



Canadian
HIV/AIDS
Legal
Network

Réseau
juridique
canadien
VIH/sida



September 15, 2008

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada

The Honourable Stéphane Dion, PC, MP
Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition

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

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

Dear Sirs and Madam:

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD) are non-partisan, community-based organizations, headquartered in Toronto and Ottawa, respectively. Together, we represent 350 member organizations and individuals across Canada, including frontline AIDS service organizations and people living with HIV/AIDS.

We are writing on behalf of our combined memberships to request your responses to seven key questions on how Canada should be fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, both at home and abroad.

1. Funding HIV prevention research

Currently, for every two people with HIV who go on treatment, five people become infected. In 2007, the Global HIV Prevention Working Group projected that 60 million new cases of HIV will occur by 2015 unless comprehensive HIV prevention is sufficiently increased. Poverty, violence and inequality put women at increased risk of HIV infection. Women require new ways to protect themselves, including microbicides, a class of products designed to reduce the transmission of HIV and/or other sexually transmitted infections that women can control even if they cannot ensure their male partners use condoms. Canada has previously provided important funding to support coordinated global research efforts via the International Partnership for Microbicides and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. Canada can take leadership to stem the spread of HIV and support the development of new prevention technologies.

Will your party increase funding for Canadian and international research on new HIV prevention technologies, including microbicides and vaccines?

2. Strengthening health systems in developing countries

Achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals, including halting and reversing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, requires robust health systems. Canada can help strengthen publicly-funded health systems in developing countries to support HIV treatment, prevention and care by living up to its commitment to increase its official development assistance to 0.7 percent of our gross national income.

Will your party set a binding timetable to deliver on this commitment?

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

Canada is the eighth largest 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. Overcoming the epidemic requires a long-term, sustained effort in these areas. The Global Fund needs to 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.

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?

4. Fixing Canada's Access to Medicines Regime

The World Health Organization and humanitarian organizations have highlighted that access to lower-cost, generic medicines — including fixed-dose combination products that simplify complicated AIDS treatment regimens — is critical to scaling up access to AIDS treatment for the millions in the developing world currently lacking access. In May 2004, Parliament unanimously passed legislation creating Canada's Access to Medicines Regime to enable export of lower-cost, generic medicines to developing countries. But it has taken four years to reach the first breakthrough: the Government of Rwanda will soon receive delivery of a key AIDS drug from a Canadian generic manufacturer under this Regime. However, all indications are that this could be the last such use of the law unless it is made more user-friendly. The Regime must be simplified, including replacing the current case-by-case process for licensing and instead require only a single compulsory license authorizing export of lower-cost generic medicines to any of the eligible countries covered by the existing law.

Will your party streamline Canada's Access to Medicines Regime to create a simple one-license process so that developing countries have access to life-saving medicines through a sustainable and straightforward process?

5. Funding the response to HIV/AIDS in Canada

Canada needs an adequately-funded federal strategy on HIV/AIDS, including funding critical for many frontline 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 2008–2009. However, cuts to this funding have been implemented in the last two 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?

6. Harm reduction services to protect and promote health

Contrary to previous federal policy, Canada's new National Anti-Drug Strategy, launched in October 2007, does not include a commitment to harm reduction, one of the key pillars of a comprehensive response to drugs. In May 2008, a British Columbia court issued a decision granting a constitutional exemption to allow the continued operation of Vancouver's supervised injection site without risk of criminal prosecution of users or staff, and declaring 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.

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?

7. 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 federal government 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. Because most prisoners eventually return to the community, the health of prisoners is also a broader public health concern. Numerous other countries have had needle exchange programs in prisons for years. Based on numerous studies of such programs, the World Health Organization, the Canadian Medical Association and the Public Health Agency of Canada, 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 public health?

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these important issues, and *we thank you in advance for the favour of your response by Monday, September 29.*

We look forward to sharing your answers with our members from coast to coast in a timely fashion during this federal election. Your responses will undoubtedly inform their choices as they cast their ballots.

Sincerely yours,



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