

For immediate release

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Stamping out stigma: Scotiabank AIDS WALK for LIFE turns 30

Vancouver, BC: Vancouver's Scotiabank AIDS WALK for LIFE is turning 30 next month, and celebrations are ramping up to honour BC's largest public fundraising and awareness event for people living with HIV (PLHIV).

"It's important to see how far we've come. The WALK started to save people's lives, now it is a chance to empower people's lives," says Val Nicholson, Chair of the event. And key to empowerment is fighting HIV stigma, so get ready to lace up your kicks and take part in the WALK.

In daily life, PLHIV experience stigma as hostile behavior or discrimination. But perhaps the most serious form stigma takes is the criminalization of HIV. Canadians are being charged with criminal offences for not disclosing their HIV status to sexual partners, and at drastically higher numbers than in other countries. The total number of HIV-related criminal prosecutions in Canada is estimated at 170 cases, and in BC, the number of prosecutions for HIV non-disclosure is estimated to be 20 or more. In modern-day Canada, no other medical condition has been, or is likely to be, treated in this manner.

To combat HIV stigma, the WALK provides community and support to PLHIV, along with financial assistance for health-related expenses via the Community Health Fund. The WALK is also stamping out stigma by participating in the HIV Anonymous campaign, which aims to give a voice to Canadians who are living anonymously with HIV. PLHIV can use the campaign's online platform (hivanonymous.ca) to share their stories and to talk about how stigma has affected their lives, while keeping their identity private. Their stories will be used to educate others about the realities of living with HIV/AIDS. The public is invited to show their support by using the HIV Anonymous campaign icon on social media, as well as joining the WALK for LIFE and the celebrations that will mark its 30th anniversary.

The 30th annual Scotiabank AIDS WALK for LIFE takes place September 20, 2015, starting at Sunset Beach and following a 6.75 km route along the Seawall and through Stanley Park.

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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.