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2014 QUEENSLAND HIV RATE RISE

Australia's annual report card on HIV was released today by the Kirby Institute at UNSW Australia, at the World STI and HIV Summit in Brisbane showing the number of new diagnoses of HIV in Queensland rose to 246 in 2014. Since 2010 the rate of HIV diagnosis remained steady for three years, declined in 2013 and increased in 2014 to 5.3 per 100 000.

Whilst the result represented a 25% increase on the previous 4 year average, HIV Foundation Queensland Chair, Dr Darren Russell said the result is likely to be attributable to increases in testing.

"While increased notifications are of concern, the increase in HIV diagnoses in Queensland in 2014 may be a result of increased testing, both among people being tested at higher frequencies and people being tested for the first time".

"Since June 2013, Queensland has invested in the largest HIV awareness campaign the State has seen. The campaign has consistently targeted those most at risk of HIV, encouraging them to get tested and know their HIV status".

"With increases in testing, these results may also be indicative of a reduction in underlying, undiagnosed HIV in the community, any result that indicates a decrease in that rate is welcome". Dr Russell said.

Data collected from Brisbane's high caseload GP's showed an increase of 36% in the number of people testing for HIV in 2014. Rapid HIV testing in Queensland almost doubled in 2014, and is set to double again in 2015. Queensland sexual health clinics participating in the Kirby's ACCESS project also showed that between 2011 and 2014 the total number of HIV tests conducted in gay and bisexual men increased from 1,423 to 2,288.

"Queensland could be seeing in 2014 what other states saw when initiatives to increase testing were implemented in previous years. NSW saw an increase of 27% on the previous 4 year average in 2012 but has subsequently seen rates reducing".

"We are already two thirds of the way through 2015 and new diagnoses this year have been consistently lower than 2014, down an average of 30% year to date" Dr Russell said.

The report also highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in Australia remain disproportionately affected by blood-borne viruses including HIV.

"This demonstrates the need to remain vigilant and increase access to and uptake of testing and treatment opportunities for HIV and all STI's to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations" Dr Russell said.

Dr Russell also supported commentary from the Kirby that more needs to be done to identify and treat infections early as well as increasing the use of new technologies such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent infection.

"PrEP is now recognised as an essential tool in HIV prevention and the Foundation is working at many levels to facilitate better access to PrEP for Queenslanders" Dr Russell said.

HIV Foundation Queensland is holding a public PrEP Forum tomorrow night to raise community awareness of PrEP.

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For further information please contact: 3054 6100 or visit: <http://hivfoundation.org.au> & www.endhiv.org.au