

## In Memoriam

### Anthony Smith: 1959–2012

Professor Anthony Smith, who died on 7 November 2012, aged 53 years, was one of Australia's quiet heroes through his life's work, dedicated to improving sexual health, sexuality and wellbeing. He was a leader in this difficult and important field of public health – building Australia's research capacity – and he was an inspiration to his colleagues and to a generation of public health researchers for whom he mentored and provided leadership. Anthony was one of Australia's pre-eminent scholars in sexuality research and his work is highly regarded internationally. Importantly, he never abandoned the community connections that informed his work.

Anthony began his research career in zoology by completing a PhD in biostatistics at the Australian National University in 1987. It was at this time that his community engagement and advocacy activities, which were directed at reducing the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS and sexual health promotion, drew him in a direction different from his PhD research. He became President of the Northern Territory AIDS Council and, in the early 1990s, was Vice-President of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. It was through his commitment to these social issues and his leadership roles in these organisations that he saw the urgent need for sexual health research. Anthony was driven by his belief that solid, rigorous and ethical research was needed in order to make a real difference to people's lives.

His commitment to public health research brought him to the University of Melbourne in 1990, where he worked on women's health and pioneered research on the menopause. His contributions from that time are still very widely cited. It was during this time, as an early career researcher, that Anthony became known as one of the rare academics in the field who understood multidisciplinary research. He became a champion for combining social research with more traditional epidemiological approaches. He was highly regarded by his colleagues as being one of the first public health academics in Australia who walked the talk – being highly skilled in qualitative and quantitative research methods and embracing social theory – reading widely, and always ready for an engaging and robust dialogue. He was, in short, a brilliant polymath in public health and social science more broadly.

In February 1993, Anthony moved to La Trobe University as one of the founders of the Vic Health-funded Centre for the Study of STDs (later ARCSHS). He was instrumental in shaping the work of this innovative new centre, was awarded a prestigious research fellowship by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and, by 2007, was promoted to Professor and Deputy Director, which he remained until his death. Anthony was the creator and chief investigator of Australia's first major study into health and relationships: the Australian Study of Health and Relationships (the Australian 'Kinsey' as it is sometimes known). He championed the need for hard empirical evidence on the sexual health of Australian youth, and designed and led the 5-yearly surveys of Secondary Students and Sexual Health with 16- and 18-year-olds around



Australia. These datasets are the foundation from which evidence-based sexual health promotion, education and service delivery are developed in Australia. These are only a few of the important and cutting edge projects instigated, designed and led by Anthony. He leaves an enormous legacy, having held numerous nationally competitive grants, published over 300 journal articles and collaborated with more than 65 other academics on his various research projects in Australia and internationally. It is impossible to overstate the impact that this work had on sexual health policy in Australia over the past decade. Importantly, he never lost sight of why he was doing research. Anthony had the rare quality of remaining passionate about ensuring that his research was translated into practice. His research has made a difference and will continue to do so for years to come.

Anthony Smith tragically left this world too early and he had much life ahead of him – both professionally and personally. But he lived life well and had the courage to carve out new areas of research into sexual health, and his work has made a difference to many individuals and to changing policy and practice in health promotion in Australia and beyond. His passion for rigor and integrity, and his commitment to social change made him a rare role model in public health and academia more broadly. He was a beloved friend to many; a treasured, loyal and loving partner to Dennis Altman for 22 years; and remained close to his surviving father, his three sisters and his six nieces and nephews. Anthony is greatly missed. His life's work will continue to live on through his colleagues, students, friends and family. He has also touched many whose life has been improved through his work and engagement with real life problems in the challenging times that he lived.

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