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PRISON TATTOO CLOSURE IRRESPONSIBLE, SAYS LEGAL NETWORK

TORONTO, December 4, 2006 — Shutting down the safer tattooing pilot program in Canadian prisons is fiscally irresponsible and a threat to public health and human rights, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network said today.

“The federal government says it won’t spend money now on a safer tattooing program for prisoners,” said Joanne Csete, Executive Director. “This means that taxpayers’ dollars will instead be spent later on treating HIV and hepatitis C infections that could have been prevented in the first place.”

In Canada, people in prison are 7 to 10 times more likely to be infected with HIV than people outside prison. The lack of sterile tattooing equipment is partly to blame. Prisoners fashion makeshift tattooing needles and inks that are reused and shared, increasing the risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission.

As early as 1994, the federal Expert Committee on AIDS and Prisons (a Correctional Service Canada committee) recommended establishing safer tattooing programs to address this problem. In 2005, Corrections Canada began the safer tattooing pilot project in six federal prisons. But earlier today, Minister Day cancelled the program, even before a final evaluation has been completed.

“Where is the evidence to back up this decision? Where are the facts and figures showing if this decision is good public policy?” asked Csete.

“Prisoners are sentenced to serve time, not to be infected with potentially fatal diseases,” concluded Csete. “Since most prisoners return to the community, this is a serious public health concern. Safer prison tattoo programs now make sense by preventing infections later.”

About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) promotes the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and

community mobilization. The Legal Network is Canada's leading advocacy organization working on the legal and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

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