



AIDS CALGARY
awareness association

Harper government's funding announcement for AIDS vaccine site not addressing the core issue

Calgary, Alberta – The Harper government's announcement of \$110 million in new funding for an HIV/AIDS vaccine research site, and the addition of \$28 million in funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is a very important step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

However, many believe the Conservative government is not addressing the core issue of prevention, and has not acted quickly enough. Susan Cress, executive director of AIDS Calgary Awareness Association says the recently announced funding decision is welcome news, but comes six months too late and is a band-aid solution. The funding announcement allocates more money to this single project, than is allocated to all prevention programs in Canada.

"Prime Minister Harper's next step needs to be allocating more resources towards prevention and addressing emerging issues," says Cress. "Matching funds for community based harm reduction programs would help agencies such as AIDS Calgary spread messages of prevention throughout the communities in which we are active."

By matching the funds for prevention, agencies such as AIDS Calgary would be able to better meet the needs of our clients. The addition of funds to find an HIV/AIDS vaccine is only one part of a multi-faceted approach. We need a comprehensive, sustainable approach that address all issues, and recognizes the value of a harm reduction approach to HIV/AIDS.

The Conservatives government has done little to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in Canada, and has created barriers to prevention work, including shutting down projects such as the safe tattooing program that provides inmates with clean needles, helping to slow down the spread of HIV and hepatitis C.

The impact of such measures is a greater cost to our communities. For example, the cost of treating an inmate with HIV is 50 times that of a safe tattooing session, according to recent article by CTV news. Corrections Canada pegs the annual cost of providing HIV treatment for an inmate at \$29 000. These costs absorb a large share of Corrections Canada health care budget, according to an article by the Canadian Medical Association. These costs could be minimized by resuming the safe tattooing program.

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AIDS Calgary is a local not-for-profit AIDS service organization that offers support services to individuals who are at-risk for, infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and provides prevention and education throughout the Calgary region. For more information, please contact AIDS Calgary at (403) 508-2500 or online at www.aidscalgary.org.

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