

## PRESS RELEASE



# Al McNutt: Fighting HIV/AIDS in small-town Canada

*Truro man receives award for courageous AIDS and human rights efforts*

MONTREAL, 9 September, 2005 – In rural Canada, where many people may think of HIV/AIDS as a big-city disease, it can be hard to imagine standing up in front of school-children to talk about what it is to live with HIV/AIDS. It is hard to fight for the rights of people with AIDS, taking that fight even into rural prisons. But from his base in Truro, Nova Scotia, without major financial support, **Al McNutt** has done these things and more.

“**Al McNutt** is a model of tenacious and courageous AIDS activism based on human rights,” said Joanne Csete, executive director of the **Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**. Today, McNutt received the *Award for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights*, a prize given each year by the Legal Network and New York-based **Human Rights Watch** to an individual or organization that has led in the struggle against HIV/AIDS while also fighting for advancement of human rights.

McNutt has also been a leading player in a class-action lawsuit that sought survivor pension benefits for those who have lost a same-sex partner. The Ontario Appeals Court in 2004 found in favour of the plaintiffs, saying that same-sex couples had the same right to pension benefits as other couples, but the federal government has appealed the case to the Supreme Court where it is scheduled to be heard next year. McNutt’s partner died of HIV/AIDS in 1993.

In a town where speaking of HIV/AIDS was largely taboo, in 1994 McNutt founded Truro AIDS Outreach, which has since evolved into the Northern AIDS Connection Society, where he remains a driving force. He and his colleagues have, without remuneration, travelled throughout the Atlantic region promoting voluntary and confidential HIV testing where it did not exist, educating young people and those, such as prisoners, who are highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, and fighting stigma and discrimination against those living with HIV/AIDS.

Thanks to his work, Truro AIDS Outreach was instrumental in getting a grant that enabled the first voluntary and confidential HIV testing centre to be opened in Truro. At the time, the town had the highest teen pregnancy rate in Nova Scotia and very high prevalence of sexually transmitted illnesses among young people, but there was no opportunity for HIV testing and counselling.

“Al McNutt has been consistently generous and brave in turning his own life experiences into something that has raised awareness of HIV/AIDS and helped provide services and reduce stigma for thousands of people,” said Csete.

McNutt is a member of the board of directors of the Canadian AIDS Society and the Interagency Coalition for AIDS and Development.

Previous recipients of the Award for Action on AIDS and Human Rights include Wan Yanhai of China, the Thai Drug Users’ Network, the AIDS Law Project of South Africa, Pivot Legal Society, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, nurse activist Megan Oleson, and deceased Canadian prison activist Laurence Stocking.

For more information about the *Awards for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights* and this year’s recipients, visit: <http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/awards.htm>

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**The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network** ([www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)) was founded in 1992 to promote the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. The Network is Canada’s leading advocacy organization for legal, ethical and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

**Human Rights Watch** ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)) is an independent, non-governmental organization that conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in about eighty countries around the world. Its reputation for timely, reliable disclosures has made it an essential source of information for those concerned with human rights. Human Rights Watch addresses the human rights practices of governments of all political stripes, of all geopolitical alignments, and of all ethnic and religious persuasions. It defends freedom of thought and expression, due process and equal protection of the law, and a vigorous civil society; it documents and denounces abuses of internationally recognized human rights. Its goal is to hold governments accountable if they transgress the rights of their people. Human Rights Watch began in 1978, and today includes divisions covering Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East as well as three thematic divisions on arms, children's rights, and women's rights, and special programs on business and human rights and HIV/AIDS. The organization maintains offices in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, London, Brussels, Moscow, and Tashkent.