

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

### World AIDS Day

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (7.51 p.m.)—Today marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. In 1988, the World Health Organisation declared the first World AIDS Day in an effort to raise public awareness about HIV-AIDS. It makes today an appropriate day to discuss in this place the future of Australia's HIV-AIDS strategy, and I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for introducing this motion.

'Enjoy life, take control, fight HIV-AIDS' is the Australian theme for World AIDS Day. Recent studies indicate that HIV infection rates in Australia are gradually increasing. This fact on its own demonstrates that the Australian battle against HIV-AIDS infection is not won. We must continue to be vigilant in our response to this ongoing problem. It is easy to go from a small increase in infection rates to a more serious and widespread problem if governments and the community become complacent. It shows that HIV not only is a problem overseas but requires continuing action right here at home. The theme aims to send out the message that, if people take personal responsibility by being informed about how they can protect themselves and others, there is no reason why they cannot enjoy life and at the same time stop the spread of HIV-AIDS.

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy 2005-2008 identified five priority areas for action to be addressed over the life of the strategy. But the current strategy has expired. Whilst it continues to be funded, I understand it has been referred to an outside organisation for consideration and that a report regarding the future of our domestic HIV-AIDS strategy is due to be returned perhaps as late as March. I also understand the international strategy is now under consideration by the minister, and I eagerly await her response and an announcement regarding its future. I had hoped the announcement would have been made today. Indeed, the majority of new Australian cases of HIV-AIDS resulting from heterosexual contact have arisen through contact with a partner from a high-prevalence country—particularly sub-Saharan Africa or parts of South-East Asia—demonstrating the importance to Australia of a continuing international response.

An estimated 16½ thousand people in Australia were living with HIV at the end of 2007. From the start of the epidemic until the end of June 2007, there were 23,360 diagnoses of HIV—after adjustment for multiple reports—and 10,097 diagnoses of AIDS. Australia has recorded an unfortunate loss of 6,709 lives through AIDS. The AIDS incidence in Australia of 0.9 per 100,000 population is similar to that in the UK and Canada—at 1.4 and 0.8 respectively—though much lower than that in the United States, at 12.8. The annual number of HIV diagnoses in Australia peaked in 1987. There followed 12 years of decline, after which the rate of diagnoses grew again to reach 983 in 2007. The annual number of AIDS diagnoses in Australia peaked in 1994, with 953 cases, and then declined rapidly to 216 in 1999. The fall was largely due to the introduction of effective combination antiretroviral therapy, which delays progression from HIV infection to AIDS.

The number of AIDS diagnoses has since remained relatively stable. After the initial success in limiting the spread of AIDS, HIV infection rates began to rise again, though they remained low by global standards. After new reported cases dropped to 656 in 2000, the rate of HIV infection rose to 930 in 2005. Transmission continues to occur predominantly through sexual contact between men, in contrast to many high-prevalence countries where it is transmitted increasingly through heterosexual contact.

We cannot take our eyes off the ball when it comes to HIV-AIDS. The minister must be motivated to quickly outline Australia's future strategy now. Time is of the essence. In this case, time will wait for no-one and no nation. Due to its strong years of bipartisan action, Australia has an excellent record in fighting growth in HIV infections. We cannot

afford to lose this record, reputation or any more lives needlessly. I commend the member for Melbourne Ports for raising this important motion and I look to the minister to announce a strategy going forward.