

March 19, 2008

## **Cutting Funding=Cutting Lives**

### **A statement by AIDS Service Organizations in Alberta, Quebec and Ontario**

(19/03/08) A life saving post card campaign is being launched by people living with HIV/AIDS, their friends, families and service organizations in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec after the Federal government slashed community HIV funding across the country.

This HIV funding is used to provide direct services to the 62,000 Canadians living with HIV/AIDS and for implementing education programs designed to prevent new HIV infections. 2,508 Canadians were diagnosed with HIV in 2006, 14% more than were diagnosed in 2001. It is estimated that approximately 4,000 Canadians are *actually* newly infected with HIV each year. There still is no cure for AIDS; it continues to be a debilitating and fatal illness.

Ontario alone lost 30% of its promised federal funding with a \$1 million cut in funding for programs to prevent HIV and to provide support services for people who are already infected. Quebec lost 24% of its funding and Alberta AIDS Service Organizations still have no commitment from the federal government to continue their funding which expires March 31, 2008.

AIDS Service Organizations in Alberta, Quebec and Ontario are united in urging Canadians to send a message to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and to their Members of Parliament that, Cutting Funding=Cutting Lives.

“Given a commitment by all of Canada’s major political parties to double the funding by 2008 we were shocked when we learned of the cuts” said Sue Cress, Chair of the Alberta Community Council on HIV.

The Federal Initiative on HIV/AIDS promised to increase funding from \$42.2 million to \$84.5 million by 2008-09. The government’s own figures show that \$7 million will be cut from front-line service organizations at the national and regional levels over a 5 year period. These cuts are occurring as HIV/AIDS-related programs and services are experiencing dramatic increases in demand both because of the number of new infections and because people with HIV are living longer. In fact there was a 43% increase in demands for service between 1993 and 2003.

Lyse Pinault, General Director of Quebec’s Coalition des Organismes Communautaires Quebecois de Lutte Contre le SIDA(COCQSIDA) stated, “Quebec has never before received a funding cut to our HIV/AIDS prevention and support services from any previous Federal government. The cost of preventing HIV is much cheaper than the cost of expensive medications to treat it.”

Every HIV infection that is prevented saves approximately three quarters of a million dollars in direct and indirect costs.

On July 31, 2006, Minister of Health Tony Clement stated in a press release "...HIV/AIDS remains an issue of significant concern for Canada". Despite this assurance AIDS organizations were not given any notice that cuts were coming or a clear explanation as to why these cuts were needed. Information on the Public Health Agency of Canada's website advises that funds have been diverted to a new HIV vaccine program announced by the Prime Minister and Bill Gates on February 20, 2007.

According to Rick Kennedy, Executive Director of the Ontario AIDS Network, "Vaccine research is important for our future, but it should not come at the expense of people who are infected with HIV/AIDS. Our lives should not be any more expendable than people living with other serious health conditions. It is hard to imagine the government cutting support services for people with cancer or other very serious diseases to invest in research that may or may not prove life saving. An AIDS vaccine is many, many years into the future. What happens to our health now?"

Twenty-two years ago on December 10, 1986 a World Health Organization specialist announced that human testing of an AIDS vaccine would begin the following year. A vaccine for AIDS is still decades away. We need more vaccine research and ultimately a cure. However, Canada must not regress and cripple its efforts to prevent new HIV infections and save lives now, before a vaccine is found. Cutting Funding=Cutting Lives. Funding must be restored to the levels promised in the Federal Initiative.

We are calling on all Canadians to join us in letting the Prime Minister and his government know that these cuts are hurting Canada's ability to stop AIDS.

Send a message to the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament that HIV prevention, education and support services are important. Postcards for the "Cutting Funding=Cutting Lives" campaign can be obtained in French or English at [www.increaseaidsfunding.ca](http://www.increaseaidsfunding.ca)

For more information contact

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