

Journalism lecturers work to improve HIV and STIs awareness

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HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Western Australia are at their highest level in 20 years.

In response to this worrying escalation and the public need for accurate and balanced information about these diseases, two ECU journalism lecturers, in partnership with the WA AIDS Council (WAAC), developed a pilot project that included several media education and training sessions for WAAC staff.

The aim was to enable the WAAC staff to be proactive with the media and to share and target health information more skilfully and effectively.

The project - *Beyond the Red Ribbon* – was sponsored by WAAC and ECU through an ECU industry partnership grant – and it has seen more than 40 WAAC staff participate in training sessions led by ECU Journalism lecturers, Associate Professor Trevor Cullen and Ruth Callaghan from the School of Communications and Arts.

Andrew Burry Chief Executive Officer of the WAAC said the feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive and appreciative.

"Learning what to do when a journalist calls, how to conduct interviews and how to maintain contacts afterwards has been really invaluable in getting essential information out to a variety of communities," he said.

The next phase of the project is underway with the dissemination and translation of the research findings.

Mr Burry said HIV is not just a WAAC or West Australian problem.

"It's an international problem with more than 35 million people still infected with the virus. We therefore see this phase as being of utmost importance," he said.

Professor Cullen has been involved with HIV and health journalism for more than twenty years. He said this pilot project allowed media-trained health workers to use social and broadcast media more effectively.

"It's a practical way to lessen fear and stigma about diseases like HIV and STIs," Professor Cullen said.

"The pilot project provides a model framework that could be applied to a broader range of health promotion and disease prevention issues like heart disease, diabetes and obesity," he said.

The ECU – Industry Grant also enabled Professor Cullen to run media education and training workshops for 134 HIV leaders from 22 HIV affected countries at the International AIDS conference in Melbourne in July 2014.



Associate Professor Trevor Cullen and Ruth Callaghan from the School of Communications and Arts developed the media training project *Beyond the Red Ribbon* with the WA Aids Council.