

Aboriginal Women, Children And Families Focus For Aboriginal AIDS Awareness

On March 13th, the CAAN Board OF Directors met in Ottawa and came up with a new theme for next year's Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Day. The theme is "All Our Relations: Aboriginal Women, Children and Families". This theme focusses on the fact that Aboriginal women and families are increasingly more affected by HIV than other groups. According to the latest statistics from Health Canada, although Aboriginal persons comprised only 2.8% of the general Canadian population in 1996, they accounted for 5.5% (2,740/49,800) of all prevalent infections and 8.8% (370/4,190) of all new infections in Canada in 1999. These reports also say that Aboriginal people infected with HIV are also much more likely to be women than in non-Aboriginal communities.

Randy Jackson, The National Programs and Projects Coordinator of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, says that the reason the theme was chosen is that it is important to focus on our families and communities as well as the individuals that make up those communities. "We want to spread the message that the disease affects everyone, and that Aboriginal women and children are often severely devastated by the disease. The woman is often the primary caregiver for the family, and if she is infected, the children are often severely affected." Also, he adds, issues of infection offer differ for women, who deal with issues of testing during pregnancy, vertical (mother-to-child) transmission, as well as issues of sexual assault and emotional and physical abuse.

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network hopes to begin planning for this year's Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Campaign even earlier than last year, and will be striking a national planning committee sometime in the late summer. For more information about this committee, or what events are being planned in your area, contact the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network at 1-888-285-2226 or at info@caan.ca



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Access for all: The XV International AIDS Conference, July 11 - 16, 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand

The theme for this year's International AIDS Conference to be held in Thailand in July of 2004 is Access For All. Conference organisers says the theme reflects the need for all groups, including scientists, community workers and leaders from all levels, from the field, the public and private sectors, to have access to all resources developed after 20 years of living with HIV/AIDS. According to the Conference website, the theme means

- 1) access for all infected and affected groups.
- 2) access to education, information, and medication.
- 3) access to the people who write policies, give support and offer care.
- 4) The tools needed are here for some.
- 5) Now comes the time to deliver the message, the medicine, the help and the hope to all.

Aboriginal people in Canada have a large role to play in International AIDS Conferences. The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network has been present with presentations and posters at World AIDS Conferences in Vancouver in 1996, Geneva, Switzerland in 1998, Durbin, South Africa in 2000 and Barcelona, Spain in 2002. Staff and board members from the CAAN of-

ice have again applied for scholarships and submitted abstracts for this year's conference, to carry the issues of Canada's Aboriginal people into an international forum and to liaise with other indigenous people the world over.



Photo: Staff and volunteers in Bangkok, Thailand gearing up to host XV International AIDS Conference, July 11 - 16, 2004

CAAN's Workshop and Poster Presentations at past World AIDS Conferences

In the past the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network has presented at the World AIDS Conference Joining The Circle, An Aboriginal Harm Reduction Model, a poster presentation on the Indigenous People's Forum in 1998, Understanding Epidemiology: A Guide To Understanding Aboriginal Epidemiology and surveillance in Canada and a History Of Aboriginal AIDS Awareness in Canada.

For more information about the international AIDS Conference, visit the World AIDS Conference website at www.aids2004.org



CAAN PROJECT UPDATES

The following are updates from CAAN staff on various projects. For more information on CAAN projects contact the national office at info@caan.ca

Addressing Homophobia in Relation to HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal Communities

By Joyce Seto

Currently, the 'Anti-Homophobia Project' more formally known as 'Addressing Homophobia in Relation to HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal Communities' - (AHRHAAC) is gearing up to do a mail out survey. Organizations who serve Aboriginal populations will be asked if they have any anti-discrimination policies and their comments on the development of solutions to address issues of homophobia. Plus, individuals who self identify as Two Spirit will be recruited from six organizations across Canada about their own personal experiences with homophobia and their suggested solutions of how organizations can reduce the impact homophobia has on accessing care and services.

The Influence of Stigma on Access to Health Services by Persons with HIV Illness

Joyce Seto

The 'Stigma Project' in partnership with the University of Alberta is now a year old and knee deep in the middle of in-depth interviews with HIV positive individuals. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are being interviewed about the role stigma has

played in their life since being diagnosed and how it has affected their access to care. Interviews are taking place in two cities, Edmonton and Ottawa. By April 2004, over 30 interviews will be completed and it is hoped a preliminary review of the interviews will start soon after. Special thanks goes out to all the community partners who have helped find people for the interviews.

In other 'Stigma Project' news, January 2004 saw the departure of Yelena Chorny as Research Assistant housed at the CAAN office in Ottawa. Joyce Seto is the new Research Assistant and will be at the CAAN office part-time until September 2004.

Joining the Circle: Aboriginal Harm Reduction, Phase II

Robert Friday

News Flash! The "Joining the Circle: Aboriginal Harm Reduction, Phase II" manual is completed and was released at the end of March. It is a very exciting time for us. After two years of research and endless revisions, the final product is here, at last. I would like to take this time to thank those who provided input during the data collection stage of the project. I would also like to thank those in Regina, SK and Halifax, NS who participated in the pilot testing of the draft manual and made many good suggestions. Most particularly, I would like to thank the members of the following organizations who took the time to guide the process: All Nations Hope AIDS Network; Healing Our Nations; 2-Spirited People of the First Nations; First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health & Social Services Commission; and Correctional Services Canada. Your commitment to this project is most ap-

preciated.

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network will begin to disseminate copies of the manual to its constituents, and any others who request the document. It will also be posted on the CAAN website. I expect it to be a useful tool that will allow Aboriginal communities, big and small, urban and rural, to implement those Harm Reduction Programs that are so badly needed. Here is to keeping our communities safe and strong.!

ASHAC Update

Robert Friday

Upon accepting the position of Executive Director of CAAN, Kevin Barlow resigned as Consultant of the Aboriginal Strategy on HIV/AIDS in Canada (ASHAC) and has since passed the torch to Robert Friday. Robert will serve in this capacity until March 31, 2004 when this phase of the project is completed. He will use the collection of information provided to write up the final report. There are a few activities to add since the last newsletter. Of key interest is the promotion of the "Strengthening Ties- Strengthening Communities" report at a press release held from the CAAN office on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2003. Most recently, the report was made available at the "Epidemics in Our Communities" Conference in Regina, SK January 29 to 31. The National Working Group held a teleconference on February 11, 2004. The discussion centred on the involvement of key stakeholders and the implementation of the strategy in communities across the country. The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network anticipates great things for the future of this important project.

Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Anti-Discrimination Policy Framework Project

Gilbert Deschamps

Across Canada Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS (APHAs) struggle to maintain their health and well-being on a day-to-day basis. The issues of poverty, racism, stigma and lack of services are some of the barriers to a healthy and productive life.

Stigma and discrimination touch almost every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal People living with HIV/AIDS. Discrimination creates many problems for APHAs. These may include harassment from employers or colleagues, inadequate workplace accommodation, denial of housing, lack of access to health care services, restrictions on travel to foreign countries, to name a few.

The human rights of Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS are continually violated, yet research has shown the Canadian human rights protection system is entirely inadequate to address these violations.

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network has recently received funding from Health Canada for a legal, ethical and human rights project. The goal of the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Anti-Discrimination Policy Framework Project (AHAAD) is to develop a policy development framework in collaboration with the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network that can be used by Aboriginal organizations to produce anti-HIV/AIDS discrimination policies on inclusion and hiring of Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS and on service delivery to APHAs in their organizations.

This project has been funded until March 31, 2005.

CAAN Web Library

By Eve Louttit

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network will be launching the Eloquent WebLibrary that will be connected to CAAN's website. People who want to access this resource can follow the link in CAAN's own Website as soon as it becomes available.

WebLibrary

Introducing the world's first entirely Web-centric integrated library management application. Eloquent WebLibrary is entirely Web-based, making it easy to support all the latest advancements in Web, Internet & Email technology.

- WebLibrary will ensure that our users (YOU) know about our other HIV/AIDS resource materials for borrowing, ordering and what it has to offer!
- WebLibrary will provide HIV/AIDS resource materials such as: books, journals, printed documents, videos, kits, etc.
- WebLibrary can be used by people living with HIV/AIDS, their families, caregivers and/or advocates. Other users will include a broad audience of individuals, youth, students, women, men, Elders, parents, organizations and health care professionals.

Strengthening Aboriginal Community-Based HIV Research Capacity

Dina Epale

National Aboriginal HIV/AIDS CBR capacity building initiative. The goal is to develop culturally-appropriate

and methodologically-sound research, analysis and dissemination strategies that are beneficial and empowering for participating communities and other stakeholders in their preparation and implementation of an effective response to HIV/AIDS.

CAAN has compiled and published its first CBR environmental scan to explore the research capacity building needs of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS service organisations. The complete report in English or French is available for downloading at any of the following three web sites. (www.linkup-connexion.ca, www.cbr-hiv.net, www.caan.ca) This report has resulted in, amongst other things, the possibility of the formulation of a research topic around addressing cultural awareness and sensitivity when addressing HIV in Aboriginal communities. Keep an eye on this page for more information.

Summer Training Awards

Dina Epale

The Summer Training Awards Training has as goal to address the need for pro-active strategies to recruit, mentor and retain qualified individuals devoted to HIV/AIDS community-based research.

In its third and final year, six students, six academic advisors and six host organisations got together and conducted related community-based HIV research. For a complete report of the research conducted by each student, please refer to the following web-sites; www.cbr-hiv.net and shortly at www.caan.ca. This project comes to an end at CAAN on March 31st 2004. The complete Summer Training Awards project report will be soon be available on-line, so keep checking!

CAAN Executive Director Promotes AIDS Strategy

Two years ago, Kevin Barlow was the chief consultant for the Aboriginal Strategy on HIV/AIDS in Canada. Now he is the Executive Director of the organization that sponsored the strategy, and is the process of making sure his work of two years is implemented. Barlow, a Micmac from Indian Island, New Brunswick, thinks that the most important aspect of this strategy, the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) and the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS movement as a whole is structure.

“CAAN provides leadership on the issue of HIV/AIDS,” he says, “and in turn our members provide glimpses of common themes taking place in the community that we can use to influence policy here at a national level. The most important job facing the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network over the next two years is strengthening our network, and getting more members to join us in the fight against HIV/AIDS in our communities.”

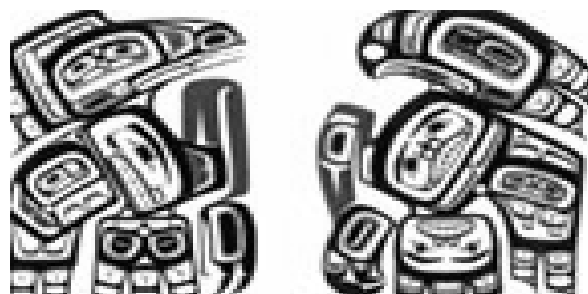
By members, Barlow explains he means Aboriginal AIDS Service organizations, reserves, friendship centres, Métis and Inuit associations, even individuals. “By working together,” says Barlow, “we can improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and then the numbers of those getting infected will go down.”

When asked in what other ways we can reduce the numbers of those living with HIV, Barlow points again to the Aboriginal strategy on HIV/AIDS in Canada. “The strategy is a blueprint for coordination and resource development in our communities. Now, as ever, funding is precarious for HIV/AIDS, and each community must find ways of addressing these issues and reduc-

ing the numbers of those affected. The strategy can help to do this.”

Barlow points out that 178 organizations and individuals across Canada gave input on the strategy, and the process took over two years. The document outlines needs and an approach to dealing with HIV/AIDS in Canada’s Aboriginal community, in such areas as Care and Treatment for those living with HIV, Research, Youth, Women and Elders. Currently the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network is promoting the strategy both at the national level and among communities, hoping that the document will inspire community leaders and government officials alike to take action. “The most important thing for us now,” says Barlow, “is to raise the profile of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network and the strategy, so we can continue to do this important work.”

For more information on the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, or the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy in Canada, visit the CAAN website at www.caan.ca



HIV Prevention Messages for Canadian Aboriginal Youth

The following is an interview with Tracey Prentice, and her project at the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network.

Q. Tracy, describe your project in your own words.

A. The goals of this project were fairly straight-forward. Given that the rate of HIV infection is rising among Aboriginal youth, we wanted to find out what kinds of prevention messages are out there for Aboriginal youth, where the gaps are in terms of prevention, and what we can do about filling those gaps. So the way we did that is to survey Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal AIDS Organizations across the country and ask them what they're doing in the way of prevention for Aboriginal youth, what they think needs to be done, and how they think it should be done. We also reviewed some of the literature on Aboriginal youth prevention and youth prevention on the international scene. From there we created a list of recommendations for designing and delivering *effective* prevention messages.

We also created a list of organizations and resources related to HIV prevention for Aboriginal youth. For instance, we looked at the kinds of prevention initiatives that are happening around the world, and highlighted about 10 initiatives that we thought could easily be adapted for use in Aboriginal communities. We also highlighted prevention initiatives that are currently happening in Canada that might be adapted for use in other parts of the country.

This project was guided by a National Steering Committee made up of 6 Aboriginal youth and 1 non-Aboriginal youth, plus an Aboriginal youth research assistant.

Q. How do you think your project directly benefits Aboriginal people in Canada?

A. I think this project has all kinds of benefits for Aboriginal people. The reason it even got started is because CAAN recognized that Aboriginal youth were accounting for an increasing percentage of HIV infections every year, and we wanted to do something to address this. So I think the direct benefit for Aboriginal people is that this project highlights the need for more targeted prevention for youth, and it draws attention to the fact that this really is an issue that needs looking at. Youth account for over 25% of new HIV infections and considering that HIV is 100% preventable, that's just unacceptable. We hope that this report will urge governments, organizations, and individuals to take this issue seriously, and to start developing and implementing the targeted prevention and education for First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth that they so clearly are lacking.

Q. How can people get involved with your project?

A. This project was completed on March 31, 2004, so there's not really any way that people can get involved directly anymore. What they can do, though, is make use of the resources we created. The final report is being printed now and it'll also be posted to the CAAN website. As well, we created two Fact Sheets for community use. So if people want to pick those up and start making use of them, that would be great for us,

and we hope, great for them too.

Q. Where do you see your project going in the future?

A. Well, as I say, the project itself is finished, but there's definitely some implied next steps, and those are to carry out some of the recommendations. For instance, one of the recommendations is to develop a national strategy for Aboriginal youth prevention. There is no coordinated effort happening out there and we think that a national strategy, probably under the umbrella of ASHAC, might help to strengthen the message that there needs to be more prevention for Aboriginal youth because they clearly are not getting the information and the skills training they need to protect themselves against HIV.

Another recommendation that I'd like to see carried out is the creation of more Aboriginal, youth-specific prevention messages that respect the diversity and unique cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. With the exception of a few organizations who are doing targeted prevention, we found that the vast majority of prevention messages and initiatives out there are really pan-Aboriginal, i.e., attempting to target all Aboriginal youth, and there's some question as to how effective that kind of message is.

So in terms of where I'd like to see this project go in the future, I guess I'd have to say that I'd like to see some action taken on some of the recommendations.

Q. Tell us a little bit about you.

A. I've been working with CAAN for a little over a year now, and I'm having a wonderful time doing it. I'm constantly learning from my colleagues and from my research, and to me, it just doesn't get any better. It's

a great office to work in. I've been involved in research with Aboriginal people for a number of years now, but this is the first time that I've worked at the national level. I'm meeting all kinds of wonderful people and I think I'm getting a sense of what's happening across the country.

I have an MA in Anthropology with a special interest in Medical Anthropology. I'd like to continue working in this field, and some day, I'd like to get my PhD. But that's down the road a ways. For now, I think I'm learning way more doing the kind of work I'm doing than I would in an academic program.

For more information about Tracey and her project contact her at CAAN at

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Photo: Tracey Prentice at CAAN during Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Day