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**YWCA OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
PRESS RELEASE FOR WORLD AIDS DAY**

The YWCA of Aotearoa New Zealand is calling for both men and women to take the lead and be part of the solution in preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Leadership is the theme for this year's World AIDS Day, on December 1st.

“Awareness raising is an important way of breaking down the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS and ensuring that people know how to protect themselves against contracting the virus”, says Alison Lewin, Executive Director of the YWCA. “We need to talk to each other more openly about this issue and take responsibility for our own sexual health.”

“Women, especially young women, can be vulnerable to HIV infection because they are less able to negotiate safe sexual practices than men, especially in situations of domestic and sexual abuse” says Alison Lewin. “Their physiology also makes them more susceptible to contracting HIV through unsafe sex.”

HIV and AIDS has touched virtually every country in the world. In the Pacific Islands HIV and AIDS is at epidemic proportions and infection rates in New Zealand, particularly in the heterosexual community, are steadily increasing. With women being disproportionately affected by the impact of the virus, women's leadership is now essential in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

“It is important that we continue to promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women and girls, including healthy and safe practices that minimize the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.”

To highlight World AIDS Day, the YWCA of Aotearoa New Zealand, along with a group of other non-government organizations involved in the international development sector, is organizing a free public screening of the film Pills, Profits, Protest at the City Gallery cinema in Wellington.

ENDS

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