

Media Release

People For Sex Worker Rights in Western Australia

19 February 2016

Allegations of HIV transmission have been made against a transgender person living with HIV, who was also a sex worker in Western Australia.

People for Sex Worker Rights in Western Australia, the peer-led advocacy group for sex workers in Western Australia, does not support criminalisation of consensual sexual activity, including when transmission of a sexually transmitted infection occurs. While we cannot comment on a case before the courts, we believe that sexual health should be treated as a public health issue, not a criminal one.

“Safer sex is the responsibility of everyone engaging in a sexual activity, not just one party,” said People For Sex Worker Rights in WA president Rebecca Davies.

“We have continually seen, both within Australia and globally, that prosecuting people for cases of this nature result in poorer public health outcomes, and a reduction in people going in for sexual health testing. UNAIDS has raised concerns that such criminal laws create disincentives to testing, create a false sense of security for those who believe themselves to be HIV-negative, reinforce stigma against people living with HIV, and result in selective prosecution of people with HIV among otherwise marginalised communities. We share these concerns.”

“It has been extremely disappointing to see the media actively encouraging stigma towards people living with HIV, transgender women and sex workers in their reporting of this case. Such reporting only serves to create fear and misinformation, when it should highlight the need for drastic improvement in public sexual health education.

“We are also extremely disappointed to see repeated transphobic reporting towards the sex worker concerned, including referring to a woman as “male”, using incorrect pronouns, and reporting of her birth name. There can be no justification for such transphobic coverage in 2016.”

“The sexual health of sex workers in Australia has repeatedly been shown to be as good as, if not better than, the general population. A public health-focused response centred on peer education and harm reduction is a far better means of promoting sexual health than harmful measures of criminalisation. We suggest that pouring funds into policing measures while simultaneously seeing funding cuts to sexual health services around Australia is deeply counterproductive.”

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