



# 2020 Annual Report

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October 2020

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### Advocacy

CAS continues to advocate and lobby quite heavily to secure new funding for both the national office and sector community organizations. This advocacy work is centered on addressing gaps in the funding for care and support of people living with HIV (also known as secondary prevention) and increasing funding to \$100 million for HIV specifically, as per the Standing Committee recommendations in 2003 and 2019.

Every new HIV infection represents \$1.3 million in direct and indirect costs over an individual's lifetime. If the number of new infections each year were reduced by 50%, it would save Canadians over \$1.6 billion in lifetime costs every year. Providing adequate funding to HIV service organizations should be a key public health priority not only because it provides care and support to a vulnerable population, but also

because it is economically sensible. We took a closer look at the surveillance data and found that if the funding model had stayed as it was before, \$2.5 billion would have been saved between 2015 and 2018 (if HIV rates had continued to decrease at 3.79% per year or 1,909 fewer people since 2015, as was the case before changes to the community funding model).

This year, CAS has focused on two major areas of advocacy:

#### 1. Media Relations:

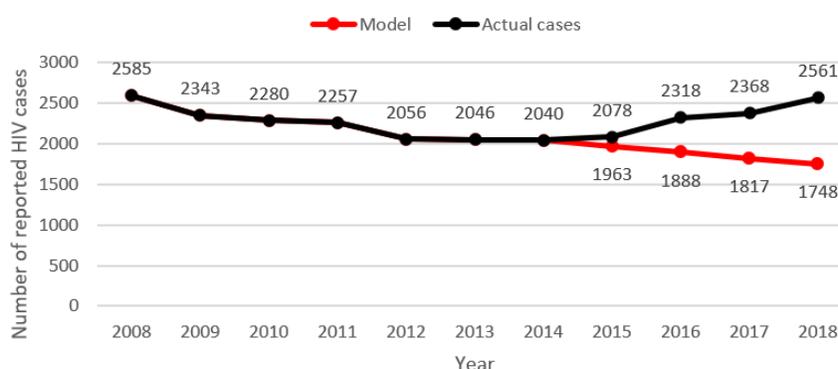
We continue to work to secure media coverage of the federal government's funding to HIV organizations, specifically the lack of increased funding to the sector and its impacts and how community can address gaps in the funding structure.

We continue to ensure that the voice of community-based organizations can be amplified in an enhanced HIV and sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) strategy.

#### 2. Government Relations:

CAS is still regularly invited to meetings by senior government officials in the bureaucracy and the Minister of Health's office, during which we continue to press for changes to the funding structure (including in our submission this year to the Standing Committee on Finance regarding the need for investment in the HIV sector). These senior officials have stated that they value the work of CAS and

**Number of HIV Cases by Year Following Funding Change vs Maintained Funding Model**



community HIV organizations and they continue to engage with us as we bring forth new ideas on how to continue the HIV programming that is so needed in Canada, especially as surveillance data has shown year over year increases in HIV transmission rates. Between 2014 and 2018, there has been a 25% increase in the number of HIV cases in Canada, a figure which has not been observed in at least the last decade.

### **Red Ribbon on Parliament Hill:**

The annual Red Ribbon event on Parliament Hill, usually held on the last day of Parliament closest to December 1<sup>st</sup>, raises awareness with parliamentarians, senators, and their staff regarding the issues surrounding HIV today. During this event, we hand out red ribbons and information about our movement and display a section of the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt. Since parliament was not sitting, this event was postponed until March 2020, and has been further postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are looking to do a virtual Red Ribbon event later this year.

### **2019 Federal Elections**

For the 2019 federal election, CAS collaborated with the Ontario AIDS Network (OAN), the Coalition des organismes québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-sida), the Pacific AIDS Network (PAN), the Alberta Community Council on HIV (ACCH), and the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) to develop a guide for Canadian HIV organizations on how to engage political parties on their role in ending HIV in Canada. We also reached to all major political parties to see their level of engagement and willingness to support community-based HIV organizations across the country.

### **Cannabis Research:**

In partnership with Canopy Growth, a medical marijuana company, CAS is developing medical practice guidelines for the use of medical marijuana for chronic pain (such as can be seen in people living with HIV). This project was started in 2018, and though challenging, we are continuing this research with our task force and should be presenting our guidelines later this year.

### **Fund Development:**

Going forward, CAS will focus on fundraising efforts for the fourth year of our national HIV Testing Week project. We have broadened our potential funders by applying to various ministries, including an application to Canadian Heritage regarding the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt.

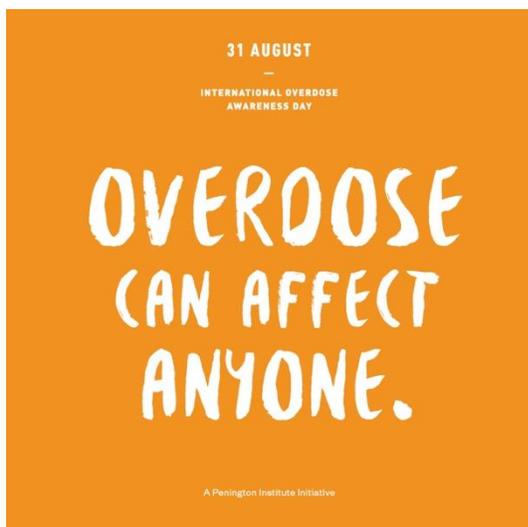
### **National HIV Testing Day/Week Initiative:**

The second national HIV Testing Day last June 27<sup>th</sup> was a huge success, with 109 testing sites (a 58% increase from last year) and 1,035 people tested. 14% of participants identified as never having been tested before and 13% identified as not having been tested within the past year, which is an indicator that this initiative is succeeding in reaching populations who otherwise might not get tested.



From L-R: Canadian AIDS Society Executive Director Gary Lacasse; Karen Chow, Director of Public Affairs at Gilead Sciences; Debby Warren, Executive Director of ENSEMBLE Greater Moncton; Minister of Health Ginette Petitpas Taylor, and Medical Health Officer for eastern NB Dr. Yves Léger at the launch event for national HIV Testing Day in Moncton.

Due to the success of the past two national HIV Testing Days, CAS and the project's steering committee made the decision to expand national HIV Testing Day to a week-long event in 2020; however, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the events this year will be taking place virtually and will focus more on education and awareness rather than testing.



#### **CAS/CAPUD:**

The Canadian Association of People who Use Drugs (CAPUD), a peer-to-peer led organization, received its third and final year of funding from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) this year. This funding will be administered by CAS and we will continue to offer them technical assistance in order to support the organization as they increase their capacity and long-term sustainability. CAS has long-mentored the evolving organization and will continue to do so as overdose-related deaths continue to rise in Canada, demonstrating the need for increased support to harm reduction programming.

#### **Sexual Health Capacity Building for Youth**

Funded by Scotiabank, this project's goals are to:

1. Develop youth-specific resources to be used by community-based organizations across Canada to educate youth about the prevention of STBBI, and
2. Create an educational campaign broadcast on social media about prevention, testing, and treatment for HIV and other STBBI.

This project is led by a group of youth from across Canada.

The Youth Sexual Health Capacity Building Project has progressed significantly over the past few months. Our advisory committee is knowledgeable and engaged and is diversely representative of young Canadians from across the country. To date, a full draft of written content for our project website has been completed, which is currently under review by advisory committee members. Once input is compiled, work will begin to transfer this information into a simple, user-friendly website. Although content will be adapted based on advisory committee feedback, information topics currently covered include: STBBI, testing, prevention, condom use, medications and vaccines, consent, abuse and violence, masturbation and porn, dating apps, and healthy sex.

The next phase of work will involve the collation of advisory feedback and edits and initial work with a web developer to design and populate our project website. Work has already been done regarding promotional/educational tools that will be used to simultaneously promote the site and spread health promotion messaging. During our latest call with the advisory committee, we heard very positive feedback regarding these promotional images and their potential impact on youth. We continue to have valuable conversations that will in no doubt enrich our campaign. We look forward to launching our website and promoting our campaign through online platforms. Online sexual health campaigns such as this one are so important for supporting the education, awareness and sexual health practices of young Canadians, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Display of the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt at the Art Gallery of Windsor

In 2019, the Canadian AIDS Society collaborated with artist Hazel Meyer and the AIDS Committee of Windsor to contribute a piece toward the Art Gallery of Windsor's exhibit *Power Play: Hockey in Canadian Contemporary Art*, which was "[i]nspired by the idea that hockey is an inclusive sport [and] explores themes of nationalism, gender, race, equity, sexuality, physical and mental health, and self-esteem". The Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt ([www.quilt.ca](http://www.quilt.ca)) is usually stored at CAS's office in Ottawa in blue hockey bags donated by Molson Canada, which were sent to the Art Gallery of Windsor for the exhibit. At the exhibit's launch event, CAS and volunteers led a Quilt unfolding ceremony, during which the names and the stories of the people represented on the Quilt section were read aloud. The exhibition will be traveling across Canada as of 2021.



### Other Scopes of Work

1. Analysis of the 2018 HIV in Canada Surveillance Report: We prepared an analysis of the Public Health Agency of Canada's 2018 HIV Surveillance Report in order to address the consistently rising rates of HIV in Canada that are demonstrated within the report. View at <https://www.cdnaids.ca/analysis-of-canadas-2018-hiv-surveillance-report/>.
2. Press release regarding the 2018 HIV in Canada Surveillance Report: CAS issued a press release highlighting how 2018 was the fourth consecutive year to see an increase in HIV rates in Canada. View at <https://www.cdnaids.ca/canada-sees-its-fourth-consecutive-year-of-increasing-hiv-rates/>.
3. All Blood is Equal campaign: This year, CAS signed on to the All Blood is Equal campaign, which aims to end the government policy that prohibits men who have sex with men and trans women from donating blood unless they have been abstinent for three months. View the All Blood is Equal campaign website at <https://allbloodisequal.ca/>.
4. Open letter and presence at Montréal Pride with the ONE campaign: We collaborated with the ONE campaign to publish an open letter detailing the need for the Trudeau government to increase their contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Additionally, we continued to pressure the federal government with our presence at the 2019 Montréal Pride festival, continuing to advocate for increased funding to the Global Fund, which resulted in the government meeting our demands.

For more information, visit <https://www.one.org/canada/blog/canada-pledge-global-fund/>.

5. STBBI testing as an essential service: In the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, CAS has written a statement detailing the necessity of declaring STBBI testing an essential service during the pandemic and sent it to the Minister of Health's office.  
View the statement at <https://www.cdnaids.ca/stbbi-testing-must-be-deemed-an-essential-service/>.
6. COVID-19 resources section on website: On our website, we have added a list of resources for both individuals (with resources targeting specific populations such as people living with HIV and people who use drugs) and organizations.  
View this list of resources at <https://www.cdnaids.ca/covid-19/>.
7. Publication of protocol for clinical practice guidelines in the British Medical Journal (Open): In June, CAS (along with its collaborators for the project) had our research protocol published in the British Medical Journal (Open). The publication of the protocol was a great achievement for us all and we look forward to the publication of the full set of guidelines. With the publishing of the guidelines in the next few months, we are hoping to improve knowledge transfer and exchange to practitioners and people who are living with chronic pain (not only with HIV but including many conditions).  
View the protocol at <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/5/e036114.full>
8. Publication in the Journal of the Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association: We were proud to have an article regarding our cannabis research published in the Journal of the Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association.
9. Presentation of e-poster at the Canadian Association for HIV Research (CAHR)'s 2020 Virtual Conference: CAS presented an e-poster with an analysis of the 2018 and 2019 national HIV Testing Days at CAHR's 2020 Virtual Conference in May.  
View the poster at <https://www.cahr-acrv.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EHP8.08-A-National-HIV-Testing-Strategy.pdf>.

## **Conclusion**

This year has been a challenging one, due in no small part to the still ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We would like to pay tribute to all those whom we have lost this year and who will continue to inspire us as we move forward.