

Report of the

# FIRST NATIONAL INDIGENOUS SISTERGIRL FORUM

A FORUM FOR ALL INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY AS  
SISTERGIRL OR WHO HAVE TRANSGENDER QUALITIES

Magnetic Island  
Queensland  
July 17 – 20, 1999

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AIDS Trust of Australia  
Queensland AIDS Council



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# FOREWORD

## AFAO NATIONAL PRESIDENT

AFAO is proud to have been involved in the staging of the first ever national forum for Sistergirls.

AFAO's formal work in Indigenous sexual health began in 1994 with *Anwernekenhe I*, the first national conference for Indigenous gay men and sistergirls, held on the lands of the Arrente people, in the Northern Territory. At this conference it became apparent that there was a role for AFAO to play in helping to assist Indigenous gay men and sistergirls respond to the threat of HIV/AIDS.

Since the review of the Second National HIV/AIDS Strategy in 1995, there has been widespread recognition of the need to respond to the threat HIV poses to Indigenous communities. The Third National HIV/AIDS Strategy 1996/97-1998/99 identified Indigenous people as a priority group for any national response to the epidemic, and AFAO has endeavored to participate in this emerging response.

AFAO's Indigenous project was established in 1996, under the auspices of the Indigenous Gay and Transgender Steering Committee. The project's first employee, Gary Lee, conducted a national consultation which was published as part of the *AFAO Indigenous Gay and Transgender Project National Consultation Report and Sexual Health Strategy 1998 - 2000*. This was the first work to consider specifically the experiences of sistergirls.

In 1998, AFAO staged *Anwernekenhe II*, the Second National Indigenous Gay and Transgender Conference, held at Tambourine Mountain, Queensland, on the lands of the Kombumerri people. At this conference, sistergirls affirmed the need for attention to their specific issues. The need for a specific sistergirl forum became more apparent.

In staging both *Anwernekenhe II* and the first ever sistergirl forum, AFAO was pleased to be able to work with the Queensland AIDS Council (QuAC). The support of QuAC's Brisbane and Townsville-based staff made both events possible. At this point it is also appropriate to thank the AIDS Trust of Australia for its financial support of this event. For an event such as this, which would find it difficult to attract funds from usual sources, the Trust's commitment is essential and appreciated.

The forum's recommendations, contained within this report, deserve serious consideration. It is probable that not all can be achieved. Even so,

they are an excellent source of advice and direction for those agencies wishing to build a more effective response for sistergirls.

This year, AFAO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation (NACCHO). This formalisation of our relationship will help AFAO and NACCHO respond to the challenges presented to Indigenous gay men and sistergirls by HIV. As with the 1998 *National Consultation Report and Sexual Health Strategy 1998 - 2000*, this report makes strong suggestions to members of both AFAO and NACCHO. AFAO is confident that with the support of NACCHO, we can improve our response.

I would like to thank the members of the AFAO Indigenous Gay and Sistergirl Steering Committee for their support of this event, and the members of the forum planning committee.

In particular, AFAO would like to extend its thanks to project officer Michael Costello and steering committee sistergirl representative, Rusty Nannup. Without the work of these two, the event would quite simply not have happened.

Darryl O'Donnell  
National President  
AFAO

## FOREWORD

### SISTERGIRL REPRESENTATIVE, AFAO INDIGENOUS GAY AND SISTERGIRL STEERING COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE

Opening speech delivered by Rusty Nannup, Sistergirl Representative, AFAO National Indigenous Gay & Sistergirl Steering Committee

We the Sistergirls of Australia are going to make living Indigenous history.

We, the Sistergirls who have been misunderstood, because of fear and the lack of wanting to understand. People have used fear just to kick us, because they know no different.

Never again will we allow this to happen. In my travels I've met and known girls who were badly damaged and broken. They have left their home country, just so they may have some kind of a life. But we all know that without family and country we are sunk.

Our own people's ignorance has driven many many of us into the arms of death. Some of us have danced with death. Many have found the comfort of his arms strong, warm and painless, so we stayed.

We, the girls who have survived suicide and sexual abuse are here today. We will never let this happen again. We are your children.

All we ever wanted was love and understanding.

This conference is going to make changes for all Sistergirls. Our strength is in our numbers. No one is going to stop us. We who are willing to stay at home have many things to contribute in our home community.

Remember, united we stand, divided we fall.

## INTRODUCTION

The First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum was the culmination of a vision, arising from the first gathering of sistergirls at the 1994 Anwernekenhe 1 conference at Hamilton Downs, north west of Alice Springs. The current AFAO National Indigenous Gay and Sistergirl Steering Committee (NIGSSC) supported this vision. A planning committee was established, made up of members from the AFAO IGSSC, Queensland AIDS Council, AFAO Indigenous project and, most importantly, sistergirl community representatives. The sistergirl community involvement and input was the most crucial component in the forum's planning and proceedings. This involvement allowed for real outcomes, helped show the way forward, provided the Forum with community ownership and, ultimately, self determination of the issues impacting on the sistergirl community.

This historic gathering took place from July 17 to 20 with 35 sistergirl delegates attending from communities within NSW, QLD, WA, SA, and NT. The gathering saw the bringing together of a diverse range of people with different cultural ideals and values from many differing backgrounds. The forum was held on Magnetic Island in Queensland on the lands of the Wulgurukaba peoples, who were extremely welcoming and supportive of this forum from the planning stages right throughout the event. The support and welcome shown from the traditional owners created an encouraging environment for the participants to engage in discussion that was often difficult and extremely emotional.

The forum provided sessions which covered issues on sexual health and treatments, identity, violence, community isolation, the history of sistergirls/transgenderism in Indigenous communities, human rights and anti-discrimination, sex work and sex for favours as well as drug and alcohol issues. The sessions were constructed within a framework that allowed for the diversity of sistergirls to interact in a culturally sensitive and accepting environment, with facilitators and participants gathering together in large circles, representing the symbolic unity of Indigenous Australians when sharing stories and experiences.

The forum had a focus on sexual health, however it became apparent that this is but one aspect of a much broader predicament. Forum evaluations suggested that consideration must be given to this in future development of these types of forums.

The predominant messages to come through the

forum related to the development of culturally specific education around HIV and sexually transmitted infections, plus support structures that are competent to deal with gender and sexuality issues. The forum unanimously passed 25 resolutions, presenting government and community organisations with many new challenges.

The forum saw many new friendships formed and several reunions, with all participants describing feelings of growth, learning and empowerment.

The final night, after conference proceedings, provided an opportunity for all conference delegates to come together to celebrate this historic forum and its achievements. The theme for the night became *Island Night*, an opportunity for all to let their hair down or, in some cases, to put it on. With many newfound talents and old alike, show time proved to be possibly the largest showgirl event ever staged.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The forum was developed and overseen by a planning committee, set up under the auspices of the AFAO National Indigenous Gay and Transgender/Sistergirl Steering Committee (NIGTSSC). Members of the planning committee worked tirelessly to devise the best possible event for delegates.

The First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum Planning Committee Members were:

Rusty Nannup, sistergirl representative, NIGTSSC  
Robert (Vanessa) Smith, convener, NIGTSSC  
Jo Deanne Bebe Mahomad-Gleeson, Community Representative  
Lilli Lampton, Community Representative  
Cee Jay Johnson, Community Representative  
Kooncha Brown, Community Representative  
Ku Ahomiro, Sex Workers Outreach Programme (SWOP)  
Paula Hartigan, Sydney Gender Centre  
Mark Saunders, Queensland AIDS Council  
Michael Costello, AFAO

The forum would not have been possible without the generosity of the AIDS Trust of Australia which provided the bulk of funds for this event. AFAO is indebted to the ATA for its support of this forum and other AFAO Indigenous health initiatives.

AFAO and QuAC also contributed large amounts of support to the Forum and the event was staged after a collaborative planning process, building on the cooperative relationship which enabled the joint staging in 1998 of Anwernekenhe 11 - the second national conference for Indigenous gay men and sistergirls. The Northern Territory AIDS Council, Western Australian AIDS Council and AIDS Council of New South Wales also funded delegates to attend.

Special thanks must also be given to all the following who provided much hands on work in their support and staging of the Forum: Shirley Johnson, Tim Leach. Steven Gallagher, Sue Stephenson, Brendan Leishman, Darrel Colbert-Whitford, Chris Macintyre, Lee Doherty, Jed Masters, Locke Ludwick and Dougie Currie.

AFAO's Indigenous Gay and Sistergirl Project is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. The Commonwealth does not, however, necessarily endorse the recommendations contained within this Report.

## AIMS OF THE FORUM

The *National Indigenous Gay and Transgender Consultation Report*<sup>1</sup> identified Indigenous sistergirls as a community experiencing high levels of discrimination and marginalisation. The report, based on consultations with Indigenous sistergirls across Australia, highlighted the following issues for sistergirls:

- - Need for HIV/AIDS awareness education
  - Lack of community activities to be involved in
  - Racism
  - Experiences of sexual abuse by men
  - Low self esteem
  - Poverty
  - Sex work
  - Alcohol and substance abuse
  - HIV positive sexuality
  - Social isolation and unemployment
  - Adoption and fostering issues
- Domestic violence

The aims of the Sistergirl forum were to promote:

- Identity and acceptance
- Free flow of information about HIV/AIDS and sexual health issues, including HIV treatments
- Expression of specific HIV and sexual health related needs in ways which will inform the work of AIDS Councils and Indigenous health service providers
- Human rights
- Examination of relevant social issues
- Development of peer education skills
- Opportunities to share experiences in a supportive environment
- The Establishment of a national Indigenous sistergirl network

Magnetic Island was chosen as the location for this Forum as it offered a comfortable isolation from distraction and interruption. This allowed for the sistergirl delegates to meet in a safe and supportive environment, which would help promote achievement of forum aims and objectives.

The original conference flier, which sets out the Forum aim in some detail and provides additional background information, is set out in the Appendices.

## CONFERENCE THEMES

### 1. SISTERGIRL IDENTITY - WHO IS A SISTERGIRL?

Anwernekenhe II saw a change in terminology from "Indigenous transgender person" to "sistergirl". Sistergirl delegates felt that 'transgender' terminology should only be used for bureaucratic reasons, as it was not representative of the diversity within the community.

Discussions at the First National Sistergirl Forum, between traditional/semi-traditional and urban sistergirls around sistergirl identity proved to be sometimes volatile but ultimately constructive. The discussions revealed some insecurities about ownership of personal identities and whether some people were claiming an identity that could rightly be called their own without fear of offending one or the other identified groups. All delegates agreed that sistergirl includes two sub-groups, "sister" and "sistergirl". "Sister" is the terminology for an individual who may identify as gay, whilst a "sistergirl" is clearly an individual who has transgender qualities.

Acceptability around the sistergirl terminology was clearly defined by those sistergirls who were from traditional or semi-traditional communities. These delegates claimed absolute identity with and ownership of the terminology, which is inclusive of not only an individual with transgender qualities but also a sister. Urban sistergirls stressed 'sistergirl' terminology for them was an individual with transgender qualities.

The usage of sistergirl terminology is clearly influenced by the diversity of communities, and will often be defined within a community depending on geographical location.

A sistergirl naming committee was established during the forum, which will determine an appropriate Indigenous name to replace the terminology of sistergirl. Hopefully, this new term will reflect the entire sistergirl/transgender community. In the meantime, the delegates agreed that the term sistergirl would continue to be used, inclusive of any individual who may wish to identify as sistergirl.

### 2. HISTORY OF SISTERGIRL/ TRANSGENDERISM IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

Popular myths from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have often dismissed the existence of homosexuality as part of Australian Indigenous culture. This myth is even more ap-

parent in the lack of visibility granted to the role Indigenous sistergirls/transgenderists have played in the Indigenous community. As a mechanism to dispel this myth and, more importantly, to give the sistergirl community ownership of their history, the forum began with a session of sharing oral histories. Stories of traditional rock paintings in existence and personal histories spanning more than three generations were shared, confirming that sistergirls have long existed and played a role in traditional Indigenous societies.

The opportunity to share stories of personal histories provided all participants with a greater understanding of the history of sistergirl existence and promoted much peer and self respect, generating a sense of self worth and self esteem.

### 3. SEXUAL HEALTH

Sistergirl delegates identified HIV/AIDS as having a major impact on the lives of all Indigenous Australians, however this is even more apparent amongst the sistergirl community. This is a community which deals constantly with sexual abuse and assault, rape, alcohol, substance abuse and prostitution, all of which can contribute to a high risk of HIV infection. Whilst there are no recorded statistics to confirm HIV incidence within sistergirls, anecdotal evidence suggests it is a significant part of sistergirl communities.

The sistergirl community felt that silence from all community sectors around their issues, based on fear, prejudice and ignorance, contributed to the lack of provision of information relevant to their identified health risks and HIV/AIDS-related needs.

It was clearly reinforced throughout the forum that the low levels of understanding and awareness of HIV/AIDS and other STIs within the sistergirl community need to be addressed through education which is culturally appropriate and which has a localised focus.

Strong recommendations were made that all Indigenous health service providers must place themselves in a position to offer services and programmes that are flexible in accommodating issues of race, gender and sexuality.

There were limited discussions around people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and their experiences, due to fears around disclosure, even in a supportive environment, and the shame factor. However, several sistergirls did comment on issues around the confidentiality practices within traditional/semi traditional communities. The area of pre- and post-test counselling programmes was suggested as

an area which needs further development.

Cultural traditions which define the context in which sex and sexuality are discussed, such as the distinction between men's business and women's business, places sistergirls in a precarious position. Sistergirls are often excluded from these discussions within some communities that cannot accommodate their issues. For many delegates, the Sistergirl Forum became the only environment in which open discussion has ever been possible. Sistergirl delegates placed a heavy emphasis on the need for any individual or organisation undertaking work with Indigenous communities to respect this cultural tradition and their unique position in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner.

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*For Indigenous Australians, sexual health is closely linked to well being. For most Indigenous Australians, well-being is not a narrow experience of the physical body: it is also a cultural, emotional and spiritual experience.*

*- National Indigenous Australians' Sexual Health Strategy (1997)*

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### RECOMMENDATIONS:

That nationally applicable Indigenous sistergirl resource materials be developed by AFAO/ACON/NACCHO/AIDS Councils and AMSs and that these resources address safe sex and drug use, gender issues and mental health.

That AIDS Councils, AMSs and other health organisation establish support groups for sistergirls.

That AFAO develop a national sistergirl sexual health strategy to complement the Indigenous Gay and Transgender Sexual Health Strategy 1998-2000.

Sexual Health Clinics make office space and other support available to sistergirl communities so that support groups may be run.

Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide counselling services for sistergirls, with this counselling ideally being provided by sistergirls themselves.

That agencies funded to participate in sexual health forums and conferences promote Indigenous sistergirl involvement in these events.

That AMSs and sexual health clinics improve confidentiality practices.

That AMSs and AIDS Councils conduct HIV/AIDS and sexual health workshops for sistergirls and employ sistergirls to conduct this training where possible.

That NACCHO promote cultural appropriateness in health services to Indigenous Australians, and to that end, ensure that non-Indigenous providers of health services to Indigenous Australians provide diagnoses, tests and treatments which are culturally appropriate and which address the needs of sistergirls.

#### **4. COMMUNITY ISOLATION**

Community and social isolations were workshopped to explore the different types of isolation and the effects of isolation on the sistergirl community. Once the types of isolation that exist were identified, participants discussed at length its consequences.

Many experiences were shared confirming isolation occurring through discrimination, exclusion from traditional ceremonies and activities, lack of awareness and acknowledgment of sistergirl/transgender issues, and remoteness.

Lack of awareness and acknowledgment by the wider community of sistergirl culture was highlighted as the major barrier to gaining community acceptance. This exclusion results in an inability to participate effectively in community activities.

The toxic effects of social exclusion significantly exacerbate the poor physical, physiological and emotional environmental and spiritual health of Indigenous people. Connectiveness is an essential aspect of our well-being.

The need for family and community reconciliation was recognised as an important process for attempting to overcome some of the different forms of isolation.

This type of forum proved to be one small aspect of breaking down isolation and allowed for networking to take place - in turn providing sistergirl delegates with a sense of belonging.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That AFAO investigate the possibilities around an 1800 line for use by sistergirls across Australia to facilitate support and information exchange.

That the AFAO NIGSSC investigates other options to promote communication and education within sistergirl communities including a database, newsletter and website.

That a national Indigenous sistergirls network be created, with the support of AFAO and the AFAO NIGSSC, to promote education, information, communication and networking and support the sistergirls representative on the NIGSSC, and that this network include sistergirls from the Torres Strait Islands where possible.

That governments and government-funded agencies promote employment opportunities and training for sistergirls, particularly in the health sector.

That Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide support, education and counselling to the families of sistergirls to promote family reconciliation.

#### **5. VIOLENCE**

The forum programme had initially built into its structure a session on domestic violence and sexual abuse by men and its consequences. In the lead up to this session it became apparent that these issues were overwhelmingly significant for the sistergirl delegates, given the environmental history that these issues have in Indigenous society. To give justice to the session and both issues, sistergirl delegates agreed that domestic violence and sexual abuse should not be run together which resulted in a workshop concentrating on violence. This decision was not made lightly, considering the impact of sexual abuse on the sistergirl community, and that some sistergirls had come to the forum specifically to discuss 'sexual abuse issues' and personal grief. To accommodate sistergirls with issues around sexual abuse, individual consultations were set up with the session facilitators. All participants at the Forum agreed that in any future gatherings of sistergirls there must be discussion and exploration of these significant issues. In the event of such future gathering, it will be important to consider aspects of discussing violence and abuse such as allowing adequate time, ensuring the presence of counsellors and working to ensure a safe environment.

Many types of violence were identified: physical, psychological, emotional, verbal, and community. The most common forms of violence perpetrated against the sistergirl community appeared to be physical assault, sexual assault and rape.

Sistergirls identified that in many instances, violence has been accepted as part of life within Indigenous communities and that we have come to accept it as a normal part of existence. It was

agreed that the Sistergirl community needs to dispel the popular view that this behaviour is acceptable and normal and seek mechanisms to alleviate the problems associated with this violence.

We recognise that current support networks and services are not addressing the issues faced around violence and its consequences. Consideration must be given to culturally appropriate programmes, addressing historical influence, race, gender and sexuality.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

That safety for sistergirls be safeguarded by the provision of appropriately located safety houses where necessary.

That Aboriginal Legal Services ensure their services are accessible to all Indigenous Australians, particularly sistergirls, and that these

services be funded adequately to provide necessary legal representation.

Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide support, education and counselling to the families of sistergirls to promote family reconciliation.

That governments fund community and school anti-violence programs, and that they include sistergirl issues.

That all corrective services, juvenile justice and prison authorities respect the gender of sistergirls as is currently done in NSW, and that visits to sistergirls by other sistergirls be facilitated for counselling purposes.

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## Recommendations

### PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That governments and government-funded agencies promote employment opportunities and training for sistergirls, particularly in the health sector.
2. That safety for sistergirls be safeguarded by the provision of appropriately located safety houses where necessary.
3. That there be a second national sistergirl forum within two years.
4. That AFAO investigate the possibilities round an 1800 line for use by sistergirls across Australia to facilitate support and information exchange.
5. That AFAO develop a national sistergirl sexual health strategy to complement the Indigenous Gay and Transgender Sexual Health Strategy 1998 - 2000.
6. That Aboriginal Legal Services ensure their services are accessible to all Indigenous Australians, particularly sistergirls, and that these services be funded adequately to provide necessary legal representation.
7. Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide support, education and counselling to the families of sistergirls to promote family reconciliation.
8. That agencies funded to participate in sexual health forums and conferences promote Indigenous sistergirl involvement in these events.
9. That AMSs and sexual health clinics improve confidentiality practices.
10. That AMSs and AIDS Councils conduct HIV/AIDS and sexual health workshops for sistergirls and employ sistergirls to conduct this training where possible.
11. That all corrective services, juvenile justice and prison authorities respect the gender of sistergirls as is currently done in NSW, and that visits to sistergirls by other sistergirls be facilitated for counselling purposes.
12. That the full costs of gender reassignment surgery be covered under the Commonwealth Medicare system.
13. That Indigenous and all government housing authorities allocate housing to sistergirls on a non-discriminatory basis and recognise the particular housing needs which sistergirls may have due to marginalisation.
14. That a national Indigenous sistergirls network be created, with the support of AFAO and the AFAO IGSSC, to promote education, information, communication and networking

and support the sistergirls representative on the IGSSC, and that this network include sistergirls from the Torres Strait Islands where possible.

15. That NACCHO promote cultural appropriateness in health services to Indigenous Australians, and to that end, ensure that non-Indigenous providers of health services to Indigenous Australians provide diagnoses, tests and treatments which are culturally appropriate and which address the needs of sistergirls.

## OTHER RECOMENDATIONS

1. That "sistagirl" from now on be spelled "sistergirl".
2. . That the sistergirls forum-naming committee established during the forum determine an appropriate Indigenous name for sistergirl and for future forums
3. That governments fund community and school anti-violence programs, and that they include sistergirl issues.
4. That Anwernekenhe III promotes the inclusion of sistergirls with specific satellite streams/sessions for sistergirls.
5. That nationally applicable Indigenous sistergirl resource materials be developed by AFAO/NACCHO/AIDS Councils and AMSs and that these resources address safe sex and drug use, gender issues and mental health.
6. Those resource materials developed are available in Indigenous community languages and in audio form where possible.
7. That the AFAO IGSSC investigates other options to promote communication and education within sistergirl communities including a database, newsletter and website.
8. That AIDS Councils, AMSs and other health organisations establish support groups for sistergirls.
9. Sexual Health Clinics make office space and other support available to sistergirl communities so that support groups may be run.
10. Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide counselling services for sistergirls, with this counselling ideally being provided by sistergirls themselves.

# National Indigenous Sistagirl Forum

## A Forum for all Indigenous People who Identify as Sistagirl or who have Transgender Qualities

July 17 - 20, 1999  
Magnetic Island/Townsville, Queensland

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations and the Queensland AIDS Council are jointly staging the first ever national forum for Indigenous sistagirls (transgenders). The forum will promote:

- **identity and acceptance**
- **free flow of information about HIV/AIDS and sexual health issues, HIV treatments and human rights**
- **education, training and employment opportunities**
- **examination of relevant social issues**
- **opportunities to share experiences in a supportive environment**
- **development of peer education skills**
- **expression of specific HIV- and sexual health-related needs in ways which will inform the work of AIDS Councils and Indigenous health service providers**
- **establishment of a national Indigenous sistagirl network**

Sistagirls are a particularly marginalised minority within a community which already experiences high levels of discrimination and disadvantage. Some of these experiences of discrimination and social isolation are detailed in a Report completed by AFAO last year. The Report was based on consultations with Indigenous sistagirls across Australia. AFAO's Report identified the following prominent issues for Indigenous sistagirls:

- need for HIV/AIDS awareness education;
- lack of community activities to be involved in
- racism
- experiences of sexual abuse by men
- low self esteem
- poverty
- sex work
- alcohol and substance abuse
- HIV positive sexuality
- social isolation
- unemployment;
- adoption and fostering issues;

- domestic violence

As a consequence of their marginalisation, sistergirls are difficult for HIV/AIDS and Indigenous health agencies to reach with safe sex education and support services. This perpetuates low levels of HIV and sexual health awareness and contributes to what is believed to be disproportionately high rates of STI and HIV infection within this community. While there is no hard research data to show high HIV prevalence within the sistergirl community, anecdotal evidence and common sense mandate immediate action in this area.

A 1994 AFAO-auspiced study, *Transgender Lifestyles and HIV/AIDS Risk*, identified the following in relation to transys:

- reduced employment potential
- high levels of loneliness
- high levels of involvement in sex work
- sexual assault
- high STI prevalence
- need for acceptance
- engagement in HIV risk practices
- discrimination and social ostracism

While the study did not interview many Indigenous transys, it is believed that these issues are also highly relevant to sistagirls.

There have been two national gatherings of Indigenous gay men and sistergirls, the Anwernekenhe (1994) and Anwernekenhe 11 (1998) conferences. The experiences shared by sistagirls at these conferences confirm that the issues listed above are pertinent and in urgent need of a national response.

The program will cover the following issues:

- alcohol and drug use issues
- experience of sexual abuse by men and low self-esteem
- racism
- HIV awareness including issues of HIV + sexuality

- unemployment, poverty and sex work
- social isolation, lack of inclusion in family and community activities, violence, participation in Indigenous women's groups
- sexuality and identity
- health issues including pre- and post-operative issues, hormone treatment and gender reassignment, mental health including suicide
- domestic violence
- general health (health maintenance and sexual health)
- discrimination in employment, social security
- legal issues (human rights, discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexuality, race or occupation)
- building networks and political action (lobbying and advocacy)
- treatments (HCV, HIV, compliance issues and drug interactions including interactions with illicit drugs and hormone treatments)
- community place (history of transgenderism, role in communities)
- adoption and fostering issues

It is hoped that scholarships will be available to support attendance by up to 30 sistagirls. A limited number of AIDS Council and Indigenous health service employees may also attend at their own cost. Indigenous transgenders from other countries, particularly in the Pacific region, are also invited to attend on the understanding that they find their own funding. At least part of the conference will be closed to sistergirls only.

For more details, please contact Rusty Nannup (sistagirl representative on the AFAO Indigenous Gay and Sistagirl Steering Committee) or Michael Costello (AFAO Indigenous Gay and Sistagirl Project Officer) on 02 9281 1999, fax 02 9281 1044 or e-mail [afao@rainbow.net.au](mailto:afao@rainbow.net.au).

Registration forms are available from AFAO.

Generously sponsored by the AIDS Trust of Australia.

<sup>1</sup> Written by Gary Lee for AFAO, 1988

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AIDS Trust of Australia  
Queensland AIDS Council

