

**For immediate release**

September 3, 2015

## **HIV criminalization puts BC residents at risk of prosecution**

**Vancouver, BC:** People living with HIV (PLHIV) in BC are being prosecuted in numbers that show no signs of slowing. Under current charge guidelines, residents of this province can and are being put on trial for aggravated sexual assault for not disclosing their HIV status to sexual partners before having sex, even if the risk of transmitting the virus is next to non-existent – for example, if a person has fully suppressed the virus in his or her blood through adherence to HIV medication, or properly uses a condom.

HIV criminalization is a dangerous form of HIV stigma, which has, for decades, produced fear and intolerance directed towards people living with HIV. By the end of 2015, the number of people investigated and/or prosecuted because of HIV criminalization in BC is estimated to rise to 20 or more.

Certain Canadian residents are more vulnerable to HIV criminalization – men of colour and heterosexual men. In over 90 percent of criminal charges related to HIV non-disclosure in Canada, charges were laid against men, with 72 percent being laid against heterosexual men. From 2004 to 2009, men of colour accounted for 50 percent of all heterosexual cases, whereas Caucasian men accounted for 41.7 percent. Men who have sex with men are also being prosecuted in rising numbers.

Key to ending HIV criminalization and HIV stigma is calling on BC's Criminal Justice Branch to change current charge guidelines for HIV non-disclosure. But people can also help reduce stigma by learning about and talking about the problem via the recently launched HIV Anonymous campaign. The campaign ([www.hivanonymous.ca](http://www.hivanonymous.ca)) features an online platform where PLHIV can talk anonymously about their lived experience, and how stigma has affected their lives. The public can show their support by using the HIV Anonymous icon on social media, as well as joining the Scotiabank AIDS WALK for LIFE on September 20<sup>th</sup> and Sunset Beach.

- 30 -

**Contact:**

Adam Reibin, Director of Communications  
Positive Living Society of BC  
604.612.0222

*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.*