

WAAC

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



HEALTHY • INCLUDED • CONNECTED

# NGALA KAADITJ NOONGAR MOORT KEYEN KAADAK NIDJA BOODJA.

*Translates to: We acknowledge Noongar people as the original custodians of this land.*

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work. We pay our respect to the Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge all First Nations Peoples and their immutable strength, resilience and connection to land and country.

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# A word from our Chairperson

George Bernard Shaw wrote that **“progress is impossible without change”**.

That phrase has played on my mind this past year at WAAC. There has been a lot of change at WAAC this past year, almost all of it positive. This is not for the sake of activity, but about setting WAAC up to better meet the needs of the community.

Perhaps the most public change was that of our CEO. CEO appointments consume a great deal of time, though all staffing decisions are significant. Given the breadth of engagements the CEO has, the role gets more attention. Máiréad Grant began acting as CEO of WAAC in June 2023 when Lisa Dobrin went on leave and continued in this role following her resignation in July until Daniel Vujcich joined us in November.

Working with Máiréad has been one of the great joys of my time at WAAC. She has both great humour and the capacity to deliver, which is a very rare combination. Acting roles are challenging, you are charged with keeping the ship sailing when everyone is asking who the captain is. Máiréad did that better than anyone else I have seen do it, she focused her colleagues and the entire WAAC community on our values, mission and goals. We owe her a great debt of gratitude for her contributions during that time, and more generally; as we do with those that supported her.

With Daniel being appointed as our CEO in November, we have leaned into our historical strengths and are forging a modern path of sustainability.

Daniel has been busy in the role. Amongst other things, he has led increased engagement with people living with HIV, the queer community, multicultural communities, our funders and more he has also undertaken an organisational restructure, overseen a reforming of a suite of policies and processes and seen an overall re-energising of the organisation, internally and externally. These are significant things to do, and are built on the long history of WAAC.

Daniel’s energy is infectious and we are very pleased to see him engaging the unique strengths and qualities of Máiréad now as Deputy CEO and Manager of Social Support Services, Sharmila Radha Krishnan as Manager of Clinical and Therapeutic Services, Marcus Shaw as Manager of Population Health and Community Development and Soko Enkh as Manager of People and Culture. This is underpinned by Rachel Anderson’s exceptional administration skills, which I regularly refer to as our compass and map for the clarity she provides us.

In their time in their new roles, Máiréad has led the expansion of peer and social support for people living with HIV, Sharmila has led WAAC’s accreditation against the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, Marcus has spearheaded three impactful social marketing campaigns, and Soko has implemented a comprehensive staff training and professional development framework.

**We are pleased to deliver a surplus of over \$12,000 for this financial year.**

Of course, not everything has gone our way. As people living with HIV know, our case management services have been reduced. This was challenging for us but we resolved to work with other providers to deliver the quality services we have built and people rely on.

In the 2025 calendar year, my time as Chair will come to an end. I am confident that WAAC is in the strongest position I can recall it ever being in. The future of WAAC will see us grow and develop to serve our communities better.

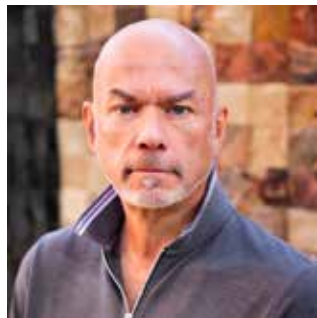
There is no shortage of work for us to do, but, thanks to our staff, volunteers and overall community support, I am pleased we are better placed to deliver it.

*Conrad Liveris*

- WAAC Chairperson

# Our team

## Board of Directors



**From top left to right:**

Conrad Liveris (Chair), Mark Reid (Deputy Chair), James Duffy (Secretary), Justin Clarke (Treasurer), Ali Local (Member), Mary Adam (Member), Matt Skinner (Member, retired February 2024).

# Our team

## Senior Management



**From left to right:** Rachel Anderson (Executive Assistant), Máiréad Grant (Deputy CEO, Manager - Social Support), Daniel Vujcich (CEO), Soko Enkh-Altan (Manager - People and Culture), Sharmila Radha Krishnan (Manager - Clinical and Therapeutic Services), Marcus Shaw (Manager - Population Health and Community Development).



# WE REMEMBER.

**WAAC remains committed to honouring the legacy of those who paved the way for improving HIV outcomes in Australia.**

On 29 November 2023, a community sundowner brought together 19 WAAC staff, people living with HIV, community representatives, and the public to foster dialogue and connection in the lead up to World AIDS Day. On 1 December, a major World AIDS Day activation was held at Forrest Place, featuring a community breakfast with 120 registrants. Speeches were delivered by Members of Parliament, community leaders, and the WAAC CEO. Six organisations, including Peer Based Harm Reduction WA, Derbal Yerrigan, Positive Organisation Western Australia, Sexual Health Quarters, and Living Proud, hosted community stalls alongside WAAC. Participants engaged in discussions around harm reduction, LGBTIQ+ awareness, HIV, and relationships.



An 'In Conversation' event held on 2 December at Museum Boola Bardip attracted 20 attendees and featured a panel discussion with three individuals living with HIV sharing their experiences and insights.

A candlelight memorial at Robertson Park on 19 May 2024 included a moving choir performance by Side Note Choir and a Smoking Ceremony by Ingrid Cumming, creating a poignant space for reflection and remembrance.

# WE SUPPORT.

**725**

HIV Infoline calls answered

**363**

counselling sessions delivered to 94 people living with HIV

**137**

Freedom Centre drop-in sessions

**4**

Weekend Wellbeing Workshops held for LGBTIQ+ youth

**220**

regional counselling sessions for LGBTIQ+ youth

**6**

Peer-led social events held for women living with HIV

**452**

metropolitan counselling sessions for LGBTIQ+ youth

**22**

Social activities hosted to improve the well-being of people living with HIV

**41**

Art therapy sessions with LGBTIQ+ youth

## WAAC also:

Entered into an MoU with Estrin Saul Lawyers to enable WAAC clients living with HIV to be provided pro bono legal advice to help them navigate the visa process.

**691**

Instances of one-on-one peer support for people living with HIV

**425**

Instances of support through WAAC's case management program





# WE LISTEN.

**WAAC is dedicated to meaningful engagement with the communities we serve.**

WAACIFY (WAAC Input from You) is our advisory group of people living with HIV, formed to guide WAAC in a co-design approach. Members offer invaluable insights on our resources, projects, and initiatives, ensuring our services reflect the needs of the community. In 2023/24, the group met 11 times and provided guidance on WAAC's services, campaigns and strategic direction.

On 16 March 2024, WAAC hosted the "Nothing About Us, Without Us" Community Forum, attended by 34 community members. The forum allowed for open dialogue and input, which directly informed the creation of an Action Plan to shape WAAC's future service planning for people living with HIV.

In June 2024, an LGBTIQ+ Advisory Group was also established to ensure that WAAC's services meet the needs of LGBTIQ+ community.

Reflecting on the importance of communities in his 2023 World AIDS Day speech, CEO Dr Daniel Vujcich said the following:

***"In the early days of the epidemic, two community groups in Perth dropped what they were working on to run towards the epidemic at a time when almost everyone else was running in the opposite direction.***

The Campaign Against Moral Persecution (or CAMP) had been working on law reform to end discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, and the Gay Activities Group Services (or GAGS) were raising money to establish a retirement village for ageing gay men.

They set those priorities aside to focus on the establishment of the organisation that we now know as WAAC.

And, sitting here today, we can see – very tangibly – the success of their endeavour.

AIDS has been eliminated as a public health issue in Australia, and we are on track to being one of the first places in the world to achieve virtual elimination of HIV.

But this doesn't mean that the legacy of those brave community efforts can just be reduced to a genteel annual breakfast. Instead, we must always gather **in here**, to think about what still needs to be done **out there**.

My New South Wales colleagues **Justin Koonin** and **Nicolas Parkhill** have said:

***"Everything that exists today stands on foundations built by those heroes who came together in the early days, at a terrifying time when everything they cherished was at stake. We must ensure their sacrifices and achievements remain part of our cultural legacy, and not just because we all owe it to them ..."***

***There are lessons that can be drawn forward, the most vital being the root cause of their success. They were able to build something unprecedented, an organisation that was guided and managed by the communities it was designed to serve, and we must always remain true to that original vision."***

*continued on page 11*

So, what are communities telling us today?

Communities of people living with HIV are saying, “don’t forget us”, in the context of falling notification rates. Around half of people living with HIV in Australia are over the age of 50.

To have a community capable of ageing with HIV warrants celebration, but it also merits considered action to address new challenges. These challenges include increasing comorbidities, lack of social support, and encounters with an aged care sector unaccustomed to dealing with HIV.

To me, there’s a certain poetic circularity here. In the 1980s, the Gay Activities Group services shelved their work on ageing to respond to the emerging HIV crisis.

Today, as we reflect on how far we’ve come in addressing HIV, we are called to revisit and recommit to prioritising ageing as an issue.

What else are communities telling us?

People from the LGBTQIA+ communities are also saying “don’t forget us”. Sexual health is more than just the prevention and management of viruses (though that is an important part).

It is also about having one’s gender and sexual identity recognised, respected, and affirmed.

At the political level, there continue to be delays in reforms to the Equal Opportunity and Gender Reassignment Acts.

Again, note the circularity here. In the 1980s, CAMP sacrificed their important work on LGBTQIA+ law reform to respond to the emerging HIV crisis.

Today, as we remember how discriminatory laws and policies have impacted people living with HIV, we are also called to stand in solidarity with trans people living in our community whose demands for dignity are not being met...

Finally, I note that there are new and emerging communities urging us not to forget them in our contemporary work.

Allyship has always been central to our HIV response, and today, we are being called to be allies to people of colour in our community.

In 2022, over 15% of new HIV diagnoses in WA were among First Nations people notwithstanding that they represent 3% of the population.

Nationally, Australians born in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia are also over-represented in HIV notification rates and tend to present for diagnosis much later than their Australian-born counterparts.

Achieving and maintaining virtual HIV elimination will require us to share what we have learned over the last 40 years and allow these new communities to lead their own responses.

None of what I have described is a pivot in our HIV work; instead, it is all the natural and logical continuation of it.

Discrimination, disadvantage, and social disparities are cunning shapeshifters.

The fact that there are declining notifications does not mean that there is any corresponding decline in our efforts or our relevance.

Instead, we must adapt our work to meet new challenges with the same courage and determination that the heroes of our sector demonstrated four decades ago.

To do anything else is to do them a disservice.”



# WE ADVOCATE.



In March 2024, WAAC established a WA HIV Law Reform Working Group. The group comprises Senator Louise Pratt, Dash Heath-Paynter (Health Equity Matters), Aaron Cogle (NAPWHA), Alex Stratigos (HIV/AIDS Legal Centre), David Carter (UNSW), Nicholas van Hattem (Francis Burt Chambers), and representatives from WAACIFY. The Group advocates for the reform of laws that contribute to HIV stigma and discrimination.



WAAC staff authored three opinion pieces in The West Australian:

- **Help LGBTIQ+ young people tell their own story (26/08/23)**
- **Fight HIV stigma by ditching laws based on fear, not science (30/11/24)**
- **Faith doesn't exclude, it invites (20/06/24)**

WAAC was also featured in three articles in OUT In Perth:

- **Calls for removal of laws that criminalise HIV on World AIDS Day (01/12/23)**
- **LGBTIQ+ groups call on WA government to reject Cass Review (22/05/24)**
- **AIDS Candelight memorial will remember those lost, and give hope for the future (10/05/24)**



WAAC staff met with Assistant Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Hon. Ged Kearney on 31 August 2023 during her trip to Perth. Discussions centred on PrEP, the HIV epidemiology in WA, LGBTIQ+ health and wellbeing and the transfer between youth and adult services.



WAAC contributed to the Submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission regarding current and emerging threats to trans and gender diverse human rights.



# WE EDUCATE.

## During the 2023/24 financial year, WAAC delivered:

- **14 educational workshops** delivered to target priority populations youth, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ communities.
- **20 sexual health educational sessions** delivered to 329 high school students.
- **6 parent workshops** to improve understanding of sexual health education for young people.
- **8 safer sex online education sessions** aimed at the general population to encourage the use of condoms, lubricant and other consumables.
- **8 sexual health sessions** to improve knowledge of HIV and other STIs and BBVs.
- **4 workshops** to build the capacity of peer, social and other networks to influence appropriate responses to HIV and other sexual health issues.
- **7,168 brief interventions** delivered to needle and syringe exchange program clients.
- **14 outreach events** at which the importance of regular sexual health testing and other sexual health messages were promoted.
- **11 events attended by WAAC's Safe Sex Angels.**
- **14 small community grants** awarded to organisations to support Sexual Health Week and World AIDS Day educational activities.
- **10 HIV lived experience talks presented.**
- **13 educational activities** for people living with HIV, including two Treatment Forums.
- **8 topical blogs** published on WAAC's website and promoted to the sector.
- **1,378 peer interactions** as part of the Rock Solid Methamphetamine Peer Education Project.
- **8 presentations** at the SiREN Symposium.
- **1 Big Ideas at WAAC webinar** with the CEO of the Terrence Higgins Trust speaking on the NHS opt-out HIV trial in emergency departments.

## Plus...

- WAAC CEO co-presented a webinar panel discussion with Dr Vincent Cornelisse as part of the HOLA National Workforce Convening (Health Equity Matters). The panel discussion examined the role of community organisations in supporting the uptake of Doxy-PEP, and how to talk about Doxy-PEP with communities. 58 people from across Australia attended.
- WAAC CEO presented at the launch of Changing the Landscape, a national campaign calling for better suicide prevention services for LGBTIQ+SB people across Australia.
- WAAC partnered with RENT the Musical to promote health messaging to be distributed during the shows run in Perth. WAAC were in attendance for several nights and WAAC branding and messaging was on display throughout the run.





# WE AFFIRM.

M Clinic commenced its gender-affirming care (GAC) clinic in May 2023, providing medical affirmation with gender-affirming hormone therapy (GAHT) to trans and gender-diverse individuals in Perth and regional WA. Our GAC clinic is run by a contractor sexual health physician with admin, nursing, and phlebotomy assistance by M Clinic. From an initial twice-weekly operation, we have increased clinic days to thrice-weekly to accommodate increased demand. To date, we have received referrals and provided medical affirmation for 113 clients. In addition to this, we have also provided support and supervision for local and regional GPs with special interests in gender-affirming care, via case conferences. In the past year, engagements with community and stakeholders have resulted in endorsements from national organisations (Trans.au, AUSPATH) as a safe and affirming provider in WA. In May 2024, we conducted a survey amongst clients attending our service, with overwhelming satisfaction of the care received and interaction with M Clinic staff.

Given current demand, we anticipate ongoing growth and expansion of this clinic with the recruitment of additional clinicians and allied health providers, to provide holistic care to our clients.

## Key feedback from the evaluation included the following:

*"I felt like I was treated like an agent of my body... My choice and my agency is always prioritised."*

*"... they listened to what my end goal was and the path I wished to take to get there and advised me of what they recommended."*

*"[I] appreciate that my choices are respected once I make them and I don't feel pressured to have to justify them."*

*"The [Gender Affirming Care] Clinic is a lifesaver; we need more clinics like this"*

*"Easily the best experience I've had with a medical care provider."*



# WE EXCEL.



WAAC achieved accreditation under the National Primary and Community Healthcare Standards.

WAAC won the Community Participant of the Year Award at the WARRRL Change Maker Awards Gala for its Waste for WAAC program.

Freedom was nominated for the LiFE Awards for its suicide prevention initiatives.

An Independent evaluation of WAAC's Freedom services conducted by Curtin University found that:

***“LGBTIQA+ young people who engaged with Freedom reported increased social connection and improved emotional and mental health. Increases were seen in understanding suicide prevention and how to address stigma and discrimination and access mental health services. Community members participating in Freedom education activities reported they intended to be more understanding and respectful towards LGBTIQA+ people and use more inclusive language.”***

SiREN (2023). Evaluation report: Freedom expansion. Curtin University: Perth, WA.





# WE ARE WAAC.

## OUR PEOPLE AND PARTNERS

WAAC promotes a workplace that actively seeks to include, welcome and value the unique contribution of all people. It is due to the ongoing and unwavering commitment, talents and passion of our highly skilled humans that we are fortunate to work with, that we continue to be able to meet our vision of positive healthy people in inclusive, connected communities.

**Chief Executive Officer:** Dr Daniel Vujcich

**Total Staff:** 61

**Total Volunteers:** 231

### Funders

Department of Health (WA), Mental Health Commission, MAC Cosmetics, U.S. Consulate General Perth, ViiV Healthcare, Department of Communities

### Grants

Lotterywest, MAC Cosmetics, U.S. Consulate General Perth, ViiV Healthcare

### Research Partners

WA Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Applied Research and Evaluation Network (SiREN), La Trobe University, The Kirby Institute, Burnet Institute, Centre for Social Research (UNSW), Telethon Kids Research Institute.

### Partners

Aboriginal Health Council of WA, Ability WA, ABN Group, ACON, Alcohol and Other Drug Consumer and Community Coalition, Annette Hasluck (Rubis Consulting), Australian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM), Baxter Lawley, Burnett Foundation Aotearoa, City of Vincent, Club 103, Constable Care, Cullen MacLeod, Cyrenian House, Department of Justice, Derbarl Yerrigan, Equality Australia, Estrin Saul Lawyers, Fast Track Cities, Fiona Stanley Hospital, Geers Sullivan CPA, Gilead, GovernancePlus, GRAI, GP on Beaufort, headspace, Health Equity Matters (HEM), Hepatitis WA, Hon. Peter Foster MLC, K&L Gates, Kennedy Vinciullo Lawyers, Lavan Legal, Leavers Joint Operation Taskforce, LGBTIQ+ Health Alliance, Living Proud, Luma, Michael Felix, National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA), Newtrend IT, Out in Perth, National AIDS Fundraising Limited (as trustee of the AIDS Trust of Australia), PFLAG, Pride WA, Palmerston, Peer Based Harm Reduction, Perth Queer Film Festival, Positive Organisation WA (POWA), Pride in Diversity, Rainbow Futures, Rainbow Community House, Richmond Wellbeing, Royal Life Saving WA, Royal Perth Hospital, Ruah, Senator Louise Pratt, SECCA, Samaritans, Sexual Health Quarters, Steamworks, Terrence Higgins Trust, The Court, TransFolk of WA, Tranby House, Vic Park Pride, View Street Medical, Volunteering WA, WA Return Recycle Renew Ltd (Containers for Change), Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, Youth Affairs Council of WA, Youth Pride Network, YMCA WA.

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