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CANCELLATION OF SAFE CRACK KITS BY OTTAWA CITY COUNCIL IRRESPONSIBLE AND SHORT-SIGHTED

TORONTO, July 11, 2007 — The cancellation of a public health program that provided safe crack kits to people who use drugs with the goal of reducing the spread of HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) is both irresponsible and short-sighted, said the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network today.

“The perception that this program somehow condoned or encouraged drug use is completely false,” said Deputy Director Richard Elliott. “When the city started this program, it was aiming to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Today’s decision is a huge step backwards in terms of public health and human rights.”

The City of Ottawa’s Safer Crack Use Initiative, which included the distribution of safer inhalation equipment, was introduced on April 1, 2005. Earlier this afternoon, Councillor Rick Chiarelli (Ward 8 – College) introduced a surprise motion to cancel the safe crack kit program. A majority of councillors and Mayor Larry O’Brien passed the motion by a vote of 15 to 7. It takes effect immediately.

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 HCV infection.

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

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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