

WEEKLY BRIEFS

AG intervenes in NIB test case

The NSW Attorney General, Jeff Shaw, last week intervened in a test case against health insurer NIB. Newcastle couple Andrew Hope and William Brown have taken the company to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal alleging discrimination over its refusal to grant them and their two-year-old son family cover. NIB claims the couple is ineligible for family cover, because the National Health Act defines a spouse or de facto as a person of the opposite sex. Shaw said he chose to intervene "to defend the State anti-discrimination laws and to oppose the notion that those laws have been overridden by Federal laws". The Tribunal will hand down its decision on 20 July.

Police seek clues to gay murder

Police will next week set up a mobile information caravan in Oxford St, Darlinghurst as part of ongoing investigations into the murder of Kenneth Brennan. The 53 year-old gay man was found murdered in his Onslow Ave, Kings Cross unit on 12 June. He had been stabbed to death. Brennan had been living at the address for two years, with his partner of five years. He was last seen alive at around 10pm on 10 June. The mobile van will be at Taylor Square from 4pm on Thursday 20 July until 2am the following morning. On Saturday and Sunday, July 22-23, the van will be in place from 11am to 2am. Police plan to distribute fliers in the area, providing a description of Brennan and the circumstances of his murder. As yet no motive has been established.

Positive news for access radio

Sydney's first radio program aimed at people living with HIV/AIDS has been granted a permanent time slot on community radio station 2SER FM. Access PositHIV Radio had previously been broadcast as a segment within another program. Access covers issues relating to treatments, service providers, and alternative therapies. It hopes the information it provides will help its listeners make informed decisions when confronted with various situations, such as drug trial participation and euthanasia. The program can be heard every Tuesday evening at 9.30pm.

Fed bill still on drawing board

Representatives from the Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights (ACLGR) have met with the leader of the Australian Democrats, Cheryl Kernot, and Senator Sid Spindler, for a third round of talks over Spindler's proposed bill to outlaw discrimination based on sexuality. ACLGR spokesperson John Davey said the removal of heterosexual provisions from Commonwealth statutes is an arduous task, and that he has faith in the consultative process Spindler has undertaken. The drafting of the bill is in its final stage, Spindler said. According to Kernot, the bill is illustrative of the Democrats' commitment to removing unfair discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

Call for campaign against drug co

People Living with HIV/AIDS (NSW) have issued a call for a campaign against drug company Abbott Pharmaceuticals. In a statement released this week, PLWHA attacked the company for failing to provide compassionate access to the antiviral drug ABT 538. The organisation also raised concerns about a clinical trial of ABT 538 that recently began in Sydney through St Vincent's Hospital and the Albion Street AIDS Centre. "PLWHA believes this trial is unethical and should not have been allowed to proceed," the statement said. According to PLWHA, the trial, which works on a placebo arm system, and involves people with very low immune functions, may place participants at risk. PLWHA expressed concerns that the trial is not being run in co-operation with the National Centre for HIV Clinical Research, HIV/AIDS groups or AIDS organisations. "The lack of consultation on the ABT 538 trial is completely unacceptable," PLWHA said.



Pictured at Parliament House with Federal Health Minister, Carmen Lawrence, are Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights delegates (left to right) Brian Grieg (WA), John Davey (Vic), Anthony Shaw (Vic), Dr Carmen Lawrence, Nick Toonan (Tas), and Jenny Brown (Qld).

Lawrence OKs funding to stop suicides

by Daniel G Taylor

Federal Health Minister, Dr Carmen Lawrence, has given her in-principle approval for part of a \$13 million youth suicide package to be spent on gay and lesbian youth.

Her awareness of sexuality as a factor in youth suicide is a result of meeting held between her and members of the Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights (ACLGR) in Canberra last fortnight.

The meeting was initiated by the ACLGR, who criticised the package — which is part of the government's mental health strategy — for not addressing gay and lesbian youth issues.

Some experts believe that 30% of all youth suicides are related to issues of (homo)sexuality. One study has found

that gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

That belief, based on American studies, has been confirmed by an Australian study by Gail Mason. Titled *Youth Suicide In Australia: Prevention Strategies*, the study, although it did not acknowledge sexuality issues as a major factor, found that 25 percent of gay and lesbian youth had attempted suicide.

While many experts believe that mental illness is the key cause of suicide, Mason's study indicates that although there is clearly a link between mental illness and suicide in adults, there is no proof that the same link exists among young people. Her research suggests that personal and so-

cial factors play a major role.

ACLGR spokesperson, Brian Grieg, told *Capital Q* that during the meeting, Dr Lawrence acknowledged suicide was a complex issue and agreed in principle to target funds from the Youth Suicide Prevention Program toward gay and lesbian youth.

"Dr Lawrence was very sympathetic to our concerns and is aware of the American studies into gay suicide," Grieg said. "She has asked the ACLGR to provide her department with information about gay and lesbian counselling services around Australia and also asked to see the South Australian research on Australian gay suicide rates.

"The meeting was instrumental in helping focus the federal health department on

the problems faced by young gay and lesbian people."

●The Suicide Consumer Alliance is holding a public forum on the issue on 19 July at the Northside Seminar Centre, 34 Oxley St, Crows Nest, at 7.15pm. Speakers include health educators Professor Ian Webster, Dr Meg Smith and Colleen Wilson.

●Young Disciples clothing company has initiated a national design competition to raise money for Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA). Directed at school pupils, art students, and the general public, organisers are asking competitors to design a T-shirt around the theme "Just Live: Designs for Life". Money raised from the sale of the shirts will be donated to SPA.

Auntie outs whingers' IDs

by Mathew Jones

The Privacy Commissioner has found that the ABC did not breach privacy guidelines when it passed on letters complaining about its broadcast of the 1994 Mardi Gras to an independent body for further study.

The Commissioner, Kevin O'Connor, investigated the use of the letters after a complaint was made by Opposition spokesperson for Communi-

cations and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston.

On 1 December last year Alston wrote to O'Connor, saying he had "very real concerns" about the use of the letters. Alston also noted at the time that the ABC had received "over 5,000" written complaints in relation to the Mardi Gras.

In a letter from O'Connor to ABC Chairman Professor Mark Armstrong, written late last month, O'Connor said it

was "appropriate" for the broadcaster, as a government agency, to use information it possessed to ascertain whether it should change its programming practices.

Although he decided there had not been a breach of the Privacy Act, O'Connor said it would "clearly have been preferable for the ABC to identify the letters before conducting [the study]". Names were left on the letters to identify the gender of the corre-

spondents.

The study, undertaken by the Australian Graduate School of Management, found the majority of negative letters were from only five post-codes. Researchers concluded the campaign was organised by the Festival of Light and the Catholic Church and did not represent the broad Australian community.

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"Weekly Briefs." Capital Q Weekly, 14 July 1995, p. 3. Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link.gale.com/apps/doc/MPKBOY680869590/AHSI?u=slnsw_public&sid=bookmark-AHSI&xid=c572c6b9. Accessed 16 Sept. 2022.