

news release

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Provincial government cuts funds for HIV / AIDS services on World AIDS Day

Today, as local and national governments around the world reaffirm their commitment to continue the fight against HIV and AIDS, BC's government is doing the opposite.

Effective December 1 – World AIDS Day – BC's Ministry of Health is imposing funding cuts to community-based HIV and AIDS service organizations, including AIDS Vancouver.

The Health Sciences Association (HSA) is the union that represents members at three HIV / AIDS advocacy and service organizations in BC: AIDS Vancouver, Positive Women's Network, and the Living Positive Resource Centre in the Okanagan.

HSA President Reid Johnson said the cuts are unconscionable, and services must be restored.

"On World AIDS Day, instead of recognizing the need for maintaining and developing services for the increasing number of British Columbians living with HIV and AIDS, the Ministry of Health is mandating another set of short-sighted cuts," he said.

"Our members are the case managers and program coordinators working to support these people, working to ensure that their devastating diagnosis doesn't translate into a death sentence," he said.

"You can't make a so-called 'administrative' cut without having a detrimental impact on program delivery." Johnson said that in addition to the funding cut on World AIDS day, another cut is planned for April 1, 2010.

"Cutting HIV and AIDS services makes no sense when BC has a disproportionate number of people living with HIV and AIDS. Our members at AIDS Vancouver tell us that for some areas of Vancouver, the HIV infection rate is at the same level as sub-Saharan Africa.

"We know from BC's Centre for Excellence in HIV / AIDS that the estimated lifetime cost to BC's health system of one new infection is \$250,000. If a prevention educator keeps 50 people a year from being infected, how many times over is she paying for herself?"

Johnson said his union joins the call to support HIV / AIDS organizations. Representatives of various HIV / AIDS organizations announced this morning in Vancouver a campaign and website designed to help the public add their voices of concern. At www.cancelthecuts.org British Columbians can send letters to MLAs calling for the protection of public health by restoring full funding to HIV / AIDS service organizations.

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