

Toronto Takes Action on HIV/AIDS

Toronto has a population of over 2.7 million residents who speak more than 100 languages. Toronto's strength is in its diversity. Through partnerships with community agencies, other levels of government and academic institutions Toronto has developed a comprehensive approach to address HIV/AIDS in the city.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Comprehensive Program

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has a mandate to provide HIV/AIDS prevention services in Toronto. The sexual health promotion program provides education, training, consultation, community capacity building, advocacy and outreach based on community need. TPH directly provides sexual health clinic services in five locations and also supports six community clinics across the city. Public health staff also conduct follow-up counselling, education and support for people diagnosed with HIV and their contacts as well as education and support for health care providers and free medication for the treatment of STIs. Toronto Public Health administers the provincial AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine which offers telephone counselling and referral throughout Ontario in numerous languages.

The incidence and epidemiology of HIV and AIDS are monitored by Toronto Public Health's Communicable Disease Surveillance Unit. These data are reported on a regular basis to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, who collates them with other Ontario data to characterize trends across larger areas. HIV rates in Toronto increased by 50% between 1998 and 2002, followed by a small decrease in 2003. In 2004, there were 567 cases of HIV reported in Toronto.

Harm Reduction

Toronto Public Health operates a harm reduction program called *The Works*. The mandate of *The Works* is to reduce the spread of communicable disease in drug users and sex trade workers. Services are provided through a van, a fixed site, street outreach and through 30 community agencies located throughout Toronto. *The Works* offers needles and other



safer drug use supplies, low-threshold methadone maintenance, condoms, education about safer drug use and safer sex; vaccinations for Hepatitis A and B, influenza and tetanus; testing for hepatitis, syphilis and HIV; and assistance accessing a variety of health and social services.

Toronto Public Health purchases and distributes safer sex supplies to a variety of clinics and community agencies in the city

through its Condom Distribution Program. The program provides male and female condoms and lubricant to approximately 300 agencies that service clients at risk for HIV, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancy.

Community Investment

The City of Toronto allocates project funding of \$1.5 million to community organizations through the AIDS Prevention Community Investment Program (APCIP). The overall goal is to influence behaviours and situations that put people at risk of acquiring HIV, thereby reducing HIV transmission. The priority populations are: men who have sex with men (MSM), injection drug users, people from countries where HIV is endemic, women and youth.

The program funds approximately 50 projects a year. Many of these groups are also supported by provincial and/or federal funds.



Botswana Partnership

The City of Toronto has an HIV/AIDS capacity building partnership with South-East District Council (SEDC) in Botswana. Botswana has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world. The partnership is sponsored by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the City of Toronto provides in-kind support by contributing staff time. There are two key areas of focus: *Palliative Care and Support* and *Youth Engagement*. The project has mobilized considerable

additional resources by bringing in other partners. For example, Casey House, a hospice and community care organization in Toronto, has played a mentor and training role in



palliative care. In addition, Commonwealth Games Canada, the Mathare Youth Sports Association of Kenya (MYSA) and UK Sport have all partnered with the City of Toronto and SEDC in establishing a youth led soccer league in South-East District, using the Kicking AIDS Out approach. Kicking AIDS Out works at the grassroots level, building leadership capacity and community involvement. It's used by an international network of organizations and demonstrates how the power of sport can fight the spread and stigma of HIV & AIDS. Kicking AIDS Out relies on local youth leaders to mobilize young people and inspire community engagement, and its success is indisputable.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Toronto recognizes that a community-based strategy is critical in responding to HIV/AIDS. Toronto has a history of strong community leadership in HIV/AIDS. A number of

community organizations play a leadership and mentor role for smaller community agencies.

AIDS Service Organizations (ASO) are community-based, non-profit organizations providing health promotion, support, education and advocacy for people who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Some are ethnoculturally specific organizations, some provide services to women only, to incarcerated men, women and youth, to children and youth and to gay and bisexual men. In all, there are 26 HIV/AIDS specific organizations but many more community health centres, supportive housing, hospitals, and youth programs that provide a variety of HIV/AIDS services and programs. These ASOs include: Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, Asian Community AIDS Services, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention, Voices of Positive Women, Prisoners' HIV/AIDS Support Action Network (PASAN), Africans in Partnership Against AIDS and The Teresa Group. For more information about ASOs in Toronto, visit the Ontario AIDS Network www.ontarioaidsnetwork.on.ca.

The **AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)** is Toronto's largest and oldest AIDS service organization. Founded in 1983, ACT is a community-based, charitable organization that provides support, HIV prevention and education services for people living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS. ACT offers free, confidential, supportive and practical services to men, women and youth living with HIV/AIDS and their friends, partners and families. ACT works with gay and bisexual men, youth and women at increased risk for HIV infection, to develop and deliver HIV prevention, education, outreach and community development programs. For more information, visit www.actoronto.org.

Casey House is a hospice and community care organization in Toronto that provides comprehensive and compassionate care for

individuals living with HIV/AIDS and their families. This service maximizes the individual's quality of life by attending to their emotional, social and spiritual needs in addition to their physical health care requirements. The hospice opened in 1988 with 13 beds and has a continuing wait list for admission. With a multidisciplinary approach, Casey House also offers care to approximately 120 people living with HIV/AIDS in their own homes. For more information, visit www.caseyhouse.com.

CARE AND SUPPORT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS

Toronto's many HIV/AIDS specialists are supported by several hospital-based HIV/AIDS clinics. A network of primary care physicians provide health care to Torontonians living with HIV/AIDS. Hundreds of nurses, social workers, complementary therapists and other care providers also provide care and support. Home-care and hospice services are also available.

There are three ambulatory **HIV/AIDS Clinics** located within teaching hospitals in Toronto. The Hospital for Sick Children also provides care to children under the age of 18 living with HIV. The clinics provide a range of services including specialized medical and nursing care, social work and nutrition. Through the clinics patients can enroll in clinical trials. There is ongoing development of programs to respond to the emerging issues which people living with HIV/AIDS encounter. The clinics work closely with the AIDS service organizations and community groups to ensure people living with HIV/AIDS receive the services and information they need. For more information about HIV/AIDS clinics in Toronto, contact the AIDS Bureau, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care at 1-800-268-6066.

The **Toronto HIV Primary Care Physicians' Group**, which has been in existence for over a decade, represents over forty physicians who

collectively provide care for over half the people living with HIV in the province of Ontario. In addition to a treatment role, they act as advocates for patients, to ensure that governments and health care industries work in partnership to allow for excellence in HIV care. For more information, contact TorontoHIVPrimaryCare@hotmail.com.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Toronto is home to three universities and eight teaching hospitals, providing education and training to thousands of care providers every year. The universities host hundreds of researchers addressing every stream of HIV/AIDS research, working in active partnerships with the community and government sectors. Research in Toronto is supported by academic, private sector and provincial and federal funding.

The **Ontario College of Family Physicians HIV/AIDS Mentoring Program** is a five day HIV/AIDS traineeship for family physicians in the province of Ontario. This program consists of small group learning and structured self-learning in the participant's region of Ontario. The curriculum includes didactic HIV/AIDS content and the application of this knowledge within the clinical setting and provides a foundation for further educational and practical experiences in the care of persons with HIV/AIDS. For more information, visit www.ocfp.on.ca.

The **HIV Social, Behavioural and Epidemiological Studies Unit** is a multi-disciplinary, university campus-based unit in Toronto devoted to HIV/AIDS research. It is located in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto with primary affiliations with the Department of Public Health Sciences and Health Policy, Management and Evaluation. The unit is currently running over 15 projects, including studies related to people from endemic countries, Aboriginal populations,

injection drug use, men who have sex with men and evaluation and service delivery. A major study of the unit is *The Polaris HIV Seroconversion Study*. Its objectives are to understand: HIV transmission; the behavioural, psychological, economic and social impact of HIV; and the clinical progression of early infection and treatment. For more information, visit www.phs.utoronto.ca/hivstudiesunit.

The **Ontario HIV Epidemiologic Unit (OHEMU)** is funded by the AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and is located at the Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto. The unit provides timely epidemiologic information on the evolving HIV epidemic to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, public health units, AIDS service organizations and researchers.

Key projects/activities of the unit include:

1. The Laboratory Enhancement Study (LES)
2. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report
3. HIV modeling: using selected indicators, the unit produces estimates of HIV incidence and prevalence by exposure category and health region.

For more information, visit www.phs.utoronto.ca/ohemu.



www.toronto.ca/health
416-338-7600

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