

April 11, 2011

Mr. Stephen Harper, PC, MP  
Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada

Mr. Michael Ignatieff, PC, MP  
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada

Mr. Gilles Duceppe, MP  
Leader of the Bloc Québécois

Mr. Jack Layton, MP  
Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada

Ms. Elizabeth May  
Leader of the Green Party of Canada



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Dear Sirs and Madam:

**Re: Your party's position on five key questions on HIV/AIDS**

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network is one of the world's leading organizations working on human rights issues related to HIV/AIDS. A non-partisan body, we represent hundreds of member organizations and individuals across Canada, including frontline AIDS service organizations and people living with HIV and AIDS.

As Canadians will soon be heading to the polls, we write to request your responses to five key questions on how Canada should be fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, both at home and abroad. We would be grateful for your party's position directly in response to the questions set out below.

**Responding to HIV and AIDS in Canada**

**1. Funding the federal strategy on HIV/AIDS**

Canada needs an adequately-funded federal strategy on HIV/AIDS, including funding critical for many front-line services and programs that offer HIV prevention and provide care, treatment and support to people infected with HIV and their families and communities. In 2003, all parties in the House of Commons recommended that Canada's federal strategy on HIV/AIDS be enhanced with funding of approximately \$85 million annually. Scaling up over five years, that target was to have been reached in 2008-09. However, cuts to this funding have been implemented in the last five years. In addition, some

funds for strengthening existing and planned programs and services have been diverted to a new initiative on HIV vaccines, an important effort but one that the Standing Committee on Health recognized five years ago warranted separate, additional funding. As a result, funding of the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada is now almost 15% below the level agreed upon by all parties several years ago.

***Will your party commit to restoring full funding, at the level of at least \$85 million per year, to the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada?***

## **2. Strengthening harm reduction services for vulnerable people**

Canada's National Anti-Drug Strategy, launched in October 2007, does not include a commitment to harm reduction services, one of the key pillars of a comprehensive response to drugs. Given extensive evidence from published, peer-reviewed research studies about the benefits of services such as Vancouver's supervised injection site, courts have granted that site a constitutional exemption from Canada's drug laws so that it can continue to operate without its users or staff risking criminal prosecution. The courts have also declared parts of Canada's drug laws unconstitutional to the extent that they prevent people who use drugs from having access to health services that can prevent death and disease. But the federal Attorney General has launched a further appeal of these decisions to the Supreme Court of Canada and has not granted exemptions to any other such health services.

***Will your party commit to supporting harm reduction services, including supervised injection facilities, as one important component of an overall federal strategy on drugs and as part of efforts to prevent the spread of HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) associated with unsafe injection drug use?***

## **3. Protecting prisoners' health to protect public health**

Across Canada, federally-funded needle exchange programs successfully reduce the spread of infectious diseases. These programs do not, however, exist inside Canadian prisons. Yet the federal government's own research shows drugs get into prisons despite efforts to block them, that many people in prison have addictions and inject drugs (including by sharing makeshift injection equipment), and that there are high levels of HIV and HCV in prisons. People in prisons have a right to health services needed to protect themselves against such diseases. Prison needle exchange programs also make workplaces safer for prison staff, by reducing the likelihood of accidental injuries with injection equipment that is even more likely to pose a health risk because it has been used by many people.

Because most prisoners eventually return to the community, the health of prisoners is also a broader public health concern and taxpayer expense. Numerous other countries have had needle exchange programs in prisons for years, and evaluations have documented only positive outcomes and no safety issues have arisen. Based on numerous studies of such programs, and a review of the extensive evidence evaluating them, the World Health Organization, the Canadian Medical Association, the Correctional Investigator of Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, among many others, have all recommended such programs.

***Will your party implement needle exchange programs in Canadian prisons to stop the spread of deadly viruses and to protect the health of prisoners, prison staff and the public health more generally?***

### **Responding to HIV and AIDS globally**

#### **4. Supporting the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria**

Canada is an important contributor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the most effective and innovative multilateral funding mechanisms for scaling up HIV prevention, care, treatment and support in the developing world. The Global Fund supports country-led initiatives approved through a rigorous technical review process and, since being created in 2002, it has saved an estimated 6.5 million lives. Overcoming the HIV epidemic requires a long-term, sustained effort in these areas. The Global Fund must be able to provide ongoing, multi-year support for developing countries' efforts. Canada's support for the Global Fund from year to year must be consistent and predictable.

***As part of unfreezing Canada's foreign aid budget and increasing our official development assistance to the UN target of 0.7% of our Gross National Income (GNI), will your party commit Canada to contributing, in each of the next five years, five percent of the resources needed to fund developing countries' efforts as identified by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria through its technical review process?***

#### **5. Fixing Canada's Access to Medicines Regime**

Millions of people in developing countries lack access to medicines for AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other public health problems because they cannot afford them. Seven years ago, Parliament unanimously passed a law to help developing countries get less expensive, generic versions of high-priced patented drugs. Canada's Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR) was supposed to use flexibility in the international rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on

drug patents — flexibility agreed upon by all countries, including Canada, to address public health needs and save lives.

But CAMR does not work. It has been used only once and will not be used again unless it's simplified. CAMR must be streamlined so that only a single licence is required to supply affordable, generic medicines to any of the eligible countries. In this way, CAMR can help save lives, as intended. People are dying while Canada delays on reforming CAMR to make it work.

There is widespread support for fixing CAMR, including from humanitarian organizations, health and development experts, religious and community leaders and, according to a national opinion poll, 80% of Canadians.

***Will your party support legislation to fix Canada's Access to Medicines Regime by creating a simple one-licence process, without additional and unnecessary restrictions, in order to improve access to affordable medicines for people in need in developing countries?***

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues, and *we thank you in advance for the favour of your response by Monday, April 21.*

We look forward to sharing your answers with our members and the general public across Canada in a timely fashion during this federal election. Your responses will undoubtedly inform their choices as they cast their ballots.

Sincerely yours,



Richard Elliott  
Executive Director