

## Happy Anniversary

The people of NSW should be very proud of NUAA. It is one of the oldest, and also one of the largest government-funded organisations of drug users in the world. Even more critical, NUAA has made an important contribution to keeping HIV prevalence among injecting drug users low in NSW (and the rest of Australia) for over two decades. That has benefitted injecting drug users, their families and the whole community. Governments of diverse political views have continued to support funding NUAA (and other drug user organisations in other jurisdictions) after being briefed on the savings to the community from keeping drug users involved in the design and implementation of HIV prevention strategies. Sometimes the same politicians who agreed to fund NUAA when in government had previously criticised this funding while in opposition. It seems perverse to think that the HIV epidemic may have had some benefits for the community. But it did. One of the great positives was teaching us that working in true partnership with groups like injecting drug users and sex workers, previously severely demonised and marginalised, had huge benefits for the community. We now realise that unless and until these groups are treated as true equals and their human rights scrupulously protected, HIV prevention and treatment will suffer. The right of free association, a fundamental human right, means that drug users should be allowed to have their own organisations to advocate for their people but also to make sure that scarce government resources allocated to drug-related concerns are spent wisely and effectively. The people of NSW should also be very grateful to the staff of NUAA. It must be no easy matter for these brave people to align themselves with such a demonised population. This is a great occasion in our history.

*Dr Alex Wodak AM*

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