**MEDIA STATEMENT 15 AUGUST 2019 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**ACON RESPONSE TO REPORT ON MANDATORY TESTING**

**The following statement is in response to *The Daily Telegraph*’s story titled ‘Agonising AIDS wait for cops amid NSW blood test farce’ on Thursday 15 August. Statement to be attributed to ACON CEO Nicolas Parkhill.**

“ACON strongly opposes the introduction of mandatory testing of individuals whose bodily fluids come into contact with emergency services personnel, including police officers. Mandatory disease testing of people is ineffective in reducing harm or risk to people involved in potential exposure incidents.

“We strongly believe in the importance of the wellbeing and safety of emergency service personnel. We agree they must be protected as much as is reasonably possible in a high-level occupational risk environment, but the proposal by the NSW Police Association to give police the power to mandatorily test offenders is very concerning and lacks an evidence base.

“The premise of mandatory testing is based on outdated, 30-year old notions of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and other BBV (blood-borne virus) transmission risk.

“International health bodies such as UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation oppose mandatory testing on the basis that it compromises public health initiatives and efforts to eliminate HIV and other BBV transmission.

“Punitive laws based on outdated misconceptions and myths about how HIV and other BBVs are transmitted, and which perpetuate stigma and discrimination need to be repealed, not introduced during a time where HIV notifications are reducing in NSW and HIV is a treatable and manageable condition.

“The proposal has no basis in medical evidence. Further, BBVs have a varied and at times extended window period for the detection of a transmission and as such, testing the source of exposure is not an effective method for gaining ‘peace of mind’ of one’s own test results.

“The mechanisms proposed will do little to address stress for police or their families who believe they’ve been put at risk of BBV infection, much of which is based on misunderstanding of the ways in which BBVs are transmitted. In the case of HIV, it is not transmissible through saliva. There have been no cases of saliva being a transmission route for HIV in Australia.

“Mandatory testing would violate state and national guidelines that indicate testing should be voluntary except in exceptional circumstances. Given that saliva is not considered a risk for blood-borne viruses, this act would not cross the threshold for mandatory testing under current policy settings in Australia.

“Mandatory disease testing of individuals infringes on the human rights of individuals, and increase community stigmatisation of people living with HIV, Hepatitis B (HBV) and Hepatitis C (HCV).

“It has the potential to further exacerbate stigma and discrimination of marginalised populations including people living with mental illness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people who are homeless, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, sex workers and people who use drugs – communities that already face disproportion discrimination against on the basis of these attributes.

“ACON, along with the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations and six other leading HIV and BBV organisations put forward a policy position paper on this issue to the NSW Government in October 2018.”

**The paper can be accessed** [**here**](https://www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/18201-Mandatory-Testing-Paper-V7_WT-V0-small.pdf)**.**

“We condemn the inflammatory language throughout the article, such as the use of AIDS when referring to HIV. Sensational reporting fuels stigma experienced by people living with HIV, perpetuates outdated myths and stereotypes, increases social isolation among communities affected by HIV and undermines HIV prevention efforts.”

“AIDS, which stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome, describes the most advanced stages of HIV infection. Someone who has an AIDS diagnosis has a syndrome characterised by a severely weakened immune system and typically has debilitating symptoms. Due to the effectiveness of modern antiretroviral treatments, AIDS diagnoses are now rare in Australia.”

“HIV is the virus that can lead to the condition called AIDS. The use of AIDS to refer to HIV is inaccurate and outdated.”

**For further information on guidelines on HIV reporting, visit the HIV Media Guide website** [**here**](http://www.hivmediaguide.org.au/index.html)**.**