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World AIDS Day: New report shows almost 45,000 cases prevented

NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, has released a new report which shows almost 45,000 HIV cases have been avoided as a result of preventative programs initiated by the State Government.

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day, Mr Della Bosca will meet with the Ministerial Advisory Committee on HIV and Infectious Diseases today (1 December) at St Vincent's Hospital to discuss the challenges ahead.

"The *Impact of HIV/AIDS in NSW* report reveals the total number of cases of HIV avoided as a result of the various prevention initiatives in NSW is 44,545," the Minister said.

"The report, prepared by independent analysts Health Outcomes International and the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, shows that for every \$1 the State invested in HIV prevention between 1981 and 2005, \$13 was saved across the NSW health system.

"During this period, NSW invested more than \$1.25 billion to combat HIV and AIDS – 70 per cent of which was allocated to clinical care, including hospital and community services, and 30 per cent went to prevention programs.

"The State Government is working hard to decrease the number of people who get HIV in NSW and our safe sex campaigns and promotions to encourage people to get tested are paying off.

"Between January and June this year, there were 201 new cases - NSW HIV notifications have now been stable for a decade with about 400 reported each year.

"This is testament to our successful partnership with clinicians and non-government organisations in delivering prevention, treatment and care.

"In particular, I'd like to acknowledge the unique contribution made by the AIDS Council of NSW and Positive Life NSW in supporting gay men and people with HIV/AIDS," Mr Della Bosca said.

But a new report commissioned for World AIDS Day revealed there remained challenges in the fight against HIV.

"We have known for some time that the best way of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS is by using condoms," Mr Della Bosca said.

"The report, conducted by Galaxy Research, revealed a concerning attitude among young people - 57 per cent of respondents had unprotected sex in the past two years and 84 per cent were not personally concerned about contracting HIV," he said.

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The report also revealed some old myths about HIV/AIDS remain:

- 12 per cent of young people believe sharing cutlery and crockery increases the risk of contracting HIV; and
- Eight per cent believe kissing is a high risk activity.

“Next year the NSW Government will launch a major new campaign to inform young people about the risks of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“The campaign will encourage personal responsibility and promote the benefits of getting tested.

“It will include a television advertisement, as well as a strong focus on new media to reach young people through mobile phones, the web and chatrooms.

“World AIDS Day is an opportunity to remind everyone to challenge discrimination against people with HIV and to stay vigilant in the fight against the virus.

“On World AIDS Day I encourage people to buy a red ribbon in support of this important cause,” Mr Della Bosca added.

The *Impact of HIV/AIDS in NSW* report is available on the NSW Health website at **www.health.nsw.gov.au**