

PRESS STATEMENT
ACT UP DEMONSTRATION - 27TH APRIL

This demonstration has been called to:

- . demand the speedy approval of wider access to the anti-viral drug AZT
- . highlight glaring inadequacies in the Australian drug approval system
- . and to demonstrate the sense of urgency felt by people infected with HIV about the lack of treatments in Australia when compared to the rest of the developed world.

ACT UP condemns the immoral delays in arriving at a decision to approve AZT for people who have less than 500 T4-cells. AZT was approved for use in the United States in February, followed immediately in Canada and New Zealand. Despite repeated requests there is no indication about AZT approval from the Australian authorities. It isn't even on the agenda for this ADEC meeting.

Yet while the drug is being denied to people with HIV, it is being made readily available to health workers as a prophylactic measure when they are only suspected of having been infected. This is morally and ethically reprehensible.

This protest is timed to coincide with a meeting of ADEC, the Australian Drug Evaluation Committee, the body which makes recommendations to the Federal Minister for Community Services and Health in relation to drug approvals in Australia.

On average, it takes over 500 days for the bureaucracy in Australia to make a decision about a drug approval once an application is received. If it takes that long before AZT is approved then over 500 Australians are going to needlessly progress to full AIDS who may not otherwise have done so."

ACT UP demands that a special meeting of ADEC be convened immediately to consider the data on the early effectiveness of AZT and to move to early approval of wider access.

The whole drug approval system in Australia needs to be re-examined - not just for AIDS drugs. The moral and ethical issues of drugs for people who have a potentially fatal disease such as AIDS or cancer are completely different than drugs for the common cold.

People with AIDS want the choice, given all the available information, to choose whether or not to take a potentially useful and life-saving drug.

ACT UP demands an immediate review of the Australian drug approval and evaluation system, particularly in relation to ensuring early access to effective treatments for life-threatening illnesses.

In the United States there are currently over seventy drugs being used in AIDS treatments. In Australia there are five.

ACT UP demands that the Federal and State governments take immediate action to broaden the range of treatments available for people with HIV/AIDS in Australia

ACT UP was recently formed to take direct action in response to a number of problems in the Australian response to AIDS in which little or no progress is being made.

ACT UP fights for the rights of all people with HIV/AIDS.

This is only the first of the actions proposed by ACT UP. We are determined to undertake whatever actions are necessary to highlight the life-threatening issues facing people with HIV/AIDS. As long as HIV/AIDS is here, so are we.