

August 31, 2021



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 on September 20th, 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 crisis.

In 2019, the Standing Committee on Health recommended that the Government of Canada increase total funding for the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada to \$100 million annually. This funding increase was also requested by the Canadian Senate in 2020. Unfortunately, these exact recommendations were first made in 2003 by the Standing Committee on Health but were never implemented. In fact, since the announcement of *The Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada – Strengthening Federal Action in the Canadian Response to HIV/AIDS*, over \$120 million of what was originally committed has never actually been spent on HIV/AIDS in Canada (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2018).

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.

**As we approach an important federal election, will you commit to:**

- 1) Increasing the funding allocated for addressing HIV in Canada to \$100 million as recommended by The Standing Committee on Health,**
- 2) Incrementally increasing funding for all other STBBI, and**
- 3) Support a mission-based funding model to support charities and non-profit organizations continue the important work that they do?**



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Over 70,000 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 supported the first UNAIDS global objectives, including the 90-90-90 targets by 2020, which unfortunately have not been met. Canada has since committed to the 95-95-95 targets and achieving zero new HIV transmissions by 2030. Despite being a developed country, Canada failed to meet the 2020 objectives and are at risk of not meeting the new 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 25.3% increase in the HIV diagnostic rate since 2014 (PHAC, 2019) which indicates that Canada is heading in the wrong direction to meet the UNAIDS goal of zero new infections by 2030. This is especially concerning given the rising rates of other STBBI in Canada, including apocalyptic levels of syphilis in Alberta.

The past few years have shown that without adequate funding, we will lose the valuable ground we have gained prior to 2014. 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. Providing adequate funding to HIV service organizations should be a key public health priority, but it is also economically sensible.

██████████ we look forward to your response to these questions and hope to see funding improved to \$100 million annually for HIV alone, and proportionate increases for all other STBBI, as has been repeatedly recommended. The \$100 million funding target is needed if Canada is to meet its HIV objectives and support the health and well-being of Canadians. There is also a need for a shift from solely project funding to a mission-based funding model. 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