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AIDS WALK for LIFE supports people living with different medical conditions

Vancouver, BC: Vivacious style, fresh music, an energetic crowd, and a giant birthday cake – the 30th annual Scotiabank AIDS WALK for LIFE has it all this September. But underlying this once-in-a-lifetime celebration is the serious work of improving HIV health. And part of this work involves supporting people managing multiple health conditions.

Living healthily with HIV is a reality. However, many people living with HIV (PLHIV) continue to be disproportionately affected by additional medical conditions that can jeopardize health, such as hepatitis C and syphilis. In British Columbia, approximately one in three PLHIV are co-infected with hepatitis C. And in the Lower Mainland, men living with HIV, particularly men who have sex with men (MSM), are being acutely affected by this province's ongoing syphilis epidemic. In 2013, two-thirds (64 percent) of MSM diagnosed with syphilis were also living with HIV, with the majority of cases being among younger men.

For three decades, the WALK for LIFE has worked to help PLHIV lead healthy lives, as well as to reduce the stigma surrounding the virus. Medical statistics and public attitudes demonstrate that continuing efforts are needed to achieve these goals – HIV stigma persists in day-to-day life and living healthily with HIV is still a challenge for many people in this province.

People interested in supporting HIV health can donate to the WALK for LIFE's Community Health Fund or join the anti-stigma HIV Anonymous Campaign (www.hivanonymous.ca). Taking part in the WALK is another excellent step in the right direction. Starting at Sunset Beach and following a 6.75 km route along the Seawall, the Scotiabank AIDS WALK for LIFE takes place on September 20, 2015.

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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.