



MEDIA RELEASE



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CONTACT: Julia Smith
Director of Communications
BC Persons With AIDS Society
Phone: 604.893.2209 **Cell:** 604.612.0222
Email: julias@bcpwa.org

AIDS Awareness on the Decline?

Vancouver BC – Statistics and public opinion suggest AIDS awareness is declining. The 22nd AIDS Walk for Life, hosted by the British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA) on September 23rd in Stanley Park, reminds us that for 15,000 British Columbians, HIV/AIDS remains a fact of life.

“HIV has been labeled an intravenous drug users’ and a gay men’s disease by society,” says Glyn Townson, Chair of the BCPWA Society. “AIDS is a community issue the greater community cannot afford to ignore. We must work together to support people living with HIV/AIDS, and find ways to prevent further HIV infections.”

Despite widespread apathy about the disease, the reality is that over 3,400 new HIV infections occur in Canada each year. In British Columbia, nearly one third of people infected with HIV are unaware of their status. Specific population groups are seeing an exponential increase in infections. First Nations communities accounted for nine percent of new infections in 2006, though they only make up three percent of the population. HIV infections contracted from heterosexual sex now count for 30.9 percent of new infections, as opposed to just 7.5 percent in 1995. The majority of these infections are among women.

The AIDS Walk for Life benefits 15 AIDS service organizations that provide a variety of resources to youth, women, first nation’s communities and others infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. The AIDS Walk for Life is the largest AIDS fundraising event in the province, and all funds provide direct services to communities throughout the province. BCPWA expects over 2000 registered walkers and 300 volunteers at this year’s event.

Walkers can register and fundraise by calling 604.915.WALK or online at www.bcpwa.org. On the day of the Walk, September 23rd, registration opens at 8:30 am at Upper Ceperley Park, in Stanley Park, and the walk begins at 11:00 am. Free afternoon entertainment includes Vancouver bands SPYGIRL, the Kitchen and Brickhouse.

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The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society), a non-profit, consumer-driven organization is in its 21st year of operation, is dedicated to empowering persons living with HIV disease and AIDS through mutual support and collective action. As western Canada's largest AIDS organization, with a membership of more than 4,400 HIV+ individuals, the Society provides support and advocacy services, treatment information, and volunteer opportunities to its diverse membership throughout the province of BC.