

Provincial cuts hammer HIV/AIDS services

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ON DECEMBER 1, as local and national governments around the world reaffirmed their commitment to continue the fight against HIV and AIDS, BC's government announced plans to do the opposite.

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

HSA represents members at three HIV / AIDS advocacy and service organizations in BC: AIDS Vancouver, Positive Womens 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 shortsighted cuts," he said.

-Our members are the case managers and program coordinators working to support these people and 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 the union joins the call to support HIV / AIDS organizations. Representatives of various HIV / AIDS organizations in Vancouver have launched a campaign and website designed to help the public add their voices of concern. At 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.

-It's shameful that on this very day, B.C. is rolling out funding cuts to community health based organizations in the Lower Mainland, including, AIDS Vancouver, YouthCO AIDS Society, the Dr. Peter Centre, Health Initiative for Men and Vancouver Native Health," said BC NDP Leader Carole James. -These services make a real difference in the lives of people with HIV/AIDS, but also to the broader community."

-Eradicating this disease requires leadership. It requires investments in research, education and harm reduction, in services for our communities, and in our people. And it requires a coordinated effort from all the

worlds citizens. I call on the B.C. Liberal government to reconsider their funding cuts to these critical HIV/AIDS organizations." 

HIV/AIDS in BC: Whats at stake

Twenty five years ago BC was at the forefront of the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, now the province has an HIV infection rate disproportionately higher than the national average.

In 2005 (the last year in which epi-data on HIV prevalence was published) there were an estimated 10,420 people living with HIV in BC, representing approximately 18% of Canada's estimated total HIV-positive population (58,000 individuals). Given that BC represents approximately 13% of the overall population of Canada; BC has a disproportionate share of HIV burden.

In 2007, (the last year for which there is data available) 395 British Columbians were newly diagnosed. The rate of new infections in BC is likewise unparalleled, with 9.1 NI/100,000 people infected annually, versus 7.5 NI/100,000 for all of Canada. In some areas of Vancouver the HIV infection rate is at the same level as Sub-Saharan Africa.

At a time when vulnerability to HIV is so high, why is the BC Government choosing to cut the one sector of the BC community that is dedicated to reducing HIV prevalence?

Checkout cancelthecuts.org to learn more or get involved by sending an e-mail to Premier Gordon Campbell, downloading posters, or forwarding information to friends.

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