



Liberal Party of Canada | Parti libéral du Canada

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Richard Elliott, Executive Director
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
1240 Bay Street, Suite 600
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By email to relliott@aidslaw.ca, info@aidslaw.ca

Dear Mr. Elliott,

Enclosed, please find the Liberal Party response to your questionnaire.

For more information on the Liberal Party of Canada's vision for Canada, please take a moment to review our policies online at www.liberal.ca. This site provides details on Liberal goals and priorities.

On behalf of our Leader, Michael Ignatieff, and the entire Liberal team, thank you for writing to identify the major concerns of your membership. We appreciate your interest in the Liberal Party's policies as they relate to the issues which affect you.

Sincerely,

Alfred Apps, President
Liberal Party of Canada

Liberal Party of Canada

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

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?

The Liberal Party has been very concerned about the state of Canada's support for the fight against HIV and AIDS globally and domestically under the Harper Conservatives. Liberals believe that Canada has both a domestic and an international responsibility to forcefully combat HIV and AIDS. More needs to be done to prevent new infections globally and amongst Canadians, slow the progression of the disease, safeguard the human rights and improve the quality of life of Canadians living with HIV and AIDS.

Stephen Harper must answer for his government's deplorable record on combating HIV/AIDS, starting with his refusal to attend Canada's world AIDS conference in 2006. His government left HIV/AIDS off the G8/G20 agenda, treated longstanding non-governmental partners with proven track records with contempt, and slashed funding for research to find a vaccine. The Conservatives must explain why they cut \$36 million in federal funding for initiatives to address HIV and AIDS in Canada, at a time when HIV infections are increasing. Instead, they prefer to mount an ideological legal assault costing millions against Insite, a proven HIV/AIDS harm-reduction program in Vancouver.

Canada must restore its leadership role in working with developing countries and non-governmental organizations on sustainable initiatives to reduce the burden of this disease – especially in Africa, where an estimated 1.4 million of the two million worldwide AIDS deaths occur.

A Liberal government would also invest in ongoing international research to produce an HIV/AIDS vaccine, microbicides and other transmission inhibitors. Further, a Liberal government will ensure a significant role going forward for Canadian civil society in Canada's HIV and AIDS spending and humanitarian work. We will seek to repair the damage to key Canadian international NGOs by the decimating funding cuts of the Conservatives.

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?

Liberals condemned the Conservatives' ideological battle with Vancouver's proven harm-reduction program, Insite. Since coming to power, the Conservative government consistently ignored and denied the clear evidence about how effective safe injection sites are at reducing harm. By placing its own ideologies first and refusing to acknowledge the benefit of safe injection sites, the Conservatives have turned its back on people struggling with drug addictions and their friends and families.

The Liberal Party believes the best way to fight drug abuse is through strong enforcement of Canada's drug laws, and innovative measures like InSite that have a track record of moving troubled Canadians off their drug addiction. The Liberal Party supports a balanced response to substance abuse and drug addiction, which includes enforcement, prevention, treatment, and harm reduction measures. Scientific research shows that harm reduction measures such as safe injection sites help to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in communities, decrease the rate of crime, reduce public drug use, diminish discarded drug paraphernalia on our streets, and increase the likelihood of recovery. A Liberal government will continue to support the InSite safe injection site in Vancouver

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?

As discussed in our response to question 2 above, a Liberal government will continue to pursue innovative harm reduction measures like InSite. The principles of safe injection to reduce harm and the importance of assisting those struggling with drug addictions apply to all. As stated, a Liberal government will continue to pursue the fight against drug abuse first and foremost through strong enforcement of Canada's drug laws, as well as innovative harm reduction measures like InSite that have a track record of moving troubled Canadians off their drug addiction. Our approach to substance abuse and drug addiction includes enforcement, prevention, treatment, and harm reduction measures. Regarding needle exchanges for prisoners, we will consult with experts and practised stakeholders to consider their recommendations on this issue.

Responding to HIV and AIDS globally

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

Canada is an important contributor 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?

In 2001, the Liberal government played a key role in creating the Global Fund to combat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and committed \$342 million to that fund in 2004-05, plus an additional \$100 million towards anti-retroviral treatments. A new Liberal government will recommit to the Global Fund. A Liberal government would also create a separate fund to help developing countries purchase the medicines they need.

In the 2010 Budget, the Harper government froze Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA), removing billions from planned investments. To restore some of the ground that has been lost under the Conservatives, Liberals will re-invest in international development assistance and health, as we re-balance the spending in our international priorities. The government reports that the annual incremental cost of the combat mission in Afghanistan is nearly \$1.7 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has reported that this cost is even higher than what's been disclosed. The incremental cost of the 2011-2014 training mission will reportedly be \$500 million annually. That leaves more than \$1 billion per year to be reallocated by a Liberal government in a balanced manner across the full spectrum of defence, development and diplomacy. This change will free up resources to reinvigorate other international capacities across the federal system, better reflecting the full range of integrated functions and forward-looking engagement that define the Liberal Party's "Global Networks Strategy."

For more information on our Global Networks Strategy, please see our platform at: www.liberal.ca/platform

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?

The Liberal Party was favourable towards the access to medicine legislation that was passed in the House of Commons before the election. Before the election, the Harper government was attempting to kill the legislation with its Conservative-dominated Senate. We would be favourable to such legislation once again as a new Liberal government.

However, we need to go further to help people in developing countries access the medicines they need. That's why the Liberal party supports new measures that will be effective in helping developing countries fight disease – particularly HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria – and advance their public health goals. Access to an adequate supply of medicine must complement better access to basic health services and infrastructure in developing countries. Fighting disease in the developing world requires new supports to purchase medicines, as well as investments in research to develop new drugs.

As part of the Liberal Party's Global Networks Strategy, a Liberal government will re-invest in foreign aid that enhances the capacity of developing countries to manage public health. We will also create a fund to help developing countries purchase the medicines they need and invest in ongoing international research to produce an HIV/AIDS vaccine, microbicides and other transmission inhibitors.