

Closure of Victoria's Longstanding Catholic HIV/AIDS Ministry

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday 8 December – Only days after World AIDS Day, Australia's oldest HIV/AIDS organisation, Thorne Harbour Health, is incredibly disappointed by the news of CatholicCare Victoria's decision to discontinue its longstanding HIV/AIDS Ministry.

The service provided vital support and advocacy for people living with or affected by HIV regardless of religious belief or background. The decision follows the retirement of the ministry's longstanding coordinator Marg Hayes who led the service for more than 20 years.

"The decision by the Catholic Church to terminate their HIV/AIDS Ministry speaks to the fragility of these initiatives that are all-too-often quietly championed by single individuals. Marg Hayes was one such individual who demonstrated compassionate care and support for countless individuals over the course of her career," said Thorne Harbour Health CEO Simon Ruth.

"The lack of community consultation on this decision is disappointing."

In addition to providing a range of social supports to people living with HIV, the Ministry also provided important community education around the contemporary landscape surrounding HIV in settings like schools and parishes. The Catholic HIV/AIDS Ministry was also a longstanding partner on the annual World AIDS Memorial alongside Thorne Harbour Health, Living Positive Victoria, and Positive Women Victoria - the most recent of which was held on Friday 1 December for World AIDS Day.

"The Catholic HIV/AIDS Ministry has historically been a distinguished institution in allyship with people living with HIV. To see it fall by the wayside is disheartening," Simon Ruth added.

"Sadly, this appears to be a further example of the lack of ongoing commitment to LGBTIQ+ people by faith-based organisations beyond dedicated individuals like the amazing Mary Hayes."

ENDS

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