

Canadian AIDS Society

## HIV and Poverty Information Sheet Series

# Info Sheet #1

## THE LINK BETWEEN POVERTY AND HIV

Since the last Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) Income Security project was completed in 1995, there have been notable changes to the Canadian social security system<sup>1</sup>, to the number of new HIV infections<sup>2</sup>, and to the distribution of HIV in the population<sup>3</sup>. Treatment regimens and disease management have also evolved, using Highly Active Anti-Retro-Viral Therapy (HAART). This therapy has succeeded in extending the life – and for many the quality of life – of numerous Canadians living with HIV. Meanwhile, infections have risen among men who have sex with men, heterosexual men and women, and Aboriginals.

**In 1996 there were an estimated 40,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada.<sup>4</sup>**

**In 2002 there were an estimated 56,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada.**

**There are an estimated 5000 new infections every year.**

Evidence suggests that poverty and economic insecurity play a key role in both HIV transmission and in the progression of the HIV disease. People living with HIV/AIDS, and community-based AIDS organizations, have conveyed to CAS that it is time to examine the relationship between HIV and income, and to integrate poverty prevention into the AIDS movement.

Want to learn more about poverty and HIV?

Check out the other information sheets:

Info Sheet #1: The Link Between Poverty and HIV

Info Sheet #2: How is poverty identified in Canada?

Info Sheet #3: The Economics of Risk and Vulnerability

Info Sheet #4: Living with the Cost of a Disability

Info Sheet #5: HIV and the Downward Drift into Poverty

Info Sheet #6: What is the impact of poverty on the life of someone with HIV?

Info Sheet #7: Public Income and Health Related Benefits

---

The goals of these fact sheets are :

- To illustrate why living in poverty is a key factor in causing Canadians to be vulnerable to HIV.
- To highlight the financial needs of people living with HIV and to identify the barriers they face when attempting to gain, maintain, or re-establish economic security.
- To demonstrate how living in poverty and economic insecurity negatively affects the health and quality of life of PLWHIV/AIDS

## HOW CAN YOU USE THESE FACT SHEETS?

### Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs)

- Use as evidence of need when seeking funds for programs and services that benefit clients living with HIV. Can also be cited in proposals and funding applications.
- Recognize that the poverty and income insecurity issues faced by people living with, and vulnerable to, HIV in one community are similar throughout Canada.
- Use to inform HIV prevention programs targeting people vulnerable to HIV infection due to their income difficulties.

### Advocates and Policy Makers

- Recognize that poverty and income insecurity are human rights issues, and that they are barriers to the right of non-discrimination and the right to a high standard of health.
- Use when developing and/or evaluating disability policies and programs. These fact sheets illustrate many of the social and economic experiences that are shared by different disabilities and illnesses.

### Researchers

- Use as a starting point for further research on the issues, and as a call to get involved in community-based research concerning people living with, and vulnerable to, HIV/AIDS.

- Provide ideas for researching poverty and the determinants of health, and how stigma and discrimination due to HIV/AIDS and poverty have health implications.
- Highlight community-based and qualitative research, and how it can reflect the life experiences of poverty and HIV.

## **POVERTY IS A HEALTH ISSUE**

Addressing poverty as part of the continuum of care and illness prevention is especially important for people living with, and vulnerable to, HIV. Poverty and income issues, as well as social and psychosocial issues, are raised when examining HIV transmission and epidemiology, treatment and disease management. When examining the evidence of the relationship between HIV and income, three trends are noticeable:

1. As a social determinant of health, living in poverty is a key factor causing Canadians to be vulnerable to HIV infection.
2. People diagnosed with HIV face many barriers when attempting to gain, maintain, or establish economic security.
3. PLWHIV/AIDS who experience poverty or economic insecurity are at risk of having their disease progress quickly, and of having a lower quality of life.

These fact sheets outline the relationship between HIV and poverty, and explore each of these trends. Understanding these trends will:

- Identify the economic structures that influence the transmission and progression of HIV, and its associated illnesses. This information can be used to advocate for a change to social and economic values and structures that perpetuate and promote poverty.
- Identify where resources need to be allocated for successful HIV prevention, care treatment and support. Canada needs an ongoing strong response to HIV that adequately addresses the unique financial needs of individuals and communities living with, and affected by, HIV.

### **RESOURCE LIST**

**HIV and Poverty Position Statement. Approved by the Canadian AIDS Society's Board of Directors, September 2004.**

Document available for download [www.cdnaids.ca](http://www.cdnaids.ca)



The HIV and Poverty Information Sheet Series is published by the Canadian AIDS Society. This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) is a national coalition of more than 115 community-based AIDS organizations across Canada. CAS is dedicated to increasing the response to HIV/AIDS across all sectors of society, and to enriching the lives of people and communities living with HIV/AIDS.

*For more information or to download a copy of this information sheet, please contact:*

**Canadian AIDS Society**  
309 Cooper St – 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K2P 0G5

Office: (613) 230 3580  
Fax: (613) 563 4998  
E-mail: [casinfo@cdnaids.ca](mailto:casinfo@cdnaids.ca)  
Website: [www.cdnaids.ca](http://www.cdnaids.ca)

Ce document est aussi disponible en français.

.....

*Additional copies of this document may be obtained from:*

Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre  
[www.aidssida.cpha.ca](http://www.aidssida.cpha.ca)  
Toll Free: 1-877-999-7740  
Email: [aidssida@cpha.ca](mailto:aidssida@cpha.ca)

**Author:** Ainsley Chapman  
**Editing:** Jennifer Carmichael  
**Graphic Design:** Marida Waters  
**Translation:** Jean Dussault

**Acknowledgements:** Thank-you to the creative and passionate National Advisory Committee.

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented without permission in writing from the publisher.*

*Permission is granted for non-commercial reproduction.*

---

1 Ross, David P., Katherine J. Scott & Peter J. Smith. (2000) *The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development

2 *HIV/AIDS EPI Updates* (May 2004) Ottawa: Surveillance and Risk Assessment Division, Centre for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control, Health Canada

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.