

2010

Canadian AIDS
Society

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In our 24th year, CAS has been busy working on the three strategic directions set out in its 2010 to 2013 Strategic Plan. We have focussed our energies on bringing the community voice to important policy dialogues, worked to improve national awareness of HIV and provided capacity building opportunities for the community-based AIDS movement.

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Government Relations

Strengthen government relations to secure and expand funding for HIV/AIDS in Canada while informing federal policy.

FEDERAL INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS HIV/AIDS

The Federal Initiative has been the main issue addressed in CAS' Government Relations over the past year. The Executive Director, Monique Doolittle-Romas, has met with MPs from all parties, along with their senior policy advisors and has won a commitment from four parties to see a return to the full \$84.4 million that was promised in the 2005 Federal Initiative Summary. Monique has been so persistent and present on this point that for the third year in a row she was named one of Ottawa's top 100 lobbyists by the Hill Times, the national newspaper on political issues.

Lobbying is never easy. It is often a matter of being in the right place to make the right connection, and as can be seen by the recognition of Monique in the minds of many in Ottawa – she is the AIDS funding lady. The message never falters, despite the slow process of seeing financial policy change. Each year as orders come down to tighten budgets and trim spending, the Federal Initiative remains untouched. Monique has secured a position on the Ministerial Council where her advice remains unwavering – bring the funding back.

She has developed an excellent working relationship with the Minister of Health and her staff and is a trusted advisor on HIV and AIDS. This puts her in a position to advise not just on financial matters, but also on policy issues, ensuring that the voice of community is well-represented at this important level. Through the year she has championed harm reduction, access to medical marijuana and shared important insights on the effect of criminalization of HIV transmission on the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS in addition to championing the need for more financial resources at the community level.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

Increasingly there have been delays and frustrations with the federally mandated Medical Marijuana Access Program at Health Canada. For years CAS has been a champion on the issue of medical access to marijuana and we have not backed down. CAS responded quickly by arranging a meeting with senior policy staff in this program, demanding the reinstatement of a stakeholders group to help guide the program and ensure accountability to those using the program.

CAS also remains active as a friend of the court on an Ontario case that is challenging the access regulations based on the fact that the program is acting as a barrier to accessing treatment. This case recently ended in a judgment that the program was unconstitutional, leaving the federal government no choice but to file an appeal of the decision. CAS will apply to act as an intervener in this case.

CANADIAN BLOOD SERVICES (CBS)

CAS works with the Canadian Federation of Students and Egale to advocate for changes to the Gay Men/MSM deferral policy from Canadian Blood Services. While the outcome of the Freeman court case upheld Canadian Blood Services practice of refusing blood from gay men, there does seem to be some progress on this topic through the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) which is investigating changing its recommended blood deferral period for gay men to five years. There remain several barriers, including Health Canada's right to overrule such a decision, we remain hopeful that CBS will soon end its discriminatory practices against gay men as blood donors.

POLICY RESEARCH – ECONOMIC COST OF HIV/AIDS

Several years ago CAS set out to revise the financial impact of HIV in Canada and after much discussion, research and searching, we were able to recruit an economist. Using plain language, and research findings, she outlined the different costs – from medical to quality of life – and provided us with an estimate as to the lifetime cost of each new HIV diagnosis in Canada. This paper will be used in our efforts to restore funding, but it will also provide us with an opportunity to highlight the impact of HIV on the lives of people living with HIV in terms of quality of life.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION – FEDERAL ELECTION

With a minority government, CAS stood ready to mobilize every time a matter of confidence was raised in parliament. Finally, the House of Commons was brought down as the opposition voted to find the governing party in contempt of parliament. CAS had an elections website up and running within hours, with guidance on policy issues, questions for candidates and a request for all parties to commit to restoring the Federal Initiative to its \$84.4 million as recommended by all parties. This request was responded to, in the affirmative, by The *Bloc Quebecois*, The Green Party, The Liberal Party, and The New Democratic Party.

National Awareness

Raise national awareness of HIV/AIDS in Canada and increase the understanding of prevention and testing thus contributing to lower infection rates.

WORLD AIDS DAY

From November 24 through November 30, during Canadian HIV/AIDS Awareness Week, and on December 1, World AIDS Day, we asked Canadians to *Light for Rights*. Shine the light of awareness on HIV/AIDS in Canada by participating in community activities based on the global Light for Rights campaign, highlighting HIV and human rights.

CAS developed a poster campaign based on the global Light for Rights campaign. Posters and stickers were distributed to members, public health offices and schools, with material available for order from CATIE.

Beginning on November 24 CAS cohosted, with local ASOs, the launch of AIDS Awareness Week with an event at the Human Rights Monument in Ottawa. The monument was bathed in the lights of red ribbons, while participants attended the opening ceremonies.

Members of Parliament were treated to a visit from CAS staff and sponsor to deliver their red ribbon pins for AIDS Awareness Week. Each year ViiV sponsors this event that allows the Executive Director and Board Chair to speak personally with each member that attends as they affix them with their red ribbons.

Finally the week culminated in CAS' third, and most successful yet, fundraising gala – this year themed – *Paint the Town Red*. It featured a bountiful silent auction followed by a live auction, hosted by MP Olivia Chow. Canadian and International celebrities lent a hand, or rather a signature, to autograph red ties that were auctioned off.

SCOTIABANK AIDS WALK FOR LIFE

The Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life is a project of the Canadian AIDS Society in partnership with the British Columbia Persons with AIDS Society, the AIDS Committee of Toronto, and community-based AIDS organizations across Canada. During the national week-long event, cities and communities from across the country hosted Walks to raise funds for local services and programming and to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. As Canada's most important HIV/AIDS awareness and fundraising event, the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life has now raised over \$30 million for community-based HIV/AIDS service organizations since 1996 and has attracted well over half a million participants. Scotiabank continues its multi-year

commitment as title sponsor for the AIDS Walk, playing a key role in expanding its promotional and fundraising capacity, including the development of a new Public Service Announcement that was run on television and at national cinema chains: Cineplex and Rainbow Theatres.

AIDS2010

CAS hosted the AIDS 2010 Booth. This year's booth incorporated opportunities for Canadians to present their work to conference participants during scheduled presentations. Visitors to the booth were also provided with copies of CD ROMs that featured a short video on the response to HIV/AIDS in Canada, a resource library of Canadian documents and a button.

CAS staff also presented at the International AIDS Conference on Vaccine Preparedness, Greater Involvement of People living with AIDS.

BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION ON WOMEN AND HIV/AIDS

CAS remained an active participant on this committee, supporting the work by sponsoring regular conference calls. Blueprint once again rallied around an international conference to develop its biannual report card and backgrounder. This year the model was adopted by Norway as well, and released at the International AIDS Conference.

Members of Blueprint presented at the Global Village's Women's Networking Zone. Blueprint also presented a poster on the development of the report card at the International Conference.

Blueprint was able to secure a six month contract for a development consultant and will continue working with others on developing a Women's Conference.

GAY MEN

Continued work on GayNet, a network of Gay Men and people working with Gay Men across the country. This group shares resources, news and information through a Facebook social networking site. During the year CAS attempted to work with the Canadian Federation of Students to connect with young gay men. In addition CAS reached out to pride communities and local ASOs to help recruit members to this network.

CAS remains active in the Working Group on Gay Men's Sexual Health Project with CATIE and other stakeholders. Through this project CAS is participating in giving direction to a project that includes the development of training and resources for front-line service providers working with gay men.

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Every year CAS develops various communications tools and resources to help spread the message of awareness to media, communities and our membership. Such a diverse audience demands different tools including:

- Mailouts to members that feature new CAS publications, member updates and action alerts.

- HIVolume – CAS' print and electronic newsletter made available to members and the general public via our website.
- Website – after much anticipation CAS has finally finished revising its website and will be launching the new look in 2011.
- Media packages – CAS remains one of the media's first stops for information about HIV and AIDS in Canada. In 2010-11 CAS prepared five media releases, and received seventeen media calls on topics as diverse as responding to the Pope's comments on condoms to our World AIDS Day Gala.
- Social media – staff utilize social media such as Facebook and Twitter to monitor the many issues they are working on in the office. This year Facebook pages were used to promote CAS and our World AIDS Day activities.

Capacity Building

Strengthen the capacity of the HIV/AIDS sector in Canada through the collaborative development and dissemination of knowledge and by providing opportunities for the sector to expand its knowledge and skills at national gatherings.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS FORUM AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Governance and consultation with membership and people living with HIV/AIDS is an important part of our priority setting and work planning each year. In 2010 we introduced The Open Spaces Method allowed an opportunity for all participants to discuss issues of importance to us at a national level and provide direction to the Board of Directors. This year also included the presentation and adoption of a three year Strategic Plan to guide the agency in its work.

In addition the People Living with HIV/AIDS Forum includes skills building programs each year. In 2010 the topics were: criminalization and disclosure, plus a special session Commemorating Canada's Leaders in HIV/AIDS and Social Justice.

GIPA TRAINING

One Foot Forward: A GIPA Training Tool Kit was such a success with community groups that we heard repeatedly that there was a need for a trainers' guide, so this resource was developed during 2010. The project was guided by an advisory group of people living with HIV and the draft resource was pilot tested at the 2010 People Living HIV/AIDS Forum. Revisions, based on the experiences and suggestions provided by the pilot test participants, were made and the final publication was released in early 2011. Copies of the resource have been provided to CAS members and people involved in its development. Training on the toolkit and use of the facilitators guide has been offered at community gatherings throughout the year.

A youth toolkit was also developed throughout the year, with the guidance of a youth advisory committee. The drafted toolkit will be focus tested at the upcoming People Living with HIV/AIDS Forum.

PAN-CANADIAN DIALOGUE ON POSITIVE PREVENTION

CAS developed a position statement, which has been adopted by the Board of Directors, and put together a discussion paper which has been shared with members and other stakeholders. An advisory group has been established to help guide future work in this area and guide the development of partnerships with others working in this area.

VACCINE PREPAREDNESS PROJECT

This project provided a unique opportunity for CAS to collaborate with stakeholders in a variety of sectors including research, community, vulnerable populations and policy-makers, using existing partnerships and developing new linkages. Project partners included ICAD, IAVI, CAHR, CAS membership, Canadian Harm Reduction Network. The project is guided by an expert Advisory Committee.

At AIDS 2010, as a part of this project, CAS hosted a satellite session featuring presentations by: Dr. Robert Broadhead, Dr. Dan Small and Dr. Deborah Money. A satellite report featuring their presentations is available from CAS.

CAS undertook an analysis of trends and lessons from the deployment of the Hepatitis B and the Human Papillomavirus vaccines, needle exchange services, and treatment adherence to TB and AIDS medications in these target populations:

- gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM)
- young women between 18 and 29
- people who use injection drugs
- members of ethno-cultural communities -- primarily Canada's African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) communities
- people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHIV/AIDS)

Community groups were engaged through a best practices symposium and key informant interviews. The results of these consultations and the literature review are available in a report published by CAS.

NEW PREVENTION TECHNOLOGY SATELLITE

CAS cohosted a New Prevention Technology Satellite at the 2010 Canadian Association of HIV Researchers Conference with CATIE, The Canadian Public Health Association and The Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development. The satellite featured updates on research and sharing of perspectives from community and research partners. Planning for the 2011 satellite was well under way by the end of the year with a scholarship program in place to assist participants to attend.

FACT SHEETS ON PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PREP)

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis is a promising means of prevention for specific populations, yet it remains a topic that requires more discussion and education within the community before CAS takes a formal position on it. To this end we have developed fact sheets to help guide this education and discussion.

WEBINAR ON PREP

Working with The Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development and CATIE, we organized a webinar on pre-exposure prophylaxis. This topic was of interest to over eighty participants.

ETHNOCULTURAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

During 2010 CAS undertook a needs assessment of members working with ethnocultural communities in their service agencies. Because of the diversity of needs faced by different ethnocultural communities, the advisory committee for this work elected to focus on African, Caribbean, and Black communities. A survey tool was developed under the guidance of the committee and disseminated to membership using email. Twenty-five groups responded to the survey. Results of the survey were collected and analysed by CAS staff and presented back to the advisory group. These results will help inform the development of a series of teleconferences on meeting the needs of ethnocultural communities to be offered in 2011.

WOMEN AND TESTING RESEARCH

Guided by a Research Steering Committee CAS undertook a series of key informant interviews, accompanied by a widely available survey to research the experience of women around HIV and testing. This research was enhanced with a literature review that scanned both academic and grey literature. Research findings were developed into a working paper that was reviewed and distilled into our bilingual *Women and HIV Testing in Canada: Barriers and recommendations as identified by service providers*. The results of this research have been presented at CANAC in an oral presentation on Health care providers' misconceptions about women and testing.

PLANNING FOR WOMEN'S RESEARCH AGENDA CONFERENCE

CAS took the lead on bringing together a group of community members, researchers and women living with HIV/AIDS to plan for a 2011 two-day conference on developing a research agenda for women, girls, and trans women. Planning for this conference included recruiting private sector funding, as well as working with a diverse advisory committee to plan the entire program. A scholarship process was launched in early 2011 to assist delegates to attend this conference. CAS oversaw this process, ensuring a diverse and engaged participant list for this gathering.

WEBINAR ON HARM REDUCTION

In partnership with The Canadian Harm Reduction Network and Bloodties Four Directions, CAS presented the first in a series of Webinars on best practices in harm reduction. The panel discussion highlighted innovations and limitations of current programs while looking to the future of harm reduction in Canada. This presentation was extraordinarily well-attended, and reflects the need for further training and education in this area.

HOUSING AND HIV/AIDS

CAS has worked with researchers working in this area to develop planned projects that will have a national scope. In addition, we have drafted a needs assessment survey that will be disseminated among our members and partners working in HIV/AIDS to help identify priority areas for further development of resources from CAS, as well as guide our policy agenda at a national level.

HIV AND AGING FACT SHEETS

Fact sheets were developed and reviewed by a group of AIDS Service Organizations working in this area. These fact sheets have been disseminated to members groups and are available on-line. Our work in this area has resulted in our joining the Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation lead Partners in HIV and Aging where the issue will be further explored and more resources will be developed by the partners.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

From time to time CAS, through its support of networking and issues related to HIV/AIDS is asked to house projects for networks that are either getting established or are in need of infrastructural supports. During the past year CAS has maintained and strengthened its partnership with Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, North America (GNP+NA) by working to develop a communications mechanism for its members. This has proved a good fit, given CAS' leadership in the area of greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Canadian Drug Policy Coalition is a national collaboration to build a new drug policy that attains a safe, healthy and just Canada in which drug policy and legislation as well as related institutional practice are based on evidence, human rights, social inclusion, belonging and public health. As a co-founder of this coalition, CAS has offered supports through managing resources and sharing communications tools.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

CAS continues its partnership on the two following projects:

- CIHR Social Research Centre in HIV Prevention: the goal of this centre is to develop more HIV prevention by increasing focus on the social, structural, economic, and population drivers of the epidemic. CAS brings the community voice to this dialogue.
- CIHR Centre for REACH in HIV/AIDS (Research Evidence in Action for Community Health):CAS is involved in this pan-Canadian work that focuses on supporting interdisciplinary research, encouraging networking and engaging in knowledge exchange that supports health service research programs for the national and global response to HIV/AIDS.

We have also joined the Aboriginal Health Program of Research, which is funded by the CIHR Centre for REACH in HIV/AIDS. This team has worked to identify research priorities within Aboriginal communities and is in the process of developing a research project on the experience of Aboriginal children living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

We have also entered into partnership with CANOC, a CIHR-funded Emerging Team Grant that was funded with the goal of merging nine clinical databases from across Canada. CANOC has been successful at starting to answer important clinical questions for people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada and now seeks to work with AIDS Service Organizations to strengthen their knowledge and experience base.