

SEMINAR INVITATION

“HIV/AIDS in our Region: Human Rights and Interventions”

- Speakers:** A/Prof Lisa Maher, National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research & the School of Public Health & Community Medicine, UNSW
Dr Alex Wodak, Alcohol and Drug Service, St. Vincent's Hospital
Mr Gino Vumbuca, Australian National Council on Drugs
- Venue:** John B. Reid Theatre, Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM), UNSW Upper Campus, Kensington (entry via Gate 11, off Botany Street, Randwick)
- Date:** Thursday 3 May, 2007
- Time:** 6.00pm (refreshments)
6.30 – 8.30pm (presentations)
- RSVP:** Jacqui Miller (Email: jacqui.miller@unsw.edu.au, Ph: 9385 1925)
- Parking:** Metered parking available at the Gate 11 Carpark, off Botany St, Randwick
- Map:** <http://www.unsw.edu.au/maps/maps.html>

BIOGRAPHIES

Associate Professor Lisa Maher

Lisa Maher is a Program Head at the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, Associate Professor in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at UNSW and an honorary fellow of the Burnet Institute. Trained as an ethnographer, she has international experience in research, program development and service delivery with drug users, sex workers, PLWHA and marginalised youth in North America, Australia and South East Asia. Associate Professor Maher is responsible for a multi-disciplinary program of research and since 1997 has coordinated the ICON (Indo-Chinese Outreach Network) program in South Western Sydney.

Dr Alex Wodak

Dr Alex Wodak is a physician who has since 1982 been the Director of the Alcohol and Drug Service, St. Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst. He worked with others to establish Australia's first needle syringe programme and Australia's first medically supervised injecting room when both were pre-legal. Dr. Wodak is the President of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation and was the President of the International Harm Reduction Association from 1996 to 2004. He is a member of a number of state and national committees and often works in developing countries to reduce HIV infection among injecting drug users.

Mr Gino Vumbuca

Mr Vumbuca has extensive experience in the HIV/AIDS and drug and alcohol fields both in Australia and internationally. He is a Churchill Fellow and has completed a Social Work degree and a Masters of Business Administration at the University of Sydney. He has worked as the Manager of HIV/AIDS and related services with the NSW Department of Corrective Services, in a variety of drug and alcohol centres as a counsellor and was responsible for co-ordinating the establishment of the NSW network of needle and syringe exchange programs for the NSW Health Department. Mr Vumbuca also continues to provide advice on prisons, HIV and drug issues for international organisations such as the UN and WHO.

ABSTRACTS

Scaling up access to anti-retroviral therapy for injecting drug users in South East Asia: Human rights issues

A/Professor Lisa Maher

This presentation will examine HIV and human rights issues for injecting drug users (IDU) in the context of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) scale up and roll-out in South East Asia. Using Vietnam as a case study, the presentation explores major barriers to scaling up treatment and care within the region: 1) Existence of punitive government policies and practices such as mandatory detention and compulsory rehabilitation programs which violate the human rights of drug users, exacerbate vulnerability and promote the spread of HIV; 2) Absence of appropriate legal and policy frameworks to reduce stigma and discrimination; 3) Failure to introduce and/or scale up evidence-based HIV prevention interventions such as needle and syringe programs (NSP) and opioid substitution therapy (OST); 4) Institutional constraints such as a lack of confidentiality, limited financial resources and restricted access to essential medications; and 5) Lack of human rights leadership by developed countries and, in particular, the forced removal of long term Australian residents of Asian background whose visas have been cancelled on character grounds due to drug-related crimes.

"Australia's critical role supporting harm reduction in Asia: helping control HIV spread among and from injecting drug users"

Dr Alex Wodak

HIV is the most serious threat to global public health since the Black Plague of the 14th Century. AIDS also threatens the social well being, economic prosperity and national security of many nations. The epicenter of the HIV epidemic is slowly moving from Africa to Asia, home to over half the world's population. Injecting drug users account for 30% of new HIV infections outside Africa and most of the new HIV infections in Asia. Harm reduction is an evidence based approach which has been proven to be an effective, safe and cost effective way of reducing HIV infections among and from injecting drug users. It is one of the most effective interventions in the entire HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment repertoire. But in most countries in Asia, entrenched opposition from supporters of global drug prohibition has meant too little and too late implementation of harm reduction measures (such as needle syringe programmes and methadone maintenance treatment). The USA has been and remains vehemently opposed to harm reduction and has used its immense power to obstruct harm reduction. However, harm reduction is now accepted by many nations and almost all major UN organisations with responsibility for HIV or drug use. Although the Australian Government has publicly proclaimed support for the 'War Against Drugs' since 1997, it discretely strongly supports harm reduction including prevention of HIV among injecting drug users in Asia. Harm reduction is based on respect for the human rights of those most at risk of HIV and those infected with HIV. In the last five years, virtually all of the most populous countries in Asia have adopted harm reduction and begun to implement needle syringe programmes and methadone maintenance treatment. Strong Australian support for harm reduction in Asia can be justified on both altruistic grounds as well as self interest.

HIV AIDS and Drugs in Prisons: An International Review

Mr Gino Vumbuca

The level of HIV amongst prisoners around the world continues to be at much higher rates than in the general community from which they come. Whilst this often reflects the higher level of imprisonment for injecting drug users the conditions under which many prisoners are housed also present extremely higher risk environments for HIV infection. The lack of policies and programs to address the risk of HIV transmission in prisons, particularly in the South East and South West Regions of Asia puts many people at an even greater risk for HIV when prisoners return to their families and communities.

