



The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P.
 Minister of Health
 Health Canada
 Sent via email: hcmminister.ministresc@canada.ca

November 17, 2021

Dear Minister Duclos:

On behalf of the organizations enumerated above, we write to congratulate you and wish you success as Minister of Health. At this time, our group of community-based and human rights organizations delivering Canada's response to HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C (HCV) and sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections (STBBI) urgently requests a meeting with you to discuss our shared successes, as well as challenges facing Canada, our sector, and the tens of thousands of people served by our organizations.

As World AIDS Day and Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day (December 1) fast approach, we are again reminded of the importance of strengthening our collective efforts in addressing HIV, along with HCV and other STBBIs. Canada is now in year three of five of its *Five-Year Action Plan on STBBIs*. Additionally, we have made international commitments to the UNAIDS "95-95-95 by 2025" goals, as well as to the World Health Organization's target of global elimination of viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030. As Canada prepares to welcome the world to Montreal, Quebec, in July, for the 9th International Indigenous Pre-Conference on HIV & AIDS and the 24th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2022), it is an opportune time to check in on our progress vis-à-vis the *Action Plan*, as well as our various international commitments.

Sadly, Minister, we are losing ground on both. This is borne out by increased HIV infection rates, growing outbreaks of syphilis and other STBBIs, and the large number of people in Canada who remain unaware of their HIV and/or HCV status (estimated at 13% and 44%, respectively). Across the country, there has been a failure to deliver a pan-Canadian STBBI response that adequately meets the needs of racialized people and those of Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis), despite the federal government's commitment to the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and to improving health outcomes for Indigenous Peoples and communities. At this time, Canada is not on track to realize equitable health outcomes for Black and other racialized communities.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and an ever-worsening drug poisoning crisis, civil society organizations like ours are struggling. The efforts of community-based and human rights organizations on the front lines of these public health crises are not being adequately resourced by the federal government. In turn, this lack of resources destabilizes our collective response to these three converging epidemics. Our organizations work with communities to mobilize and develop solutions that are flexible, timely, cost-effective and culturally safe. These are the organizations that bring to the table the experiences and insights of people living with HIV, people with lived and living experience of HCV, and those communities most affected. These are the organizations that advocate for health and human rights, as well as for evidence-informed and culturally safe policies, programs and services. And these are the same organizations that are struggling with their ability to effectively and sustainably serve their communities and work for policies and programs that will stem onward transmission of STBBIs and continue to address Canada's opioid and overdose crisis.

Canada is in danger of losing its foothold in the response to HIV, HCV and STBBIs. Now is not the time for the status quo. Now is the time for enhanced investment, commensurate with funding recommendations made by the Government of Canada's own parliamentary committees.

With a number of significant gatherings and commemorative events on the horizon—World AIDS Day 2021, Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week, the International Indigenous Pre-Conference on HIV & AIDS, and the International AIDS Conference—we request to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss these concerns and strategize how we can work together to support the Ministry of Health in meeting our international commitments as well as important domestic goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Evin Jones', written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

J. Evin Jones, Executive Director, PAN

And on behalf of:

Chris Aucoin, Executive Director, AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

Gerard Yetman, Executive Director, AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador (ACNL) and Chair, Action Hepatitis Canada (AHC)

Celeste Hayward, Executive Director, Alberta Community Council on HIV (ACCH)

Leona Quewezance, Program Director, All Nations Hope Network

Jacque Gahagan, Co-Director, Atlantic Interdisciplinary Research Network: HIV/HCV (AIRN)

Margaret Kisikaw Piyesis, CEO, CAAN – Communities, Alliances and Networks

Gary Lacasse, Executive Director, Canadian AIDS Society (CAS)

Laurie Edmiston, Executive Director, CATIE

Ken Monteith, Directeur général, Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA)

Jody Jollimore, Executive Director, Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC)

Scott Elliott, Executive Director, Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation

Julie Thomas, Executive Director, Healing Our Nations

Janet Butler-McPhee and Sandra Ka Hon Chu, Co-Executive Directors, HIV Legal Network (HLN)

Mike Payne, Executive Director, Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Shannon Ryan, Executive Director, Ontario AIDS Network (OAN)

Tammy Yates, Executive Director, Realize

CC: The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, M.D., P.C., M.P., Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health