



---

CANADIAN  
AIDS  
SOCIETY



SOCIÉTÉ  
CANADIENNE  
DU SIDA

September 2021

## 2021 Annual Report

### **Advocacy**

CAS continues to advocate and lobby quite heavily to secure increased funding for both the national office and sector community organizations. This advocacy work is centred 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. In 2020, CAS joined a group of 16 like-minded organizations to continue this advocacy, we have had meetings with PHAC officials and have produced some documents geared towards this advocacy.

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 and have done several interviews we have specifically addressed 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 way with an HIV and sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) strategy as it's focus.

Here are a few examples of our media relations:

[https://www.cdnaids.ca/wp-content/uploads/Final-Joint-Press-Release-Sept-14-2021\\_HIV-Hepatitis-C-and-STBBIs-in-Canada\\_Eng\\_2.pdf](https://www.cdnaids.ca/wp-content/uploads/Final-Joint-Press-Release-Sept-14-2021_HIV-Hepatitis-C-and-STBBIs-in-Canada_Eng_2.pdf)

<https://www.cdnaids.ca/40-years-of-hiv-in-canada/>

<https://www.cdnaids.ca/site-magazine-features-the-national-aids-quilt/>

<https://www.cdnaids.ca/publication-in-open-access-government/>

<https://www.cdnaids.ca/stbbi-testing-must-be-deemed-an-essential-service/>

#### **2. Government Relations:**

CAS with other organizations continues to press for changes to the funding structure so that we can address the existing and future gaps that will exist with the new LOI process. We must also keep in mind

that the last LOI process has demonstrated 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:**

Parliament was a mix of in-person and virtual and we are looking at other ways of engaging with elected officials.

Funded by Innovative Medicines Canada

### **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. We were very excited with the publication of our Clinical practice guideline protocol in the medical journal BMJ Open (<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/5/e036114>), and publication in the Journal of the Ontario Occupations 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, we have been looking for the full publication of the medical practice guidelines now.

### **Fund Development:**

Going forward:

- CAS will focus on fundraising efforts for the fourth year of our national HIV Testing Week project.
- We have been successful in applications to do more research-driven initiatives.
- Continuously looking for a funding partner for the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilts.
- We had a successful LOI project with PHAC.

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

The third national HIV Testing week was held from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2020, being a mix of awareness and physical testing sites.

We have broadened the testing initiative with Coalition PLUS partnership, which has activities on 4 continents, stay tuned.

We would like to thank the steering committee which is comprised of these following groups:

- The [Pacific AIDS Network \(PAN\)](#)
- [Alberta Community Council on HIV](#)
- [AIDS Saskatoon](#)
- [Nine Circles Community Health Centre](#)
- The [Ontario AIDS Network \(OAN\)](#)
- [COCQ-SIDA](#)
- [Ensemble](#)



- [AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador](#)
- The [Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network \(CAAN\)](#)
- [Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange \(CATIE\)](#)
- [AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia \(ACNS\)](#)

Funded by: bioLytical, GILEAD, MERCK

### **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 youths 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, and the website design is done. Once input is compiled, translation is underway and we should be launching in 2021. 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.

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 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

travelling across Canada as of 2022, as per other in person projects, COVID has had a tremendous impact.

**HIV+ Women’s Health, Resiliency and Wellness Project**

Although historically underrepresented in HIV transmissions, new cases of HIV in Canada have disproportionately affected women in recent years, increasing both in terms of total cases, and as a percentage of new cases. Since 2016 the proportion of new HIV cases in Canada affecting women has consistently risen, from 23% of new cases in 2016, to 30% in 2019 (PHAC 2020; PHAC 2017). This year, CAS initiated a Women’s HIV+ Working Group to bring together women with lived/living experience and empower discussions relating to gaps that currently exist. This working group is comprised exclusively of women living with HIV in Canada from diverse experiences and backgrounds which brings more meaningful inclusion and discussions. This group, with the assistance of CAS staff, will be developing a position statement regarding the care and support of women living with HIV and will identify opportunities for improvement.

Funded by ViiV Healthcare

**Exploring the relationship between cannabis use, mental health and HIV**

Unfortunately, people living with HIV are at a significantly greater risk of mental health issues, and astonishingly, depression rates within this population have been found to be as high as 50% (Williams et al., 2005). Cannabis is commonly used by people living with HIV to treat a variety of symptoms, including anxiety and depression (Woolridge et al., 2005). Initiated by CAS, a research team was established including people with lived/living experience and co-led by CAS and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). This research team successfully obtained a catalyst grant from the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR). This study will use a qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of 4 populations as they relate to cannabis use and mental health for people living with HIV and mental illness: People who use drugs; 2SLGBTQ+ populations, Immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural and racialized populations; and First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples. Through this research we aim to improve policies, practices and programs that relate to cannabis and mental health for people living with HIV.

## Other Scopes of Work

1. Analysis of the 2019 and 2020 HIV in Canada Surveillance Report: We will be preparing an analysis of the Public Health Agency of Canada's 2019 and 2020 HIV Surveillance Report in order to address the various outcomes of the surveillance data, view our previous analysis at <https://www.cdnaids.ca/analysis-of-canadas-2018-hiv-surveillance-report/>.



2. All Blood is Equal campaign: we signed on to this campaign, though there has not been any engagement in the last year, CAS has continued to engage with the Canadian Blood Service (CBS) on their policy that prohibits men who have sex with men and trans women from donating blood unless they have been abstinent for three months. Following a few meetings in the past year, we have been advised that CBS will be filling the elimination of the deferral and a behaviour based questionnaire by year end, stay tuned, and you can view the All Blood is Equal campaign website at <https://allbloodisequal.ca/>.
3. 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/>, we have yet to receive an answer to this important statement.
4. COVID-19 resources section on the 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, updates done periodically when necessary. View this list of resources at <https://www.cdnaids.ca/covid-19/>.
5. The closure of our physical spaced offices and move to a cloud-based environment.

## 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.