementation of the *NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027*
 - e. A whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategy
 - f. Support services for LGBTIQ+ older people

2. Commit to funding the recommendations ACON provided to the Minister for Police and Police Commissioner, including:
 - a. Implement in full, and adequately resource, the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes.
 - b. As per the suggestion of the Honourable John Sackar KC,² commission an independent review of the NSW Police Force's institutional approach to the LGBTIQ community, including LGBTIQ employees, a review of the effectiveness of the GLL0 program, and the role of the NSW Police Spokesperson.
 - c. Publicly rescind the findings of Strike Force Neiwand, and revert to the findings of the earlier Coronial Inquests. Additionally, make a public apology regarding the adversarial findings of Strike Forces Neiwand, Parrabell and Macnamir, and the adversarial conduct at the Special Commission of Inquiry.
 - d. Establish a whole-of-government Ministerial LGBTIQ+ community advisory group, with sub-committees dedicated to particular portfolios, including justice.
 - e. Strengthen partnerships with community groups, including LGBTIQ+ community groups and ACON, with a commitment to close collaboration on issues that affect our communities and other marginalised populations, including First Nations people.
 - f. Urgently reconsider the response to the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission's Review of NSW Police Force responses to domestic and family violence incidents, in particular the recommendations pertaining to investigations of officers.
 - g. In conjunction with the enactment of NSW coercive control legislation, urgently elevate police understanding of LGBTIQ+ coercive control and sexual, domestic and family violence.

- h. Develop a NSW Police Force LGBTIQ+ Safety and Protection Action Plan, in co-design with community.
 - i. Conduct a full independent review of user pays policing and specifically policing at LGBTIQ+ events, including the huge volume of police, the use of drug dogs inside venues (or at all), strip searching and banning re-entry.
 - j. Work with the City of Sydney to resource and implement the recommendations of the Lord Mayor following the City of Sydney Safety Summit, including:
 - i. increased funding for Anti-Discrimination NSW and Community Legal Centres in the 2024-2025 NSW State Budget to enable them to better respond to and assist with complaints of anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment and abuse;
 - ii. in co-design with community organisations, develop pathways to increase rates of reporting and the improved collection of information from LGBTIQ+ community members of acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment and abuse in both the public domain and online;
 - iii. the provision of community based legal, social and emotional support for individuals who seek redress for acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment or abuse against them - including funding for local community legal centres that support members of the LGBTIQ+ communities seeking redress for acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment or abuse against them; and
 - iv. community-led initiatives to keep LGBTIQ+ communities safe and supported;
 - k. Provide resources to ACON and other community organisations to better facilitate third-party or peer reporting of instances of violence, to maintain registers of violence, and to enhance community safety programs and community care services.
3. Commit to the Recommendations of the National HIV Taskforce Report, including a scheme to provide subsidised PrEP to those who are Medicare-ineligible.
 4. Support the passage of the Equality Legislation Amendment (LGBTIQ+) Bill 2023 in NSW Parliament.

Commitment one: five-year funding arrangements and greater certainty for LGBTIQ+ organisations

In the lead-up to the NSW 2023 election, NSW Labor told us that “a Minns Labor Government will deliver more job security and funding certainty for our community and health services sector by introducing longer-term five-year funding arrangements for providers. Labor will also review funding arrangements to make grants more efficient and provide greater certainty for LGBTIQ+ organisations.”

We welcome this commitment and seek to have it realised across the community and health services sector. Community organisations are resilient, and consistently demonstrate their capacity to achieve outcomes for the communities they serve. The strong partnerships the NSW Government has with

community organisations is indicative of the fact that that community organisations know the best ways to reach the communities they are part of, and improve health outcomes and health equity, especially where there are populations that face unique health challenges and barriers to accessing traditional health pathways.

However, community organisations are not immune from the pressure people in NSW experience as a result of the cost-of-living crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and successive interest rate rises. Longer-term funding agreements provide a degree of certainty that allows our organisations to plan ahead for our communities. Short-term grants make planning and recruiting suitably qualified staff more challenging when they aren't offered long-term employment.

Long-term funding agreements require a degree of flexibility, for example, annual implementation plans or adjusted key performance indicators, to allow community organisations to be flexible in their service delivery and responsive to community needs.

Long term funding agreements need to be indexed to appropriately match inflation, and reflect the real cost of delivering quality services. ACON is currently seeking additional funds for its LGBTQ+ Health Centre, to cover the inflationary pressure that has impacted the budget from the feasibility study to the implementation phase, as costs have significantly increased since the planning phase.

The retention of staff in our organisations requires appropriate compensation for the work, including adjustments to reflect inflation. The NGO sector has a clear competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining staff, and so workforce retention is of particular concern, especially when funding arrangements can't guarantee long-term contracts, job security, and reasonable remuneration.

Organisations like ACON are funded by a number of grants from different departments of the State and Federal Governments. Funding arrangements need to account for overhead and administrative costs, where staff such as managers and administrative staff may be required to oversee or work across a number of programs with different funding sources.

Greater certainty also comes in the form of an ongoing commitment to relevant Government Strategies. The *NSW HIV Strategy 2021-2025*³ and the *NSW Hepatitis C Strategy 2022-2025*⁴ provide a strong foundation for NSW's role in achieving state, national, and global targets surrounding BBVs and STIs. In order to ensure NSW's ongoing commitment to the elimination of HIV and hepatitis C transmission, both Strategies will need resourcing to be renewed in 2024-25, to ensure we are future focused and planning for beyond 2025.

Commitment two: Increased investment in the peer workforce

NSW Labor also committed to reviewing funding arrangements of peer health services and strategies. We wish to reiterate the importance of embedding the peer workforce within the health and community services sector in NSW – through the ongoing, long-term commitment to peer-based community organisations, but also by embedding peers across the health and social services workforce more broadly. Expanded investment is required to ensure that peer programs, including peer navigators,

are supported for LGBTQ+ communities and people living with HIV across all of NSW, including rural and regional NSW.

The benefits of a peer workforce are well documented,⁵ particularly within the mental health sector⁶ and in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. Across the health and social services sector, there is a vibrant peer workforce that needs to be provided with the opportunities to contribute their personal experiences and insights into how services can respond to and best support people in NSW.

It is also vitally important to the outcomes for clients from minority populations that their lived experiences are represented in the peer workforce. Consumers respond to a number of factors they may share with peer workers, including identities, age, common lived experiences around mental health, sexual health, alcohol and other drug use, trauma, disability and long term or chronic health conditions, class, incarceration and numerous other factors.⁷ It is important that the peer work sector recognises the additional experiences peers bring to their roles outside of lived experience of a particular health issue.

Peers need support to thrive in the working environment. The peer workforce needs to be professionalised – including providing professional development and supervision/mentoring opportunities, as well as adequate recognition and remuneration that acknowledges the inherent value and benefit of lived experience and peer labour, clearer job descriptions and boundaries.⁸

Peers also need mental health support,⁹ and policies to address unconscious or conscious power imbalances in the workforce.¹⁰ Furthermore, integration of service models is necessary to effectively integrate, peer, clinical and allied health approaches. Peer integration training is required for managers and other staff to effectively integrate peers into service and treatment models and recognise and celebrate the unique approaches to working with clients that different workers, from peer to clinical, bring.

The 2024-25 Budget should contain investment to expand peer programs in NSW so that existing programs are strengthened, further peer programs are considered where they may currently not operate, and these programs are adequately supported and promoted.

In addition, long-term sustainability for Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations in NSW must be guaranteed, to ensure that programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are culturally safe and Indigenous-led.

Commitment three: A resourced drug summit, including resources to implement its recommendations

NSW Labor has committed to “hold a drug summit in its first term to bring together health and medical experts, police, drug user organisations, families, and other stakeholders to build consensus on the way NSW deals with drug misuse. A Labor Government will listen to the experts and take a whole-of-government approach to issues relating to drug use, abuse, supply, law enforcement, and treatment.”

We strongly welcome this commitment from the NSW Government, however, it is important that the drug summit is an effective mechanism for reform. The success of the 1999 Summit is in large part due to the decision to pause Parliamentary business and actively engage and educate all NSW MPs over a five-day period. The Summit must bring together Government officials, MPs, experts, advocates and consumers to engage with the evidence in a meaningful way, in order to develop drug policy that achieves real outcomes for the people of NSW.

The NSW Government must also be prepared to resource the recommendations that come from the Summit. The NGO alcohol and other drugs sector is underfunded, and not able to meet community demand. The NSW Government must be prepared to address current gaps in alcohol and other drug service provision, policy, and strategic direction.

Commitment four: Ongoing implementation of the *NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027*

The NSW Government has made some major progress in the implementation of the *NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027*.

The Strategy is a major milestone in improving the health of LGBTIQ+ people, but it's critical to its success that the NSW Government continues to support its implementation throughout its five-year lifespan. Implementing the Strategy requires both time and funding commitments each year of the Strategy, and must be a critical component of the Health, Regional Health and Mental Health portfolios.

The \$12 million committed in the 2022-23 budget has seen significant milestones achieved across the improvement of health and mental health for trans and gender diverse people, improving service gaps and training for NSW Health staff, and has been instrumental in the development of the ACON Health Centre.

Furthermore, the ongoing funding ACON receives for its health promotion and preventative health initiatives, especially with regard to HIV, is an example of an extremely successful funding model in reducing service access gaps in NSW for sexuality and gender diverse communities.

However, specialist services and clinicians who have particular expertise in LGBTIQ+ healthcare are in short supply in NSW. While efforts to educate and build the capacity of mainstream services will make a difference over time, immediate steps are required to strengthen access to expertise across the State. GPs and clinicians working in the NSW Health system need support from clinicians and clinics where there is more expertise. Cost effective healthcare delivery is an important consideration for our health system, and as such, digital approaches to healthcare offer a way of sharing expertise and maximising the access to clinicians with experience across the State.

There is an opportunity to strengthen and better support healthcare delivery for LGBTIQ+ people in NSW through telehealth and other digital health care technologies. Key priorities of NSW Health include delivering more care in communities and closer to home – these goals require more investment in virtual healthcare delivery.

In addition to better access to inclusive services, interventions to improve health literacy are needed to encourage greater health seeking behaviour among sexuality and gender diverse communities, so that service gaps can be addressed at both the service and consumer level.¹¹

Furthermore, a key pillar of the Strategy is improved data collection. Robust data collection, locally relevant LGBTIQ+ health research and evidence is critical to design and implement data-driven and evidence-based health initiatives that can improve LGBTIQ+ communities' health outcomes.

Similarly, data and research are fundamental in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of initiatives supported by the Strategy in order to measure their success against the Strategy's aims and vision.¹² Because of the complex nature of NSW Health's data systems, we are aware that improving routine data collection is a complex and costly, but fundamentally necessary undertaking.

Commitment five: A whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategy

Our communities are often ignored in government decision-making processes and data collection. While research shows that a number of health gaps between people in our communities and the general population persist, government departments do not systematically collect indicators that could inform the design and monitoring of policy interventions for our communities.

When Equality Australia surveyed LGBTIQ+ people in the lead up to the 2022 federal election, 94.8% of respondents indicated that ensuring the needs of LGBTIQ+ people are better reflected in government programs, services and decision-making was important to them.¹³

We applaud and welcome the *NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027* and its commitments to improving the health of our communities, however, a whole-of-government approach is needed to address the human rights and the social determinants of health and wellbeing of these communities.

NSW Labor has committed to undertaking this process, and we would strongly welcome action on this commitment with appropriate resourcing in the 2024-25 financial year. This process should also involve the establishment of a whole-of-government Ministerial LGBTIQ+ community advisory group, with sub-committees dedicated to particular portfolios and seed funding to establish relevant initiatives and co-design processes.

Commitment six: Support services for LGBTQ+ older people

Older people in our communities face particular challenges, particularly in aged care. Due to histories of stigma and discrimination, our communities often fear disclosing their identities or their health conditions, such as living with HIV, which may lead to some of their needs being unaddressed and social isolation. Older people living with HIV (PLHIV) with a long history of anti-retroviral use may have co-morbidities associated with older or experimental HIV medications used in the past.¹⁴

The current *Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031*¹⁵ does acknowledge LGBTIQ people and diversity but does not, and should, acknowledge the needs of PLHIV, and needs to do more to address social determinants of health such as housing. Safe, affordable and secure housing is associated with better health, yet people who are aged over 55 years are over-represented among those living in temporary and insecure housing, and are at greater risk of homelessness due to a chronic shortage of age-appropriate and affordable housing.

It is essential that the NSW Government's programs and services that support older people specifically contain measures to support older LGBTIQ+ people, to reduce social isolation and improve their quality of life.

Strengthening community trust in the NSW Police Force, addressing the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes, and Improving community safety

In the weeks leading up to the 2024 Mardi Gras parade, there was significant media attention on a number of issues concerning LGBTIQ+ communities and their relationship with the NSW Police Force.

The media attention had significant focus on the devastating and tragic murders of Jesse Baird and Luke Davies, however, at the same time our communities were grieving this terrible tragedy, we were also advocating that the NSW Government and Police Force adequately respond to the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes, and address community concerns about our safety, outlined at the City of Sydney's LGBTQIA+ Safety Summit.

On Monday, 26 February 2024, ACON President Dr Justin Koonin, ACON CEO Nicolas Parkhill AM and Alex Greenwich MP met with The Hon. Yasmin Catley MP and Commissioner Webb to discuss these converging issues. Following that meeting, we presented the Minister and Commissioner with a series of recommendations for action, also supplied to this Submission. We offer suggested costings for some of these recommendations.

ACON also sent a letter to the Premier on 5 February 2024 requesting action on the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry.

The findings from the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes represent a landmark moment in NSW's history, and a unique opportunity for the NSW Government to mark a turning point in the relationship of the NSW LGBTIQ communities with the NSW Police Force.

The recommendations (10-12) note the necessity of the NSW Police Force to be adequately resourced to implement the recommendations around reform to its systems in particular; but this resourcing also needs to cover Recommendation 8, around "additional mandatory and ongoing training be provided to NSWPF officers concerning the LGBTIQ community", as well as the case-specific recommendations that require a fresh inquest into four cases.

The Inquiry report also suggests that the NSW Government consider an independent review of the NSW Police Force focused upon its institutional approach to the LGBTIQ community, including its LGBTIQ employees. Such a review could help to build community trust and work to better ensure the safety of LGBTIQ communities.

In addition, there has been an alarming increase in far-right hate group attacks targeting LGBTQ+ events, and forcing their cancellation, for safety concerns. This trend is not limited to NSW but has also been reported across Australia. Extremists and fringe groups have targeted drag story time at libraries and local councils with intimidation, hate speech and fear. Performers and council workers have been harassed in-person and online, and rather than deal with angry, hateful mobs, some performances are being cancelled. Anecdotally, experiences of suicide amongst LGBTQ+ communities in NSW are at an all-time high, with demand on ACON's Community Care services the highest of our entire 40 year history.

This is occurring across NSW, including in Sydney, Newcastle, Goulburn, Wollongong, and other regional centres.

Disappointingly, coupled with these experiences of violence, ACON has also heard from our communities that they have received poor responses from the NSW Police Force, and from some, that they do not trust the NSW Police to respond to these incidents. We have heard from LGBTQ+ people about slow and inadequate responses to hate incidents, including responses delayed by months, and refusals to take reports.

In two recent cases, ACON has assisted to escalate these issues to the NSW Police Force Engagement & Hate Crime unit, although issues have persisted even following this intervention. ACON does not receive funding to engage in this work, but we recognise that we must sometimes act as a liaison and advocate between community members and the NSW Police Force.

In response to these threats to community safety, in February, the City of Sydney held an LGBTQIA+ Safety Summit. The recommendations from the Summit were summarised in the Lord Mayoral Minute "Progressing Action on Safety for Our LGBTQIA+ Communities" unanimously endorsed by Council on 19 February 2024.

One key recommendation from the Summit was to investigate community-led initiatives to keep LGBTQIA+ communities safe and supported, including facilitating third party or peer reporting of instances of violence, to maintain registers of violence, and to enhance community safety programs and community care services.

This recommendation is reminiscent of ACON's former Anti-Violence Project, a program that collected reports on violence experienced by members of our community from 1991-2014. In 2014-15, due to changing community attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people, it was thought that such a registry of reports no longer needed active monitoring and resourcing. It is very disappointing to realise that ten years later, such a program is now, again, necessary. Such a program and associated community safety initiatives would cost ACON \$350,000 per year to effectively implement.

The Safety Summit also identified the significant need for increased funding for Anti-Discrimination NSW and Community Legal Centres in the 2024-25 budget. If LGBTQ+ people's safety is to be taken seriously, then our communities require greater support to make complaints or report incidents, and Anti-Discrimination NSW requires significantly more funding in order to be able to adequately, and in some

cases, proactively, investigate complaints and discriminatory behaviour, including instances of systemic discrimination.

In addition, it is our understanding that the Anti-Discrimination Board is being considered as a possible mechanism to address complaints regarding conversion practices, as the drafting of the legislation to prohibit conversion practices is under way.

As conversion practices are not discrimination, but harmful practices in and of themselves, it is our view that should this be the outcome, the Anti-Discrimination Board and ADNSW must be further expanded, in scope and in name, to better reflect its role and functions. This must also occur alongside workforce capacity building so the Board is equipped to respond to its expanded functions sensitively. ACON is not best placed to estimate the resources required to upscale community legal centres and Anti-Discrimination NSW, but we must underscore the importance of such an endeavour, given the current resource deficiencies.

The Safety Summit also recognised the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes, and especially action to improve the relationship between the NSW Police Force and LGBTQ+ communities. This includes training, as outlined in the Inquiry recommendations and earlier in this Submission, but also initiatives that work to build community trust, and change the culture, in the broader police force and the way it works with LGBTQ+ communities. The Summit advised that training initiatives should also extend to Council officials across NSW.

We provided the following list of recommendations to the Minister for Police and the Police Commissioner, as actions we believe will strengthen trust and build partnerships between LGBTQ+ communities and the NSW Police Force. We recommend that the 2024-25 Budget consider how these recommendations may be resourced.

ACON recommends that the NSW Government and the NSW Police Force:

1. Implement in full, and adequately resource, the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ Hate Crimes.
2. As per the suggestion of the Honourable John Sackar KC,¹⁶ commission an independent review of the NSW Police Force's institutional approach to the LGBTIQ community, including LGBTIQ employees, a review of the effectiveness of the GLLO program, and the role of the NSW Police Spokesperson.
3. Publicly rescind the findings of Strike Force Neiwand, and revert to the findings of the earlier Coronial Inquests. Additionally, make a public apology regarding the adversarial findings of Strike Forces Neiwand, Parrabell and Macnamir, and the adversarial conduct at the Special Commission of Inquiry.
4. Establish a whole-of-government Ministerial LGBTQ+ community advisory group, with sub-committees dedicated to particular portfolios, including justice.
5. Strengthen partnerships with community groups, including LGBTQ+ community groups and ACON, with a commitment to close collaboration on issues that affect our communities and other marginalised populations, including First Nations people.
6. Urgently reconsider the response to the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission's Review of NSW Police Force responses to domestic and family violence incidents, in particular the recommendations pertaining to investigations of officers.

7. In conjunction with the enactment of NSW coercive control legislation, urgently elevate police understanding of LGBTQ+ coercive control and sexual, domestic and family violence.
8. Develop a NSW Police Force LGBTQ+ Safety and Protection Action Plan, in co-design with community.
9. Conduct a full independent review of user pays policing and specifically policing at LGBTQ+ events, including the huge volume of police, the use of drug dogs inside venues (or at all), strip searching and banning re-entry.
10. Work with the City of Sydney to resource and implement the recommendations of the Lord Mayor following the City of Sydney Safety Summit, including:
 - a. increased funding for Anti-Discrimination NSW and Community Legal Centres in the 2024-2025 NSW State Budget to enable them to better respond to and assist with complaints of anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment and abuse;
 - b. in co-design with community organisations, develop pathways to increase rates of reporting and the improved collection of information from LGBTIQ+ community members of acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment and abuse in both the public domain and online;
 - c. the provision of community based legal, social and emotional support for individuals who seek redress for acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment or abuse against them - including funding for local community legal centres that support members of the LGBTIQ+ communities seeking redress for acts of violence, discrimination, vilification, harassment or abuse against them; and
 - d. community-led initiatives to keep LGBTIQ+ communities safe and supported;
11. Provide resources to ACON and other community organisations to better facilitate third-party or peer reporting of instances of violence, to maintain registers of violence, and to enhance community safety programs and community care services.

Recommendations arising from the National HIV Taskforce Report

The National HIV Taskforce was established in 2023 to renew Australia's efforts to end the HIV epidemic and achieve virtual elimination of HIV transmission in Australia by 2030. The National HIV Taskforce is made up of representatives from government, community organisations, peak bodies, researchers, advocates and medical experts.

The National HIV Taskforce Report, released late last year, makes a series of recommendations for state and territory governments to consider. NSW has long been a leader in our public health response to HIV, and these recommendations offer an opportunity for our response to continue to be innovative and responsive to the evolving epidemic.

Of particular importance to the NSW Budget are the recommendations to expand access to self-testing and point-of-care testing and to investigate models to provide subsidised access to oral PrEP for people who are ineligible for Medicare, in partnership with the Australian Government.

Self-testing has been shown to increase uptake and frequency of testing, especially among those who may not otherwise test and are looking for a discreet option.¹⁷ It is, therefore, effective, alongside

accessible point-of-care testing. ACON understands that the NSW Ministry of Health is investigating the expansion of its self-testing capacity.

There are currently a concerning number of HIV infections occurring in the Greater Western Sydney (GWS) region. There are only five publicly funded sexual health clinics located in the GWS region, compared to inner Sydney, which has more than double this number distributed over a much smaller geographic area. Significant numbers of people from GWS travel to locations in the inner suburbs to access testing and treatment, indicating a lack of access to, or knowledge of, local and culturally safe prevention, testing, and treatment service providers in the GWS region.

Expanding the number of HIV and sexual health services, or, at the very least, exploring the feasibility of expanding these services in GWS would help to improve access and increase rates of testing if targeted with particular attention to public transport accessibility, discretion, and cultural sensitivity. Increasing access to and knowledge of self-testing options will also increase overall rates of testing within these communities.

Following the introduction of PrEP, NSW experienced a sharp decline in new HIV infections.¹⁸ It is clear that affordable PrEP is effective at reducing new HIV infections.¹⁹ However, people who are not eligible for Medicare do not receive the PBS subsidy for PrEP, and it is, therefore, less affordable for this cohort. Access to subsidised PrEP for Medicare-ineligible people in NSW will have a positive impact on the HIV epidemic in NSW. The NSW Government should collaborate with the Australian Government to explore a cost-effective model to provide this.

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