

Canadian AIDS Society Announces First National HIV Testing Day

Establishment of day promotes the importance of testing and treatment of HIV

OTTAWA, June 18th, 2018 – The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) and community-based organizations across Canada today announced Canada’s first country-wide HIV Testing Day. The inaugural event will be held on June 27th in 43 sites across Canada. The goal of the day is to effectively target groups disproportionately affected by the disease, said Mr. Gary Lacasse, Executive Director of CAS, the organization spearheading this new initiative.

“A National HIV Testing Day will help reduce the stigma associated with testing,” Lacasse said. “Knowing your HIV status is important for your health. If you are living with HIV, you should start treatment as soon as possible. HIV medicine can keep you healthy for many years and greatly reduces your chance of transmitting the virus.”

“*Know Your Status*” is the theme of this year’s event. “The only way to know for certain if you’re HIV-positive is to get tested,” stressed Lacasse. “The sooner you know, the sooner you can control the virus and prevent damage to your immune system.”

The National HIV Testing Day will aim to reach individuals at risk for HIV exposure who lack adequate sexual health resources and capacity for HIV testing, including members of the LGBTQ2 community, off-reserve Indigenous communities and people who use drugs. It is expected that more than 1,500 people will participate in the initiative and that the pilot project will lead to more newly identified patients with HIV in the month of June compared to other months of the year. The project also aims to transfer knowledge to vulnerable populations and drive behavioural change to adopt best practices for sexual health and drug use.

About 75,000 people in Canada have HIV, and one in five HIV-positive Canadians are not aware of their status, which makes the possibility of transmitting the virus to others much more likely. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there were 2,344 new HIV infections in Canada in 2016, an 11.6% increase from 2015.

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In addition to CAS, the steering committee for the new initiative includes: AIDS Moncton, COCQ-sida, the Ontario AIDS Network, Nine Circles Community Health Centre, AIDS Saskatoon, Alberta Community Council on HIV, HIV Edmonton, and the Pacific AIDS Network. These groups are collaborating with community-based organizations across the country who will be implementing local HIV Testing Day events in their communities. Local and provincial health authorities are also collaborating to deliver the project, stating it addresses an unmet need in the current Canadian healthcare system.

On HIV Testing Day, rapid HIV tests will be administered using point-of-care testing (POCT) kits (where available), which give results in under a minute. If a positive result is detected, blood draws will be administered, which will also be used to test for other STBBIs. Pre- and post-test counselling will be provided to all participants to help determine their risk factors. If a participant tests positive for HIV or another STBBI, the local community based organization will be able to form a long-term relationship with the individual and work toward ensuring their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

“This inaugural National HIV Testing Day provides an opportunity for Canadians to take charge of their health to learn their HIV status, particularly in rural and remote areas with one-minute testing at the point-of-care in both conventional and unconventional settings,” said Livleen Veslemes, of bioLytical Laboratories, the maker of INSTI.

In addition to HIV Testing Day on June 27th, this project will also involve an ongoing initiative of providing sexual health resources to these priority populations in a variety of mediums. A social media educational campaign will be on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and will take a holistic approach adapted to the specific cultural needs of priority populations. A toolkit has also been developed by CAS with templates and guidelines for community-based organizations to organize presentations for priority populations in their communities.

These strategies will sustain the benefits of the National Testing Day initiative and ensure information will be accessible to as many people as possible, to increase testing year-round so more Canadians living with HIV know their status and can take proper precautions to protect themselves and their sexual partners.

Information on the testing site locations will be released on CAS’ website, www.cdnaids.ca/testing as details are finalized.



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