

**For immediate release**

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## **Online Connec+: New Group for People Living with HIV Reaches Residents across BC**

**Vancouver, BC:** “How are you doing?” For people living with HIV (PLHIV), feeling lonely and isolated is common due to the stigma surrounding the virus—so a simple question like this, asked by someone who knows what you are going through and how to help, can mean a lot. It can also start a connection—to peers who can give emotional support, or to a healthcare provider. To help PLHIV establish this vital link, Positive Living BC has launched a new online peer support group, Online Connec+. The group, the first of its type in BC to be affiliated with an HIV/AIDS service organization, will provide HIV education, support and community referrals to people throughout BC, who might otherwise be unable to access these key services.

Online Connec+ will be facilitated by Positive Living BC’s Peer Navigators. A Peer Navigator is an HIV-positive person who helps PLHIV develop HIV self-management strategies and gain knowledge. Peer Navigators are trained and educated on health issues surrounding HIV/AIDS, self care, safer sex, sexually transmitted infections, and disease progression.

Says program leader Michael Crate, “Online Connec+ was started as a natural extension of the Peer Navigator program. The group will be an open format meeting. We will talk about what is currently going on for participants in relation to their HIV diagnosis. This might include health, treatment or self-care issues, stigma, isolation, disclosure, or dating. Peer Navigators will be there to facilitate the group, or do one-on-one counseling.” Notes Elgin Lim, Positive Living BC’s manager of programs and services, “Living with HIV can be isolating, particularly in smaller communities. Online Connec+ can help people feel less alone, allow people to share experiences, and provide an opportunity to make new connections with other people living with HIV, no matter where they are in the province.”

Online Connec+ is open to anyone living with HIV in BC. All genders, sexualities and ages are welcome. The group will meet twice a month on Monday night from 6:30 pm to 8 pm. For more information or to participate, people can call Positive Living BC’s toll-free number (1-800-994-2437) and leave a confidential voicemail, or email Michael Crate at [michaelc@positivelivingbc.org](mailto:michaelc@positivelivingbc.org).

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*The Positive Living Society of British Columbia exists to enable persons living with HIV and AIDS to empower themselves through mutual support and collective action.*