

Election 2008

Vote for action on AIDS



At issue: Cuts to federal AIDS funding

Federal funding has played a critical role in supporting community groups that deliver HIV prevention education and provide vital support services.

The need

Think the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Canada is over? Think again.

Almost 60,000 people in Canada are living with HIV and more than a quarter of them don't even know it.

Each year, somewhere between 2300 and 4500 more people across the country learn they have HIV.

The situation

Over the past year, the federal government has cut or redirected money for programs aimed at preventing new HIV infections and providing critical community services to people, families and communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

After federal funding for Canada's AIDS strategy had been frozen for a decade, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health decided several years ago that funding was too low. All political parties agreed that it should be gradually increased over five years to \$85 million per year (about \$2.50 per person in Canada), and the government began to ramp up support.

But in late 2007, the federal government reversed course and began cutting funding for the fight against AIDS. Funding for existing and planned programs and services was reduced by almost 15 percent in 2007, and the same amount again this year.

The debate

In making these cuts — which came as part of a much broader series of cuts across a whole range of government programs — the federal government says that funding should support initiatives that deliver “value for money”.

Funding under Canada's federal AIDS strategy does many things, from making HIV research possible to helping community agencies treat, care for and support people living with HIV and AIDS and their caregivers, families and friends.

It also helps tackle the things that put people at risk for HIV infection, including: drug addiction, mental health issues, poverty, homelessness, violence, abuse, lack of effective safe sex education, and inadequate health services.

At \$2.50 per Canadian? Now that's “value for money”.

Funding cuts mean service cuts and weaker efforts to prevent HIV from spreading further.

Last year, the federal government announced a new Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative, supported in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. But some money for this “new” initiative is being drawn from what’s left after other cuts are made. Research towards an HIV vaccine is crucial, but it shouldn’t happen at the expense of the valuable programs and support services that have been working for people already infected and their families and communities.

The case for HIV/AIDS federal funding

Cuts to HIV/AIDS prevention and support services injure our communities.

HIV continues to spread and is everyone’s concern.

A vaccine or a cure is a long way off — we can’t afford to under-fund our response to AIDS in the meantime.

Preventing new HIV infections means limiting costs for expensive medicines and other health-care measures — that’s just good economic sense.

Community-based programs are essential to any country’s success in preventing epidemics and delivering services to hard-hit communities.

The decision you need to make

In the three months leading up to this federal election, the government announced nearly \$15 billion dollars in nearly 300 separate funding announcements — making money available to everything from infrastructure in Quebec to tobacco growers in Ontario. Yet the funds needed to support HIV/AIDS services and programs in Canadian communities are still missing.

Cast your vote for a federal government that will:

- reverse the recent cuts to AIDS funding and follow through on the funding agreed to by all parties in Parliament not long ago; and
- ensure the new HIV vaccine initiative is supported by new money, not money diverted from other vital programs.

For more information

www.aidslaw.ca/election2008