



# **Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**

**Submission by the HIV Legal Network  
October 2022**

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**Challenging Wrongs. Advancing Rights. Transforming Lives.  
Combattre les injustices. Faire avancer les droits. Transformer des vies.**

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**Recommendation 1:**

That the government increase federal funding for the HIV response to meet the amount unanimously recommended by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (most recently in 2019). In 2019, the amount recommended was \$100 million annually; this amount should be adjusted for inflation.

**Recommendation 2:**

That the government simultaneously increase federal funding for hepatitis C (HCV) and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections, either by existing (including the Community Action Fund and the Harm Reduction Fund) or new mechanisms.

**Recommendation 3:**

That the government consult with leaders in the sector(s), including those with lived and living experience, for input on mechanisms to distribute this funding.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic illustrates starkly, yet again, the critical importance of both investing in public health and of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights in order to respond effectively to an ongoing public health challenge that is fuelled by, and is exacerbating, social and economic inequalities. In this regard, while there are of course important differences between COVID and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, there are important similarities — and hence important lessons to be learned from the history of HIV and the HIV response.

Even as Canada and the world continue to struggle with this latest public health crisis, it is essential that we not lose sight of the fact that ending the HIV pandemic — the pledge made by all countries as one of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 — is unfinished business. It would be a tragic mistake to let the ongoing challenge of COVID-19 derail the work that is needed to sustain the response to HIV and the human rights abuses that still accompany it.

**In this submission, we highlight again, as we have previously to Members of Parliament, the outstanding issue of adequately funding the federal response to the ongoing HIV pandemic.**

**Leading up to the AIDS 2022 conference, held in Montreal, Canada, this past summer, we had hoped to see additional monies made available for the HIV response that might bring us closer to what has been unanimously recommended by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health (most recently in 2019).** While a modest, one-time \$17.9 million commitment to HIV testing was announced at that venue, and is certainly welcome, this amount falls far short of what the sector actually needs to end the HIV pandemic. As of September 2022, the Government of Canada has pledged to contribute its fair share to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, which is an important and most welcome development. **We hope that the domestic response to HIV might also reflect Canada's commitment to ending the HIV pandemic, at home and around the world.**

### ***A history of promises unfulfilled***

In 2003, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health unanimously recommended that Canada double its HIV funding to \$85 million annually. In 2004, the previous Liberal government committed to largely reaching this target, with funding increasing gradually over several years. But that committed funding increase was halted by the Harper government in 2007 and has flatlined at the level of roughly \$70 million a year since.

The appended briefing paper tracks the year-over-year underfunding of the HIV response, based entirely on figures publicly reported by Health Canada.

As you can see, more than \$123 million ostensibly committed to the HIV response has simply never been delivered. Services and organizations have either closed, or have discontinued some programs, despite the clear need.

### ***Time to honour the commitment and meet the need***

During the previous Parliament, your government released a new federal *Five-Year Action Plan on Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections* (STBBIs). However, the plan does not include firm targets and there is no commitment for funding. **Reiterating the call for an adequately funded federal HIV strategy, in June 2019, as part of its study of the health of LGBTQ2S people and communities in Canada, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health unanimously recommended, yet again, an increase in federal funding just for the HIV response, this time to \$100 million annually.**

On World AIDS Day (December 1) 2021, the Senate of Canada adopted a motion again urging the federal government to follow through on this latest recommendation of the Standing Committee with a commitment to this level of funding.

To date, there has been no government response to the Standing Committee's report.

During the 2021 election campaign, the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) told us that it is committed to continuing "to work with people living with HIV and AIDS as well as community and advocacy organizations to create supportive networks that ensure no one is left behind." It also emphasised its commitment to encouraging testing and connecting people with treatment, recalling the creation of the Action Plan in 2020. Finally, it was indicated that the LPC would "also assess our plan and investments as part of a broader review of public health in Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada once we are through the current crisis."

However, the absence of firm targets is a shortcoming in that Action Plan and at odds with your government's previously stated commitment to delivering clear outcomes. It must also be noted that the promised funding is well below what is needed to address HIV alone — and yet your government's own statements, including in previous correspondence to us, make it clear that the funds committed so far are intended to support not only the HIV response but also other STBBIs. This puts even greater strain on what were already insufficient resources for addressing HIV alone. The funding gap remains, weakening the response to HIV — as well as underinvesting in addressing other important public health needs such as hepatitis C (HCV) and other STBBIs.

We look forward to working with you and your government colleagues to ensure that your government **responds to the Standing Committee's report** and that it then follows through by **committing the recommended \$100 million annually for the HIV response**. To be clear: we are also fully supportive of additional funding of the needed and complementary efforts to also address HCV and other STBBIs.

It is again our desire to work together with you and your team to respond to this moment and this challenge. Indeed, COVID-19 is again underscoring the importance of investing adequately in public health efforts. And yet, this is simply not happening with respect to HIV (or other STBBIs) — not even following through on previous federal government commitments, now 18

years old, and falling short of what has again been most recently recommended in 2019, with unanimous support from all parties in Parliament.

National organizations, including the HIV Legal Network, have time and again expressed our commitment, to successive Ministers of Health, to work together to build the case for adequate federal funding of the HIV response in Canada. We reiterate that commitment again and we know, from discussions with other national, provincial, and local organizations, that there is widespread and growing support for the federal government to act on these long-standing promises and recommendations.

**We therefore wish to draw to this government's attention, yet again, during these pre-budget consultations, the need to provide adequate funding for the federal government's response to HIV (and adequate funding for the response to HCV and other STBBIs).**