

AIDS Memorial Quilt included in Victorian Heritage Register

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday 15 JUNE 2022 - Victoria's AIDS Memorial Quilt has formally achieved heritage recognition and protection - a first for Australia and a landmark moment in the history of the AIDS Memorial Quilt movement.

This month, the Heritage Council of Victoria determined to include the Melbourne AIDS Memorial Quilt in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR), listing it amongst 2,400 sites, objects, and collections legally recognised and protected by the register.

Borne out of the AIDS Memorial Quilt movement in the United States, the Melbourne AIDS Memorial Quilt was originally coordinated by volunteers out of Fairfield Hospital in 1988 - with quilt panels being made by family members, loved ones, or volunteers working with community groups. Today the Quilts consist of 209 panels - each handmade and individually designed to commemorate a person or group of people who died from an AIDS-related condition.

Thorne Harbour Health (then the Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre) accepted custodianship of the Quilts several years ago and currently maintain the collection.

Thorne Harbour CEO Simon Ruth said, "Every year we put a number of the Quilts on display for World AIDS Day and the cultural significance is undeniable. They are an incredibly moving piece of our history and a tribute to those who we've lost to the epidemic. Being added to the Victorian Heritage Register is an important step in ensuring the Quilts are here for future generations."

Doris Beecher was the former convener of the Melbourne AIDS Memorial Quilt and her son, Stephen, is included in one of the panels.

"On behalf of our family, I'm absolutely delighted by this listing to ensure the AIDS Quilt is recognised and protected. Stephen would be humbled and touched by this legacy," she said.

Cheryl Olver's son Darren is also featured on the Quilt and the heritage listing is welcome news.

"I'm relieved by the Heritage Victoria listing as now the AIDS Quilt will be there for posterity and not forgotten," Cheryl said.

"My son Darren would be thrilled to be immortalised in this way, because we loved him, and he loved us. The protection of the Quilt in this way, reflects and protects our love for each other which will always be there for everyone to see and understand."

The Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria, Prof Philip Goad spoke to the Council's decision to include the Melbourne AIDS Memorial Quilt in the Victorian Heritage Register.

"The Heritage Council of Victoria is very pleased to include the Melbourne AIDS Memorial Quilt in the Victorian Heritage Register. The Quilt is one of the most important objects associated with the AIDS crisis in Victoria, and promotes a compassionate and educational dialogue about HIV/AIDS."

"It is an important example of community and activist art and highlights the impact of the AIDS epidemic. The decision to include the Quilt illustrates at a broader level the Council's wish to protect cultural heritage which is significant to the history and development of Victoria, and reflects diverse community narratives and experiences," he added.

ENDS

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