

New progress in the fight to end HIV in Canada by 2025

May 26, 2020 (TORONTO) – A new initiative sponsored by the CIHR Centre for REACH 3.0 and the Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research (CANFAR) seeks to end the stigma that inhibits Canada’s progress to reaching its goal to end the HIV epidemic by 2025.

The Positive Effect – collaboratively designed by scientists, medical experts, community leaders and people with living with HIV in Canada – begins online at positiveeffect.org. The initiative will connect the lived experience of those both managing and preventing HIV with facts and evidence to correct the misinformation and fear that underlies and perpetuates stigma.

The positiveeffect.org will promote authentic, ongoing and high-energy engagement across Canada of those dedicated to wiping out HIV stigma, which impedes testing, prevention efforts, and contributes to further health inequities across communities.

“*The Positive Effect* is much more than a website – it is about shifting mindsets and enriching lives,” said **Dr. Sean B. Rourke, Director of REACH** and a scientist with the MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael’s Hospital of Unity Health Toronto. “It is a movement to end HIV stigma by linking facts and evidence of how stigma can affect people to their core, with stories of lived experience where people navigate through challenging circumstances and vulnerability with courage, resilience and growth.

“We know stigma interferes with HIV prevention and deters people from getting tested regularly and knowing their status – this is one of the reasons why ending HIV stigma is so critical. HIV stigma arises out of fear, lack of knowledge, and prejudices, and that’s why we created *The Positive Effect*. We want to inspire and support people to think differently about HIV by appreciating real stories that they otherwise may never hear about – through these experiences, we will shift mindsets.”

It is critical that those people living with and affected by HIV must be at the centre of the effort in order to properly align the broad range of tools, resources, and thinking that is required to end the HIV epidemic in Canada. This frontline perspective is critical in crafting an approach and solution that will truly be effective.

“CANFAR is a proud partner in this initiative that will shift mindsets about HIV, open hearts and our tolerance, and improve lives. *The Positive Effect* provides the opportunity to read, connect with, and share stories about the experiences of Canadians in the journey to end the HIV epidemic,” said **Alex Filiatrault, CEO of CANFAR**. “Erasing stigma is a building block in our strategy to end the HIV epidemic in Canada by 2025.”

Quick Facts

- One in five people living with HIV are denied health services because of stigma and discrimination.
- 9,090 Canadians live with HIV and don’t know it.
- 10,340 people diagnosed with HIV aren’t in care and accessing life-saving treatment.
- Reducing HIV stigma is central to ending the HIV epidemic in Canada and will mean less barriers for people to know their status and receive treatment or preventative care.

Link to site: positiveeffect.org

About The CIHR Centre of REACH in HIV

REACH: Research Evidence into Action for Community Health was established in 2009 and is a highly effective national collaborative leadership network of over 125 researchers, front-line community agencies, people with lived experience of HIV, service providers, public health practitioners and policy makers that is committed to making a real difference in Canada's epidemic. Our mission is to build upon this vibrant network and further develop a highly connected and coordinated applied implementation science research centre that conducts highly relevant research, trains and educates the next generations of scientists, and moves research evidence into action to have a measurable impact on the health and wellbeing of people living with and at risk for HIV, HCV and STIs. Our vision is to be a major national network and broker of pragmatic solutions to end the HIV epidemic in Canada in the next 5-10 years, and in so doing, influence the course of HCV and other STBBIs.

About St. Michael's Hospital

St. Michael's Hospital provides compassionate care to all who enter its doors. The hospital also provides outstanding medical education to future health care professionals in more than 27 academic disciplines. Critical care and trauma, heart disease, neurosurgery, diabetes, cancer care, care of the homeless and global health are among the Hospital's recognized areas of expertise. Through the Keenan Research Centre and the Li Ka Shing International Healthcare Education Centre, which make up the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, research and education at St. Michael's Hospital are recognized and make an impact around the world. Founded in 1892, the hospital is fully affiliated with the University of Toronto. St. Michael's Hospital, along with Providence Healthcare and St Joseph's Health Centre are part of Unity Health Toronto network. For more information visit www.unityhealth.to.

About CANFAR

CANFAR's mission is to end Canada's HIV epidemic by leading national strategies to increase prevention, testing and linkage to care and to end HIV stigma. Fueled by fundraising, CANFAR supports research, builds awareness and cultivates partnerships. For more information, visit www.CANFAR.com.

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