



# Media Release

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## Harper Lied: HIV Infections Will Increase

On the eve of World AIDS Day, those dedicated to fighting the disease are reeling from a recent admission revealing Prime Minister Stephen Harper's bald faced lie.

In 2006, Harper announced what he termed 'new' funding for the \$139-million Canadian Vaccine Initiative, in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In reality funding for the vaccine initiative is now to be taken away from funding previously allocated to Canada's ongoing efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, including community AIDS programs that directly assist people living with the disease.

"It's a classic case of stealing from Peter to pay Paul," says Glyn Townson, chair of the BC Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA). In this case the government is stealing from people living with HIV/AIDS, and the organizations that provide them with the care, support and treatment they need to live as successfully as possible with the disease.

"HIV treatment and care is HIV prevention," explains Townson referring to a recent cut to HIV/AIDS programs in Ontario. "Slashing programs by 30 percent in Ontario can't help but cause a rise in infection rates. And this is apparently just the start of what will be millions cut from such programming nation-wide, including in BC."

In 2004, the federal government agreed to double HIV funding. Health Minister Tony Clement has confirmed that the federal AIDS initiative will get \$84.4 million next year, as promised. However, it now appears that \$15 million to \$26 million of those dollars will be removed from previously funded efforts, including community-based work, and redistributed to the vaccine initiative, a change not included in the original plan. Furthermore, when Harper announced the vaccine initiative, he announced it as new funding, not to be drawn from existing HIV/AIDS work.

"This re-juggling of AIDS money will only exacerbate the epidemic," says Townson. "Harper needs to keep his word and find new funding for the vaccine initiative. He needs to

leave our community programs intact and able to continue their important work. Indeed, if anything, the federal government should be doing everything it can to extend and deepen its support for the community-based response to AIDS.”

While BCPWA supports the vaccine initiative as an important component of addressing HIV/AIDS, it does not agree that people living with the disease should be paying the price. The vaccine should be funded by new money, as promised.

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**BC Persons With AIDS Society**

The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society), a non-profit, consumer-driven organization in its 21<sup>st</sup> year of operation, is dedicated to empowering persons living with HIV disease and AIDS through mutual support and collective action. As western Canada's largest AIDS organization, with a membership of more than 4,400 HIV+ individuals, the Society provides support and advocacy services, treatment information, and volunteer opportunities to its diverse membership.

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