

**CANADIAN ABORIGINAL AIDS NETWORK  
LE RÉSEAU CANADIEN AUTOCHTONE DU SIDA**



**For Immediate Release**

**NEWS RELEASE/COMMUNIQUÉ**

**This Valentine's Day show you care...  
about Aboriginal People Living with HIV/AIDS**

**CANADIAN ABORIGINAL AIDS NETWORK**  
Challenges Leaders to Reduce HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination

**OTTAWA, February 12, 2008** – Kevin Barlow, Executive Director for the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN), today announced the launch of a Valentine's Day initiative that challenges Leaders to show they care about Aboriginal People Living with HIV/AIDS (APHA) by reducing HIV/AIDS related Stigma and Discrimination.

“During this special time of year when most show appreciation for their loved ones, we are reminded that many Aboriginal People living with HIV/AIDS do not have this opportunity,” says Kevin Barlow, Executive Director of the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. “Many APHAs simply face too many barriers and choose to be single because of the fear, stigma and discrimination that come with HIV/AIDS”.

Barlow goes on to challenge, “this Valentine's Day, we seek both action and commitment from Aboriginal leaders and our communities to help stop stigma and discrimination.”

“Valentine's Day can be a difficult time for Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS,” says Trevor Stratton, APHA Advocate for the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. “Today we are supposed to express our *love* but many APHAs have given up on romance, love and sex because it is too complicated.”

“The stigma is because we are positive we are not supposed to have sex. The reality is as human beings we are entitled to love,” asserts Stratton. “As an APHA, I hope this campaign will remind our leaders that HIV/AIDS is a serious concern for all of us, HIV positive and HIV negative alike.”

Valentine's Day is the first initiative of the “**Fostering Community Leadership to Reduce HIV/AIDS Stigma and Discrimination**” national campaign that will seek to increase awareness and knowledge. This campaign scheduled to launch next month will set out to *increase support from and endorsement by Aboriginal leaders and officials for prevention, care and treatment programs intended for our communities.*

“Not only must all of our leaders acknowledge HIV/AIDS is an epidemic but they must address the stigma and discrimination that is fuelling it,” says Doris Peltier, a board member with the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network. “Our leaders must take action to build healthy communities.”

## **CANADIAN ABORIGINAL AIDS NETWORK LE RÉSEAU CANADIEN AUTOCHTONE DU SIDA**

Now is an ideal time to engage your community about HIV/AIDS and how to reduce the HIV related stigma and discrimination too often associated with this virus. Beginning on Valentine's Day (February 14th) and extending to December 2008, CAAN would like to remind individuals, communities and leaders that because HIV/AIDS does not discriminate it affects everyone.

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network represents a coalition of hundreds of Aboriginal organizations and individuals committed to providing leadership, support and advocacy for all Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and those most at risk to infection, regardless of where they reside.

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### **Campaign Background**

Aboriginal people living in Canada represent 3.8% of the country's total population but represent more than three times that number in prevalent HIV infections. Aboriginal people are the most vulnerable population in Canada to test positive for HIV. Statistics from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) indicate that Aboriginal people now represent 27.3% of positive HIV test reports in 2006. This is a 4.1% increase from 2005.

In partnership with the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada, the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) has developed and distributed Valentines to First Nations, Métis and Inuit community leaders to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

Reducing HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination is seen as an appropriate first step towards creating an environment that is conducive to engaging Aboriginal people, communities and leadership in the real work to; (1) prevent further infections, (2) provide support for testing and diagnosis, and (3) care and treatment of Aboriginal People living with HIV/AIDS (APHA).

## **CANADIAN ABORIGINAL AIDS NETWORK LE RÉSEAU CANADIEN AUTOCHTONE DU SIDA**

By launching its biggest and longest running social marketing campaign ever... CAAN hopes to increase support from and endorsement by Aboriginal leaders and officials for prevention, care and treatment programs intended for our communities.

CAAN will provide leaders with resources and promotional materials related to this campaign to help raise levels of awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

In November 2008, leaders across the country will be asked to “sign on the line” to let their community know there are committed to reducing HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

Through this leadership commitments initiative, our vision is to get 5000 signatures by next year, to show we are standing together to turn the page, and end stigma.

CAAN acknowledges that Aboriginal political and health leaders (at the community, provincial, regional and national levels) are crucial to creating environments free of stigma and discrimination. Although many leaders have already stepped forward to face the real challenges associated with HIV/AIDS, a long-term commitment is required to engage, foster and expand messaging to those political and health leaders where HIV/AIDS endorsement is lacking.