

## Media Campaign

**"If we don't talk about HIV stigma, we can't deal with it."** - Rick Kennedy, HIV stigma campaign spokesperson.

Toronto - October 9, 2008

Fighting HIV stigma that impacts the health of gay men, discussion of HIV status and understanding of HIV risk in Ontario's gay communities, Ontario's Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance launches The HIV stigma campaign today. Focused on addressing the multitude of social, inter-relational, health and safety challenges created by biased attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes against gay men with HIV.

Overcoming HIV stigma is about creating a culture where gay men with HIV can lead healthier lives and where all gay men can discuss their HIV-related fears, concerns, experiences, and strategies to reduce the likelihood of HIV transmission.

The HIV stigma campaign includes print, outdoor and online advertising, as well as a fully interactive online destination that brings a face and voice to gay men with HIV and gay men affected by HIV. The HIV stigma website highlights the risks and effects of HIV stigma, helping to educate community members.

Ways that you can fight stigma can be as simple as being more sensitive to language used to discuss HIV status or learning to react with respect and compassion when a guy discloses he has HIV to you. Questioning your own attitudes and beliefs in relation to gay men with HIV and challenging stigmatizing attitudes and behaviours in others can create lasting change.

HIV stigma prevents gay men from engaging in open and necessary communication about HIV. When up to one in four sexual partners may have HIV, and when about 30% of men with HIV do not know it, it's important that gay men discuss HIV and engage in safer sex practices, sharing the responsibility of preventing transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Across Ontario today, it is estimated that 17% of men who have sex with other men have HIV. In Ottawa, it is about 11% and in Toronto, that number rises to nearly 25%.

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The HIV stigma campaign aims to increase awareness in the gay community about the impact that HIV stigma is having on gay men's health, breaking down misconceptions that men who are newly infected with HIV are somehow at fault, that men with HIV lead

unhealthy or more 'promiscuous' lifestyles, or that men with HIV have a particular look, or mindset.

Treating gay men with HIV with respect and without fear or discrimination, and beating prejudice will lead to a more inclusive and strengthened community where everyone - no matter what their HIV status - can feel safe and accepted and all gay men can better fight the transmission of HIV.

Ontario's Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance is a provincial coalition of gay men and their allies from community-based HIV/AIDS service organizations, the HIV research community, public health, policy makers and other community members. The Alliance is interested in strengthening our capacity as a community to reduce rates of new HIV infections and support the health and well being of all gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men across Ontario.

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**Available for interviews:**

**Rick Kennedy**, Executive Director, Ontario AIDS Network

**Murray Jose**, Executive Director, Toronto People With AIDS Foundation

**John Maxwell**, Director of Special Projects, AIDS Committee of Toronto

**Kathleen Cummings**, Executive Director, AIDS Committee of Ottawa

**Shannon Thomas Ryan**, Executive Director, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention

**For further information, please visit:**

**[www.HIVstigma.com](http://www.HIVstigma.com)**

**For media inquiries please contact:**

Pennant Media Group

Toronto Office: 416.596.2978

[info@pennantmediagroup.com](mailto:info@pennantmediagroup.com)

[jonathan@pennantmediagroup.com](mailto:jonathan@pennantmediagroup.com)