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MEDIA STATEMENT

Kirby Institute Director Professor David Cooper, AO, passes away

(Sydney, 19 March 2018) The Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney is mourning the loss of our Director, Scientia Professor David Cooper, who passed away on Sunday afternoon after a short illness.

David's life was dedicated to the prevention, treatment and cure of HIV and other infectious diseases. These diseases disproportionately affect the world's most disadvantaged communities, and David firmly advocated health as a fundamental human right in all of his endeavours. His leadership as a clinician and researcher was extraordinary, and it is difficult to imagine our many collaborative efforts without David at the helm.

David was our inaugural Director at the establishment, in 1986, of the research centre that ultimately became the Kirby Institute, so he has served as Director for the entirety of our history. David was among the first responders when the HIV epidemic reached Australia in the 1980s, and has been pivotal in the ongoing fight against HIV. David was an internationally renowned leader, initiating ground-breaking, collaborative infectious disease research that has saved countless lives in Australia, and globally.

"David's special gift was having both a huge intellect and a huge heart. It was his intellect that made him a leader in the global response to the AIDS epidemic and led to the building of the Kirby Institute. But it was his great heart that all who knew him, his family, his colleagues and his patients, could witness every day. He was first a clinician, and that made him a great scientist," said The Hon. Michael Kirby, who was a close friend of David, and in whose honour our Institute is named. "We will miss him terribly and be all too aware of his absence."

David's record of clinical and academic achievement is unparalleled. In the mid-1980s, his research led to the first description of the seroconversion illness which accompanies initial HIV infection in many people. He then proceeded to take a leading role in most of the key trials that ultimately led to the optimal use of life-saving combination treatments that are now widely available to people with HIV all over the world. In 2003, he was made Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AO) for "service to medicine as a clinician, researcher and leading contributor in the field of HIV/AIDS research and to the development of new treatment approaches." David was working right up to the time of his illness, running large-scale international clinical trials to improve HIV treatment, building research capacity in Indonesia and Myanmar, and leading the trial of pre-exposure prophylaxis to eliminate HIV transmission in New South Wales.

Under David's leadership, the Kirby Institute grew from a national centre with a handful of staff formed to respond to the emerging HIV crisis, into what is now a globally renowned research institute with

more than 300 staff and students, working at the forefront of the latest discoveries and innovations in HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections.

Our Institute is David's legacy, and while we are devastated to lose him, we carry on his work with immense dedication, honour and pride.

Though he was humble about his scientific achievements, David spoke with the greatest pride about his family. His wife Dorrie and their daughters Becky and Ilana were as unfailingly supportive of his work as he was of them. To them we extend our deepest condolences.

Vale David. Our Director, our mentor, our friend.

The Kirby Institute Executive Committee, on behalf of the Kirby Institute

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[Read more about David's contributions to the HIV sector](#)

The Kirby Institute is collecting messages, stories, memories and photos about the life of David Cooper. If you have something to share, please send it to lbamford@kirby.unsw.edu.au

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