



Canadian AIDS
Society



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MEDIA RELEASE

Safe-crack kits important for health of drug users: AIDS groups

MONTREAL, March 31, 2005 – Provision of safe crack kits is an important measure to reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C in a marginalised and vulnerable population, said the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) in a joint statement today.

“This initiative is a responsible use of resources by the City of Ottawa to protect public health,” said Paul Lapierre, executive director of CAS. The two organizations said they look forward to the implementation of further harm reduction programs in other cities across Canada in the future.

Crack users commonly experience abrasions and cuts on their lips. Crack pipes are frequently shared, which exposes crack users to potentially infectious blood. While smoking drugs such as crack cocaine is generally thought to be a lower-risk practice than injection drug use, studies have shown that crack smokers are at high risk of HIV and Hepatitis C infection. In order to respond effectively and comprehensively to the HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C epidemics in Canada, drug policies need to incorporate harm reduction approaches such as safe crack-smoking kits.

“The perception that acknowledging the realities experienced in the lives of people who use drugs somehow equals condoning or encouragement of drug use is completely false,” says Paul Lapierre of the Canadian AIDS Society. “With this measure, the city is simply trying to prevent the spread of infectious diseases through methods that have been proven to be successful.”

Both HIV/AIDS organizations believe that it is time for governments at all levels across Canada to provide the tools and resources necessary for effective prevention of HIV and Hepatitis C as well as other diseases. The appropriate implementation of harm reduction practices ensures the quality and integrity of human rights of persons at risk of HIV and the respect for individual choices.

International human rights law and norms require that Canada take measures to ensure the highest attainable standard of health services for the whole population. Harm reduction services have been understood by human rights organizations to be part of the right to health as they effectively reduce adverse outcomes such as HIV infection among populations that are some of the most marginalised and most at risk of ill health.

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“It is incorrect and misleading to refer to safe-crack smoking kits as ‘drug paraphernalia’ because the Criminal Code of Canada does not prohibit instruments intended for prevention of a disease,” said Richard Pearshouse, Senior Policy Analyst with the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network.

Safer crack use initiatives have already been implemented in other Canadian cities such as Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal, Guelph and Halifax.

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The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network is a national organization engaged in education, legal and ethical analysis, and policy development, with over 250 organizational and individual members across Canada. Information about our activities and copies of our publications are available at www.aidslaw.ca.

The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) is a coalition of over 120 community-based AIDS organizations across Canada. The CAS mandate is to speak as a national voice and act as a forum for a community-based response to HIV infection, as well as to advocate for persons so affected.
