



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Research Announcement Will Directly Benefit People Living with AIDS

Vancouver BC – The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA) applauds the announcement made today at St. Paul’s Hospital. Paul Levesque, President and CEO of Pfizer Canada, announced \$3 million for the BC Center for Excellence in HIV/AIDS to develop a tropism virus strain test.

The test, which identifies the route the virus uses to enter the immune cells, will enable physicians to prescribe the best medications to patients with HIV, and help prevent drug resistance. BCPWA believes development of this test in British Columbia will directly benefit the 12,000 people living with HIV in the province by improving treatment options.

“This is good news for people on HIV treatment,” says Glyn Townson, Chair of BCPWA. “This innovation has the potential to greatly improve the quality of life for thousands of people living with HIV/AIDS.”

It may also help to protect their privacy. Currently the tropism test, which is necessary before many new improved medications can be prescribed, is only available in one lab in the United States. Many HIV positive people fear sending blood work across the board, as privacy laws differ between the US and Canada. Furthermore, results from the US lab take three to five weeks, and the test itself is cumbersome. In comparison, the test the BC Center for Excellence is developing will be rapid and hopefully replicable. It has the potential to improve the treatment and care for millions of people living with HIV throughout the world.

There are over 12,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in British Columbia. About 25 percent of these people do not know their status and there are about 400 new infections each year. Effective treatment is a corner stone to preventing further infections, as people on treatment are less likely to spread the virus.

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