



# News Release Communiqué

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## THE MISSING MILLIONS

*As community organizations are closing, federal government presides over the continued steady erosion of federal HIV funding, with \$104 million in funds lost from the response*

**TORONTO, April 16, 2018** — As they close their books on the fiscal year that has just ended, numerous HIV and AIDS organizations across Canada are being pushed to the brink, with some preparing to close permanently. It is against this worrisome backdrop that the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network releases an important analysis of how the federal government presided over the steady erosion of funding, leading to this unfortunate turning point in the history of the HIV response in Canada.

“We are calling on the Trudeau government to restore the millions of dollars in funding that have been frozen, diverted or simply allowed to lapse unspent in Canada’s response to HIV over more than a decade,” said Richard Elliott, Executive Director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “The federal government must honour its commitments, especially when lives and public health are at stake.”

In 2003, following a study of the long-frozen federal AIDS strategy, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health recommended that federal funding to respond to the ongoing crisis of HIV and AIDS should be increased to \$85 million per year. This recommendation was unanimous, supported by all parties. In response, the government of the day launched the new *Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada* in 2004, with an explicit commitment to increase annual funding for this strategy to \$84.4 million by fiscal year 2008/09.

**However, in the years since, this funding has actually been cut substantially — with a cumulative loss of more than \$104 million between 2004 and 2016.**

The Legal Network and others have repeatedly highlighted that funds were being cut or diverted out of the Federal Initiative, contrary to the unanimous Parliamentary committee recommendation and the explicit pledge of the federal government. The previous government presided over most of the erosion, but the issue has also been drawn repeatedly to the current government’s attention by national HIV organizations since it was elected in 2015 — **and still there is no commitment to address the ongoing chronic underfunding of the federal HIV strategy.**

In the meantime, the program for delivering the limited federal HIV funding that remains was restructured. That process and its results have provoked widespread concern within the HIV sector, across the country — to the point that the Public Health Agency of

Canada has finally conceded the need for an independent review, just now getting underway. There is, however, no commitment to address the missing millions in funding.

With more than 2000 new HIV infections per year, and the number of people living with HIV in Canada increasing, the epidemic is clearly not over — and it disproportionately affects marginalized communities such as gay men, Indigenous people and other racialized communities, people who use drugs and people in prison.

The funding erosion continues even as Canada has made international commitments to HIV treatment and prevention efforts, with a view to achieving the global goal of “ending AIDS” by 2030.

“Ending AIDS, in Canada and around the world, will never happen unless the response is adequately funded,” says Elliott. “Given the millions of dollars eroded out of federal funding, numerous services and organizations across the country will be forced to close or discontinue programs despite the clear need that exists. It is simply unacceptable that even as funds supposedly dedicated to the HIV response went unspent for years, now organizations providing critical services are being defunded.”

**This cannot stand. HIV is not over in Canada. It’s time to restore the missing millions. Lives, and public health, are at stake.**

You can read “*The Missing Millions: Stopping and Reversing the Steady Erosion of Federal HIV Funding*” at [www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca).

#### **About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network ([www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)) promotes the human rights of people living with, at risk of or affected by HIV or AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research and analysis, litigation and other advocacy, public education and community mobilization.

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#### **Contact:**

Joshua Terry

Communications and Campaigns Officer, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

416 595-1666 ext. 236

[jterry@aidslaw.ca](mailto:jterry@aidslaw.ca)