

MEDIA RELEASE

The World is Looking to Canada For Leadership on HIV Vaccines

OTTAWA, May 18, 2004 – To mark World AIDS Vaccine Day on May 18, a coalition of organizations announced that Canada is poised to make significant contributions to the accelerated discovery of vaccines against HIV/AIDS. However, lack of funding is hindering those efforts.

Indeed, Canada is the first and only industrialized country to begin developing an HIV Vaccines Plan, which includes both domestic and international contributions to the discovery and delivery of HIV vaccines. The development of the Plan has strong support from Canadian researchers, coalitions of community-based organizations, government departments and international partners. Despite this broad consensus, no specific resources have been allocated for the development of the plan, or for its eventual implementation.

“With the development of the Canadian HIV Vaccines Plan, we are demonstrating remarkable leadership on the global stage, especially for vaccines in Africa where 16,000 new infections are recorded every day. Further, we are taking advantage of the world-class HIV vaccine research expertise in this country,” remarked Dr. Rafick Sékaly, Scientific Director and Program Leader of the Canadian Network for Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics (CANVAC). “It is regrettable that no targeted funding has been allocated to complete this cutting-edge work”.

Enhanced Canadian contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS were announced last week, but there is concern that it will take five more years until the budget of the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS (CSHA) is doubled. In addition, no specific funding for vaccines was announced, despite strong recommendations in last year’s report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. The report recommended an immediate doubling of CSHA funding, with an additional \$5 million specifically earmarked for vaccines.

“We applaud the Canadian government’s recent commitment to increase the funding of the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS, but we cannot wait for five years for this to happen,” urged Gail Flintoft, chair of the Canadian AIDS Society. “Furthermore, there is a compelling human rights imperative for Canada to respond immediately to the urgent need for HIV vaccines as it committed to doing by endorsing the United Nation’s Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.”

May 18 is World AIDS Vaccine Day, a global observance of the urgent need for vaccines against HIV/AIDS.

The scope of the global HIV/AIDS epidemic is unprecedented in human history, with over 40 million people currently living with HIV/AIDS, and a death toll of 28 million people.

“HIV vaccines are a critical component of the comprehensive global effort that is required to stop this epidemic,” commented Louise Binder, chair of the Canadian Treatment Action Council, “along with access to treatment and more extensive prevention efforts, including the development of new HIV prevention tools such as microbicides.”

Coalition organizations include:

Canadian AIDS Society (CAS)

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

Canadian Network for Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics (CANVAC)

Canadian Treatment Action Council (CTAC)

Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)
