



# News Release Communiqué

For immediate release

## **CANADA NEEDS NEW DIRECTION ON KEY HEALTH ISSUES**

### ***New poll underscores concern with national drug strategy, cuts to AIDS funding***

**Toronto, October 9, 2008** — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) called for a change in direction today on two important public health issues — providing sustainable federal funding for AIDS programs and the inclusion of harm reduction and treatment programs as part of the national drug strategy. A new poll prepared for the same organizations by Angus Reid Strategies indicates Canadians also want a new policy direction on these issues.

According to the poll, nine in ten Canadians (91%) want federal funding for the fight against AIDS either increased (44%) or maintained (47%). Support for maintaining or increasing federal funding for AIDS programs is largely consistent across demographic and regional lines as well as income and education levels. Support for increasing or maintaining funding for AIDS is highest among women (96%), in the regions of Quebec and Manitoba/Saskatchewan (95% each), among Canadians aged 18–34 (94%), and those making under \$50,000 per year and less well-educated Canadians (93% each).

Despite a 2003 all-party agreement that federal funding for Canada's AIDS strategy should be gradually increased over five years, last year the federal government reversed course and began cutting funding for the fight against AIDS — by almost 15 percent in 2007, and the same amount again this year. This funding includes money for research, community support for those living with HIV and programs that help Canadians most at risk for infection.

“Many Canadians take the measure of our country based on how we treat our most vulnerable citizens,” said Monique Doolittle-Romas, Executive Director of CAS. “Funding for AIDS programs is an important factor in that measurement and one to which all parties made a unanimous commitment in 2003 — it’s a promise they should honour.”

On the question of what Canada's dominant approach to drug policy should be — addiction treatment services and harm reduction programs versus increased

prosecution and incarceration — the poll indicates that Canadians see the need for both in Canada’s drug strategy. Nationwide, a slim majority (51%) favours prioritizing harm reduction and treatment. This support was highest in Ontario (52%), Quebec (53%), Atlantic Canada (63%) and British Columbia (58%) — home of Vancouver’s safe injection site, Insite. Young Canadians aged 18–34 (69%), and those with a university education or higher (62%) also prefer this approach.

Unsafe drug use is a key factor driving the spread of HIV and hepatitis C virus in Canada. Scientifically proven preventive services, including harm reduction programs like needle exchanges and supervised injection sites, protect the lives of people struggling with addiction as well as the public at large. However, the federal government’s new National Anti-Drug Strategy focuses exclusively on punishment, omitting the type of harm reduction and treatment programs that have proven effective in Canada and many other countries around the world.

“Today’s poll indicates that Canadians see the importance of a balanced drug strategy that includes harm reduction and addiction treatment services,” said Alison Symington, Senior Policy Analyst with the Legal Network. “We know the American ‘war on drugs’ approach does not work. We need a made-in-Canada strategy based on scientific evidence to keep our communities safe and healthy.”

The federal government’s public health agency says almost 60,000 people in Canada are infected with HIV and a few thousand new cases of HIV are diagnosed each year.

As the federal election campaign enters its final days, four out of the five major political parties have registered support for these issues. The Bloc, NDP, Greens and Liberals have all backed harm reduction programs and addressed the need for predictable, stable federal funding for AIDS — either through their campaign platforms or in responses to questionnaires from the Legal Network and CAS.

“We need the next federal government to understand the impact that HIV and AIDS has on so many Canadians, particularly young Canadians,” said Angel Parks, Positive Youth Coordinator at the AIDS Committee of Toronto and a young woman living with HIV. “We need to elect a government willing to commit to a plan to fight HIV/AIDS.”

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*For more details on the poll please see the attachment. For more information on polling technique please visit [www.angusreidstrategies.com](http://www.angusreidstrategies.com).*

### **Canadian AIDS Society**

The Canadian AIDS Society ([www.cdnaids.ca](http://www.cdnaids.ca)) is a national coalition of over 125 community-based AIDS organizations from across Canada. Dedicated to

strengthening the response to HIV/AIDS across all sectors of society, we also work to enrich the lives of people and communities living with HIV/AIDS.

### **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 and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and community mobilization. The Legal Network is Canada's leading advocacy organization working on the legal and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

### **About the survey**

The survey was conducted on-line by Angus Reid Strategies on behalf of the Canadian AIDS Society and the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network among a nationally representative sample of 1,005 Canadians from October 6 to October 7, 2008. The results of this survey are accurate to within +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

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