

Appearing before the Committee were representatives of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, the Canadian AIDS Society, the Canadian Association for HIV Research, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, the Canadian HIV Trials Network, the Canadian Treatment Action Council,

the McGill AIDS Centre, Voices of Positive Women, and YouthCo AIDS Society. A copy of the presentation made by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network is available on its website (www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/otherdocs/Aidsstrategy/e-Jurgens-speakingnotes.pdf).

– David Garmaise

¹ 37th Parliament, 2nd Session, Standing Committee on Health, Evidence, Monday, 24 March 2003. Available via the website of the Parliament of Canada (www.parl.gc.ca) by clicking on "Committee Business," "House of Commons," "Committee List," "Health," and "Evidence and Index." Transcripts of the other two days of hearings (17 and 19 March 2003) are also available on this site.

Survey Reveals Human Rights Abuses in Alberta

A survey of people with HIV/AIDS in Alberta suggests that there are serious deficiencies in the provision of pre- and post-test counselling to people undergoing HIV-antibody testing.¹ Survey respondents also identified human rights abuses in employment, housing, and other areas.

Almost three-quarters of the people with HIV/AIDS who participated in a recent human rights survey in Alberta reported that they did not receive counselling before they were tested for HIV. More than a third of the respondents said that they did not receive counselling even after being told that they had tested HIV-positive. The results suggest that some medical professionals in Alberta are failing to provide adequate pre- and post-test counselling, despite the existence of ethical guidelines stating that such counselling must be provided.²

The survey was conducted by means of a written questionnaire administered to 34 people with HIV/AIDS from across Alberta who attended the Expanding Your Horizons Symposium, a conference for people with HIV/AIDS held in October 2002. The survey was a preliminary step in a new Human Rights Project at AIDS Calgary. The project aims to develop rights-based educa-

tional, empowerment, and advocacy tools for use by people with HIV/AIDS and service providers in the Calgary region.

Almost a third of those who participated in the survey reported being treated unfairly by employers or co-workers as a result of their HIV status. Respondents described being terminated by employers, being asked to quit, and having their hours severely reduced. Fifteen percent of respondents reported having problems finding a place to live due to their HIV status; two respondents reported being evicted or harassed by landlords. As Alberta human rights legislation prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability, such treatment is in clear contravention of the law.

About a quarter of the respondents reported having difficulty accessing health care, for reasons ranging from inadequate access in rural areas to difficulties finding a general practitioner willing to provide treatment. About half the respondents reported

breaches of confidentiality concerning their HIV status, either at the hospital or at work.

More than a third of the survey participants had spent time in prison. Among this group, 42 percent reported difficulty accessing harm-reduction materials – including condoms, bleach, and clean needles – while in prison, while 25 percent said they had problems accessing HIV medications.

– Jessica Leech

Jessica Leech is the Human Rights Worker at AIDS Calgary. For further information on the survey and on AIDS Calgary's Human Rights Project, contact Ms Leech at jleech@aidscalgary.org. Survey results are also available on AIDS Calgary's website via www.aidscalgary.org/. The Human Rights Project is funded by the Alberta Lotteries Fund through the Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Education Fund.

¹ AIDS Calgary human rights questionnaire, October 2002, available on AIDS Calgary's website via www.aidscalgary.org/ by clicking on "Human Rights Project."

² See Canadian Medical Association. *CMA Policy: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (Update 2000)*, available on the CMA website via www.cma.ca/ by clicking on "Inside CMA" and "Where We Stand." See also HIV Testing: Counselling, one of a series of info sheets on HIV Testing issued by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network in 2001 (www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/issues/testing/e-info-ta8.htm).