

SWOP ON THE ROAD TO ORGANISATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

A two year process aimed at achieving independent organisational status for NSW's peak sex worker health agency, the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), commenced on 1 July 2012. SWOP is currently a stand-alone division of ACON and occupies separate premises in the 414 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills building which is also occupied by ACON, Hepatitis NSW, Positive Life NSW and other NGOs.

SWOP has been funded by the NSW Ministry of Health (NSW Health) to provide sexual health information and support to sex workers in NSW, specifically in relation to HIV and other sexually transmissible infections, since 1990.

Under the terms of NSW Health's Funding and Performance agreement with SWOP, the governance arrangements have been provided by ACON – the peak NSW HIV/STI health promotion/prevention NGO. This arrangement was originally envisaged as an interim measure pending development of the organisational capacity required within SWOP to operate independently. ACON and SWOP share the view that SWOP has more than sufficient capacity to continue to deliver world's best practice HIV and sexual health outcomes for sex workers as an independent entity and indeed, take that delivery to the next level.

NSW Health has offered no objection to ACON and SWOP commencing the process but has been clear that no guarantees can be offered in regard to the end result. Ultimately the decision to fund - and against what performance and organisational criteria - will be taken by the Minister of the day, in eighteen months' time, on the basis of the proposal presented.

The case for a positive outcome is significantly strengthened by the fact that a key component of Australia's successful partnership response to HIV has been the central involvement of communities affected by HIV. Community Based Organisations have facilitated the critical engagement of affected communities and for sex worker organisations and projects this has supported sustained low rates of HIV and STI's amongst sex workers in Australia.

The SWOP Advisory Committee (SWOPAC) was reshaped into the SWOP Transition Committee (SWOPTC) on 1 July this year. Kylie Tattersall (A/Executive Director, SWOP) was elected Chair and SWOPTC member Cameron Cox was nominated to join the ACON Board as a Board Associate. The ACON Board will in turn nominate a representative for SWOPTC at the August Board meeting.

SWOPTC will manage the transition process over the next two years and evolve into the SWOP Governance Board over that time. Importantly, SWOPTC will institute a policy aimed at ensuring that peer representation on SWOPTC increases to at least 50% of the membership by October 2012.

SWOP A/Executive Director Kylie Tattersall says SWOP is looking forward to contributing to the transition process and working towards organisational independence. "We acknowledge and appreciate the support we have received from ACON over the last two decades," Ms Tattersall says. "However, we are confident that the time is right for SWOP to become an independent agency, a development that will assist us in promoting the health and wellbeing of workers in the NSW sex industry."

ACON A/CEO, Geoff Honnor says "this decision affirms ACON's commitment to the principle of affected community self-determination in shaping responses to HIV that goes back to the Denver Principles of 1983 and of course the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion of 1987 that underpins the community-based HIV response, both nationally and in NSW. We anticipate working with all stakeholders to ensure the emergence of a strong, independent sex worker peer-based organisation delivering world's best practice health outcomes".

Safety ● Dignity ● Unity ● Respect

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@SWOPnsw



/SexWorkersOutreachProject

“I’d particularly like to acknowledge SWOP staff for the outstanding service they continue to provide and the leadership of Scarlet Alliance CEO Janelle Fawkes and SWOP Executive Director Lance Schema (recently seconded for 12 months to the position of Associate Director, HIV/Sexual, ACON) in bringing us to the dawn of a new era. I know Kylie Tattersall will continue to provide exceptional leadership as the A/ED SWOP.”

Further information about the transition process is available on the SWOP website: www.swop.org.au

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