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NEWS RELEASE

AIDS Calgary turns up the HEAT Announcing the launch of a new men's program

Calgary, Alberta – AIDS Calgary Awareness Association announced today the launch of its new and improved men's program, HEAT – HIV Education and Awareness Today. The program provides HIV/STI education, awareness and prevention by engaging the men who have sex with men (MSM) population.

By providing MSM specific education supporting HIV/STI prevention and health promotion, HEAT hopes to turn the tides and help reduce the increasing number of STIs being reported in the Calgary region. Alarming, there continues to be increases in Chlamydia (5% to 8834 cases in 2005) and Gonorrhoea (10% to 1530 cases in 2005) in our province which indicates a continued prevalence of unsafe sex. These increases can also mean an increased risk for HIV infection.

In 2005, there were 162 newly diagnosed cases of HIV in Alberta according to Disease Control & Prevention Branch of Alberta Health and Wellness. Currently, there are approximately 4000 Albertans living with HIV.

"Paramount in the fight against HIV/AIDS is an understanding of how HIV is transmitted and how people can and protect themselves," said Susan Cress, Executive Director, AIDS Calgary. "HIV is 100% preventable and continued community education, through programs like AIDS Calgary's – HEAT – will hopefully lead to a decline in HIV cases and also a decline in the STI rates in our city."

An educationally focused program, HEAT will provide outreach in bars, on the street, at community events and to the growing population of online users. After conducting community-based research, including focus groups, an online survey and an advisory committee, AIDS Calgary realized the need for an evolved men's program that serves the specific needs of the MSM community, and one that also educates the general population about HIV and MSM issues. The HEAT social marketing campaign will include education and prevention focused posters, condom negotiation pamphlets and prevention tools, like condoms and lubricant.

What distinguishes this program from its predecessor - Choices - is the focus on the social environment as a determinant of health. HEAT will provide development workshops, such as 'Breaking Barriers' an anti-homophobia workshop to community partners and the general population to increase awareness of HIV and MSM issues.

"AIDS Calgary strongly believes in offering non-judgemental support, information and tools to keep people safe and healthy," said Cress. "As a community, we need to renew our commitment to prevent HIV/STI transmission, which affects every individual in Calgary."

AIDS Calgary is a local not-for-profit AIDS service organization that offers support services to individuals who are at-risk for, living with 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 visit www.aidscalgary.org.

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For more information:

Christine Heggart
Communications, AIDS Calgary

Phone: 403-508-2500
Email: cheggart@aidscalgary.org