

## HIV RATES

10 April 2008

**The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD:** The University of New South Wales has warned that HIV rates are again dramatically rising after a decline in the 1990s. The university has predicted that HIV rates could rise by as much as 75 per cent in some parts of Australia over the next seven years unless more is done to reverse the trend—a very concerning statistic. The most recently available HIV/AIDS statistics for South Australia from the Royal Adelaide Hospital note that some 1,097 individuals have now been diagnosed with an HIV infection in this state. It is substantially up each year from the year 2000. A recently obtained independent report, prepared by the Allen Consulting Group for the federal government, found that the HIV/AIDS programs across Australia are flawed and may have contributed to a recent rise in HIV infections across the country. The report concluded by noting:

‘The incidence of HIV diagnosis is increasing after a long decline that began in the mid 1980s. It has blamed the trend on duplication of resources, accountability issues and a general lack of flexibility in organisations tasked with dealing with HIV/AIDS.’

In South Australia, the AIDS Council has accumulated a lengthy list of accusations against it, suggesting inappropriate use of funds, including articles published in *The Advertiser* of 15 September 2006, 25 June 2007, 19 October 2007 and 17 November 2007. In addition, I recently learned that the AIDS Council has been funded tens of thousands of dollars for an anti-smoking program for its members which, I would submit, has little to do with HIV prevention. Despite this very large amount of money, only one person attended the program.

My questions to the minister are:

1. Does he believe that the AIDS Council of South Australia is appropriately using the resources granted to it by the people of this state; and, if so, how does he explain the fact that HIV statistics are again on the rise in South Australia despite constantly increasing funding levels?
2. Why was an anti-smoking program funded to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars by the AIDS Council, and does the minister consider that one attendee at this program is value for money for South Australian taxpayers?

**The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Environment and Conservation, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health):** I thank the honourable member for his question, and I am pleased to pass on those questions to the appropriate minister in another place and bring back a response. However, as I have done before in this place, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the importance of a number of our programs, including our Clean Needle Program which is a very important public health initiative and which is aimed at helping to reduce the spread of blood-borne viruses—HIV as well as hepatitis C.

In Australia the Clean Needle Program is estimated to have saved something like between \$2.4 billion and \$7.7 billion in downstream health care costs in a 10 year period between 1991 and 2000, and the cost savings include the prevention of an estimated 25,000 HIV infections, 21,000 Hep C infections, and 4,500 deaths attributed to HIV. That is from the commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (2002). The work that they do is, indeed, very important. Many of their programs obviously save lives and a great deal of family and community heartache as well.

In terms of the smoking project that the member refers to, I would need more details about that to answer the question. I do not have any information about a program where only one person attended. I know that there have been a number

of really important projects run, including a tobacco project for gay men. I am not too sure whether that is the project that he is referring to.

*The Hon. D.G.E. Hood interjecting:*

**The Hon. G.E. GAGO:** No, it is not, but that was, indeed, a very successful anti-smoking program that ran over a couple of different phases. I would need more detail on the smoking program to be able to respond to the question and I would be happy, if the member provided me with those details, to bring back a response to that aspect of the question.