

September 23, 2019

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada  
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada  
c/o T. Harrison & Mike Jones  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Trudeau,

The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) is a national coalition of community-based HIV organizations. Our members provide prevention and capacity to people living with or affected by HIV and STBBIs in local communities from coast to coast. We are dedicated to strengthening the response to HIV across all sectors of society, and to enriching the lives of people and communities living with and affected by HIV. As we approach a federal election this fall, CAS is concerned about the consistent lack of funding burdening the HIV sector, especially now as the HIV sector is at the forefront of the opioid epidemic.

In 2003, The Federal Government of Canada's Standing Committee on Health made the recommendation that annual funding to address HIV/AIDS in Canada be increased to \$100 million. In 2004, the Federal Government announced *The Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada – Strengthening Federal Action in the Canadian Response to HIV/AIDS*, which stated that HIV yearly funding would increase from \$42.2 million to \$84.4 million by 2008-09. Despite this commitment being already reduced from what was recommended, the full amount committed to this initiative has never been made available. Since the announcement of the initiative, over \$120 million of what was originally committed has never actually been spent on HIV/AIDS in Canada (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2018). As a result, the number of Canadians living with HIV continues to rise. This year (2019), The Standing Committee on Health has once again recommended that the Government of Canada increase total funding for the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada to \$100 million annually.

In your response to the letter we sent you in 2015, we were told that, "Liberals believe that Canada has both a domestic and an international responsibility to forcefully combat HIV and AIDS. More needs to be done to prevent new infections in Canada and around the world, slow the progression of the disease, safeguard human rights, and improve the quality of life of Canadians living with HIV and AIDS." Although we agree *more needs to be done*, we are concerned that this is not occurring, especially as we are witnessing the highest transmission rates since 2008.

**I am writing to you on behalf of CAS to request your position on this serious funding issue leading up to the fall election. Will you commit to increasing the funding allocated for addressing HIV in Canada to \$100 million, as recommended by The Standing Committee on Health in 2003 and now again in 2019, and proportionately increase funding for all activities funded under the Federal Initiative including direct HIV program funding. We would also welcome a mission-based sustained funding model.**

Over 65,000 individuals are currently living with HIV in Canada, a quarter of whom are unaware of their HIV status. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men; people who use injection drugs; Indigenous peoples; and Black Canadians are all overrepresented in these numbers and form disproportionately large percentages of our HIV-positive population.

The Canadian government has expressed its support for the UNAIDS global targets, including the 90-90-90 targets by 2020 (90% of all people living with HIV know their status, 90% of those diagnosed receive antiretroviral treatment, and 90% of those on treatment achieve viral suppression), and eliminating HIV as a public health threat by 2030. Despite being a developed country, Canada is in danger of failing to meet the 90-90-90 targets by 2020 and will be behind schedule to meet 2030 objectives.

National and community-based organizations working in the HIV sector strive to improve education, prevention, and quality of life; however, chronic underfunding jeopardizes their efforts. Despite the hard work of these organizations, Canada has seen troubling health outcomes in recent years. There has been a 17.1% increase in the HIV diagnostic rate from 2014 to 2017 (Haddad et al., 2017) which indicates that Canada is actually heading in the wrong direction to meet the UNAIDS goal of zero new infections by 2030.

The past few years have shown that without adequate funding, we will lose the valuable ground we have gained. With enhanced funding, we will be able to achieve the public health goals to which Canada has committed. Community-based HIV organizations play a direct role in reducing the number of HIV infections in Canada and with sustained mission funding, these organizations are capable of providing care and support for those currently living with HIV, reducing new transmissions, and educating the public about the realities of HIV.

Each new HIV infection represents \$1.3 million in direct and indirect costs over an individual's lifetime (Kingston-Riechers, 2011). 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. Not only should providing adequate funding to HIV service organizations be a key public health priority, but it is economically sensible.

Mr. Trudeau, we look forward to your response to these questions and hope to see HIV/AIDS funding improved to \$100 million annually, as has been repeatedly recommended. Thank you for taking the time to consider this important health issue and I look forward to discussing this matter with you in the future.

Yours sincerely,



Gary Lacasse  
Executive Director  
Canadian AIDS Society