

For immediate release

April 6, 2017

BC Ministry of Health makes dental care a priority for people living with HIV

Vancouver, BC: People living with HIV (PLHIV) in BC are set to receive ongoing, professional, free-to-user dental care thanks to a generous contribution of \$420,000 from the British Columbia Ministry of Health to the Positive Living Society of BC, a registered non-profit and Western Canada's largest consumer-based HIV/AIDS service organization. These funds will cover the capital cost of a purpose-built dental clinic at the Society's new headquarters at 1101 Seymour Street, Vancouver. The donation was recently announced by Sam Sullivan (MLA, Vancouver False Creek) at a private event in Vancouver for PLHIV.

"Dental disease is progressive, and unlike the cold or the flu, will not resolve itself. For those who are medically compromised, such as those living with HIV, the impact of untreated dental disease can be devastating," explains Neil Self, Chair of Positive Living BC's Board of Directors. "Still, PLHIV are less likely than other populations to pursue or receive dental care when social factors like HIV stigma and poverty are considered. By funding the construction of a dental clinic intended predominantly for PLHIV, BC's Ministry of Health is helping ensure that all PLHIV can benefit from high quality dental care in a safe, accepting and culturally sensitive environment."

In terms of dental service delivery, Positive Living BC has a long-standing history of collaboration with the UBC Faculty of Dentistry. Since 2007, first and fourth year dental students (a total of 250 students to 2016) have engaged in various levels of community service activities with the Positive Living BC membership. Such opportunities have enabled dental students to enhance their knowledge of HIV/AIDS while engaging in various levels of preventive and educational dental care. Students come to understand the multiple barriers that PLHIV experience when accessing oral care. Since 2011, fourth-year Dental Hygiene Degree Program (DHDP) students have similarly been providing basic hygiene services at the Positive Living BC clinic. To 2016, a total of 130 DHDP students have met the preventive oral health needs of 250 Positive Living BC members. Dental hygiene services have included oral assessments, periodontal debridement, fluoride application, sealants and oral health education. Students gain the experience of running a community clinic from its conception to completion. Specifically they are responsible for scheduling all appointments, tracking patient treatments, providing referrals to outside dental services, and ensuring care is provided in a consistent manner.

"While the current clinic is effective in providing the most basic of dental hygiene care, it is operated under extreme space and resource limitations," explains Self. "Dental hygiene students use massage therapy tables rather than proper dental chairs to treat patients. Headlamps are used in lieu of proper lighting systems and dental instruments must be brought to and from UBC as there is no ability to sterilize or store dental instruments in the current space. Our new clinic will be a 500 square foot, 2-operator facility allowing a vastly expanded range of dental service delivery to PLHIV. In addition to the dental hygiene services currently being offered, the new dental clinic will be able to provide basic restorative dentistry,

For more information contact:

Adam Reibin

Director of Communications

adamr@positivelivingbc.org / 604.612.0222

endodontics, minor oral surgery and the much-needed oral medicine/pathology services important to those in our community.”

Fees generated from the provision of certain treatments will cover the ongoing operational and supply costs of the clinic. Patients will not be charged fees for any services beyond what their personal coverage provided by the Social Development and Social Innovation Ministry or other sources will meet.

Many people are to be thanked profusely for their tireless work in bringing this project to fruition. At the head of the list is Dr. Allan Hovan, Department Head of Oral Oncology/Dentistry at the BC Cancer Agency, Jocelyn Johnston, Executive Director of BC Dentists (the BC Dental Association), Dr. Mario Brondani of the UBC Dentistry faculty – and the long-time organizer and proponent of the current dental program at Positive Living BC, Dr. Leanne Donnelly of the Dental Hygiene division of the UBC dental faculty who, Like Dr. Brondani, has been instrumental in the current program and in promoting the full dental clinic dream. Of special note is the role played by BC Government Caucus Communications Director of Outreach Lorne Mayencourt in piloting the proposal for the clinic through the various shoals of government; the clinic would not have happened without his dedicated effort.

- 30 -

For more information contact:

Adam Reibin

Director of Communications

adamr@positivelivingbc.org / 604.612.0222