

**Speaking Notes
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**Deadly Public Policy:
The Federal Government's Failure to Provide Adequate Funding
for the Fight against HIV/AIDS**

Federal funding for the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS has not increased since 1993, when the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney dedicated \$42 million/year to the fight against HIV/AIDS. Already at the time, the then Liberal Opposition deemed this insufficient and promised to increase funding, if elected, to \$55 million/year.

Over ten years later, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada has nearly doubled, reaching 56,000 in 2002.¹ Every year, 4,000 new infections occur. We know how to prevent HIV infections, but the little federal funding available does not allow us to step up prevention efforts and to implement prevention initiatives that have proven to be effective in other countries. Rather than fighting the HIV epidemic, the federal government is administering it. Rather than acting on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health, which unanimously recommended that federal funding for AIDS be increased to \$100 million,² the federal government keeps funding at a level the Liberals themselves deemed insufficient already ten years ago.

The costs of this deadly public policy are enormous, for the people being infected and their families and loved ones, but also for the public purse. Every single new infection adds \$180,000 in direct medical costs – 4,000 new HIV infections per year add \$720 million in direct health-care costs. If we compare Canada with other countries, such as Australia and many European countries, Canada looks really bad. Our rates of new infections are nearly double as high, and our funding for HIV is lower. We can and must reduce the number of new infections.

Those who do not care for the lost lives and other consequences of HIV may start caring when they realize that the federal government's failure to invest appropriately in the fight against HIV/AIDS is not only morally irresponsible, but also fiscally irresponsible. Canada would save \$1.8 billion over five years in direct health-care costs alone if, through increased and targeted prevention efforts, we reduced the number of new infections comparable to those countries such as Australia. We can spend relatively little now on prevention, research, community-based support, and other initiatives, or spend much more later on hospital care.

At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001, Canada made an "unprecedented" commitment to fight AIDS at the national and international levels. In 2006, when Canada will host the International AIDS Conference, the whole world will be able to judge whether Canada is honouring its commitment. So far, Canada has failed abysmally.

For an in-depth analysis of Canada's failure to fight HIV/AIDS, see "Deadly Public Policy: HIV/AIDS and Government (In)action." Arthur Kroeger College Annual Lecture in Public Affairs and Civic Society, Carleton University, Ottawa, 22 January 2004. Available via http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/issues/discrimination/rights_approach.htm

¹ HIV and AIDS in Canada. Surveillance Report to June 30,2003. Division of HIV/AIDS Epidemiology and Surveillance. November 2003.

² The Standing Committee report is available at www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/2/HEAL/Studies/Reports/healrp03-e.htm.