

35th Anniversary marks transition from Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) to Thorne Harbour Health

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8PM, SATURDAY 7 JULY

5 JULY 2018 - In the lead up to their 35th anniversary, LGBTI health organisation and Australia's oldest HIV/AIDS organisation, the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) has announced they're changing their name to Thorne Harbour Health. The new name recognises two visionary community leaders in the organisation's history of advocating for the health and wellbeing of both people living with HIV (PLHIV) and LGBTI communities — Alison Thorne and Keith Harbour.

"It's been a carefully considered decision, one that was informed by feedback from our members, volunteers, staff, and stakeholders. AIDS Councils are trusted institutions in Australia, but our evolution as a community-controlled organisation has seen us outgrow our identity as 'the Victorian AIDS Council'. We're now working with a broader range of LGBTI communities — delivering programs and services interstate and nationally," said VAC President Chad Hughes.

"Thankfully, we're at a point in the epidemic where having an AIDS-defining illness is rare in this country, and the majority of people living with HIV are seeing the health benefits of highly effective treatment options."

VAC CEO Simon Ruth added, "Thorne Harbour Health gives us a fantastic opportunity to tell our story to a whole new generation of people. Alison and Keith represent a much larger group of community leaders, activists, and advocates who worked, and in many cases continue to work, for the health and wellbeing of our PLHIV and LGBTI communities."

"We're incredibly proud of where we have come from, and we've made that legacy central to our new brand identity."

In June 1983, during Melbourne's first community meeting about the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic, one voice stood out amongst the hundreds of people at the Royal Dental Hospital that night — that of lesbian activist and queer liberationist, Alison Thorne. Alison motivated and mobilised the meeting by asking 'what are we going to do about this and how can we do it? We need to form an organisation'. A few weeks later, a follow up meeting was held at the Laird Hotel resulting in the formation of what was to become the Victorian AIDS Council.

Keith Harbour was VAC's President from 1987-89. As an inspiring leader, Keith mobilised the community from high-level political policy to grass-roots activism with the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP). Keith continued to work tirelessly to get access to lifesaving medicines for PLHIV. In a special ceremony convened by the then Governor of Victoria, Keith was awarded the Order of Australia medal at his bedside at Fairfield Hospital before he died in 1991.

Thorne Harbour Health will make this announcement at the 35th anniversary of the organisation on Saturday 7 July at Experimedia in the State Library of Victoria.

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