

Red Matters

Volume 2 • Issue 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF AIDS CALGARY AWARENESS ASSOCIATION

February 2010

New strategic plan launched

AIDS Calgary Awareness Association has launched a new strategic plan that will guide our work from now through to 2012. Every three years our organization goes through a strategic planning process to identify challenges and opportunities and to fine-tune our programming to best respond to needs in the community.

One result of our strategic planning process is a streamlined mission statement. The mission of AIDS Calgary is to *reduce the harm associated with HIV and AIDS for all individuals and communities*. Our vision continues to be *empowered lives in a compassionate society in the face of HIV/AIDS*.

Stakeholder feedback, environmental scans and current program evaluation all contributed to the creation of three key strategic directions for AIDS Calgary.

1. Realize Sharper Focus - with a focus on collaboration, advocacy and communication, a sharper focus will be brought to our activities and services.

This strategic focus allows for growing the capacity and nurturing the talents of staff. An internally developed government relations and advocacy strategy will ensure that staff is trained to respond proactively to timely issues in our community.

2. Strategically Focused Communication - we will increase our targeted communication activities with our stakeholders. We will engage our clients, donors, staff and volunteers in combating HIV/AIDS in our community.

Our communications work has undergone a facelift with a new focus on social media (including our blog and Facebook group). We also have a re-designed and streamlined newsletter. Red Matters now comes to your

mailbox (or inbox) bi-monthly so you can stay up to date on what's happening at AIDS Calgary right now. Our new website has also proven to be a success with its user-friendly design making the site easier to navigate.

3. Strengthen Community Leadership - to further enhance our position in the community we will deploy resources which will address HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination at a systems and policy level.

Beginning in 2010, AIDS Calgary will implement programming designed to build the capacity of individuals in African communities to mount a community-level response to HIV.

We will also continue to share our knowledge through advisory committee work, provincial partnership as well as local, regional and national conference presentations (in March 2010 four of our staff will be presenting at the 6th Canadian HIV/AIDS Skills Building Symposium).

AIDS Calgary Awareness Association was founded 26 years ago. We came together in a time of crisis to provide support and create awareness. Two and a half decades have passed. The challenges associated with HIV and AIDS have gradually slipped out of society's headlines, but they remain real. In fact, their impact has spread; more segments of the population are directly affected today; more people are less aware and thus at higher risk; and the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS has hardly abated.

This new strategic plan ensures that we can continue our good work to address these critical issues and move forward with bold steps. We look forward to sharing our work with you in the coming years.

EVENTS CALENDAR

Core Training

February 10, March 13 Time: 9:00am – 4:00pm, Location: AIDS Calgary Training Room.

Increase your knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS in this free workshop. Topics covered include: safer sex & HIV/AIDS, living with HIV/AIDS and challenging stereotypes. To register, call (403) 508-2500 or email info@aidscalgary.org.

Friday Lunch

February 5 & 19, March 5 & 19 Time: 1:00pm. Location: Calgary Cares Centre.

Friday lunches are an opportunity for those living with HIV/AIDS to share in a hot, nutritious meal in a safe non-judgmental environment. For registered clients of AIDS Calgary.

HIV/AIDS & Employment Workshop

February 17, Time: 9:00am – 4:00pm, Location: Kahanoff Centre

Topics: The workshop will provide practical information on employment topics including: How others living with HIV have been successfully employed, understanding disclosure rights in the workplace, workplace accommodation options and more. To register, call 403-508-2500.

The Positive Women's Network

The Positive Women's Network aims to build connections among HIV+ women and recognize their unique experiences of being positive. Gatherings will begin in February 2010 and continue on the first Tuesday of each month until June 2010, with a possibility of extension.

Participants must be registered clients of AIDS Calgary and speak with Catharine in person or by phone (403. 508.2500 ext. 103) to sign up.

First Gathering:
Tuesday, February 2, 2010
5:30pm - 7:30pm
Calgary Cares Centre

Sexually transmitted HCV

What is HCV?

HCV, also known as Hepatitis C, is caused by a virus carried in blood. HCV attacks your liver and you might not have symptoms for many years. By that time the liver damage could be serious.

How is it transmitted?

The virus is passed by blood-to-blood contact. Even though you may not experience symptoms, you can still pass it on to other people. Although HCV is not listed as a sexually transmitted infection, it can be transmitted sexually if blood is present.

You can get HCV from:

- Sharing needles, pipes, straws, cookers, filters, ties, or water for drug use with anyone, including your sexual partner.
- Piercing or tattooing equipment (including ink) already used on someone else.
- Anything that might have blood on it, like razors, nail clippers, and toothbrushes already used by someone else, even if you can't see the blood.

- Unprotected sex with someone who has HCV.

How can it be transmitted sexually?

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange [CATIE] shared a study that pooled health information from Australia, France, Germany, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom to look at sexually transmitted HCV in gay and bisexual men. It should be noted that the men researched were also living with HIV. The study stated:

...HCV was transmitted through unprotected anal sex that damaged the lining of the rectum. This can occur in several circumstances, including these: having prolonged bouts of unprotected anal intercourse, having multiple episodes of unprotected anal sex, being fisted, having another sexually transmitted infection such as syphilis or LGV, or engaging in substance use... (CATIE, 2009)

The study also mentioned that substance use can dry out a person's mucous membranes, which can cause the lining of the rectum to

become damaged and bleed. Any damaged mucous membrane can facilitate the entry of HIV and HCV into a person's body.

Although the study did not look at data specifically on women from these countries, women are still at risk for transmitting or contracting HCV if engaging in the same risk factors, and if menstruating.

For more on this article, please visit the CATIE website at www.catie.ca.

Testing

A person can have HCV for years without knowing it. It is important to get tested regularly if sexually active.

Testing is available through a doctor's office, or anonymous and confidential testing is available at the STD Clinic (Sheldon M. Chumir Centre, 5th Floor, 1213 – 4th Street SW, Tel: 403-955-6700).

Reprinted from *The A Word*. <http://aids Calgary.blogspot.com>.

AIDS Calgary supporters deliver holiday cheer

On December 21st and 22nd, AIDS Calgary volunteers delivered 117 hampers to individuals and families in need. The Holiday Hamper program would not have been possible without the generosity of the individuals and organizations who raised an estimated \$16,000 to support the program.

With feedback from clients, our holiday hampers this year included a grocery gift card along with essential toiletries. This gift card allowed our diverse clientele to purchase the items necessary for their own holiday dinners.

Our volunteers came out in force again this year with 36 individuals stepping up to deliver hampers. In addition, 5 volunteers

were able to help with hamper assembly. A group of Girl Guides also gave their time to create a personalized holiday card to be included with each hamper.

Thank you to everyone for your contributions. Your support ensured the success of our 2009 Holiday Hamper program.

If you would prefer to receive Red Matters by email, simply send a message to newsletter@aidscalgary.org notifying us of your preference.

U.S. lifts travel ban

Our neighbours to the south have finally lifted a 22-year travel restriction placed on people living with HIV. Until recently, the United States was one of 8 countries that had a complete ban for people living with HIV (other countries include China, Sudan and Yemen). The ban was originally put in place when it wasn't known how HIV was spread. The goal of the ban was to reduce the spread of HIV within the U.S.

Washington DC has already been named the site for the 2012 International AIDS Conference. The travel ban has prevented this conference from being held in the United States previously.

If you were tuned into the Homestretch on January 4th you may have heard our board chair, Jeff Kapler, speaking with David Gray about this issue. The lifting of this ban is very exciting news for Canadians living with HIV who are now able to travel freely across the border.

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