



MEDIA RELEASE

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BCPWA Dismayed by Clement's Lack of Commitment

Vancouver BC – The decision to grant Insite a six month extension, announced today by Minister of Health Tony Clement, demonstrates the government's lack of commitment to tackling the HIV epidemic, says the British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society.

Insite, the first supervised injection site in North America, has helped prevent the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C, as well as provided an entry point for drug users to access detox services. Minister Clement's failure to recognize the direct benefits of Insite in addressing HIV depicts the government's short-sighted agenda.

"Health Minister Clement made it apparent that the federal government is not committed to curbing the spread of HIV," says Glyn Townson, chair of BCPWA. "This decision was not based on a desire to help people or to address HIV in our community. This decision was purely political." BCPWA fears the Conservatives are simply stalling, hoping to revisit the issue with a majority government.

Minister Clement noted more time was needed to assess Insite's impact. However, 28 published studies have already concluded Insite is beneficial, and many credit it with helping reduce HIV and Hepatitis C infection rates on Vancouver's Down Town East Side, as well as linking people living with HIV/AIDS with appropriate services.

The B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, a leading world researcher, recently declined two Health Canada research projects on Insite because of restrictions preventing publishing the completed research for up to six months. BCPWA fears that such restrictions indicate a lack of willingness from the federal government to objectively and openly address supervised injection sites as an important tool to help combat HIV/AIDS in our communities.

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The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society), a non-profit, consumer-driven organization is in its 21th 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.