

February 14, 2020

Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health

Sent via email: HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Dix:

We write on behalf of the members of the Pacific AIDS Network*, in the wake of your December 1st, 2019 World AIDS Day Announcement. There is much to celebrate about the record low cases of HIV and AIDS in BC. We applaud your government's decision, one year ago, to expand public funding for pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis medication. We applaud the continued resourcing of the treatment as prevention approach, and the critical work of Dr. Julio Montaner and his colleagues at the BC Centre for Excellence.

We are mindful, however, that these are shared successes, attributable to the work and efforts of countless individuals and numerous agencies and organizations across the province – many on the front lines of our communities. Staff and volunteers of community-based organizations – many of them people living with HIV - have made key contributions across the continuum of care, supporting efforts to test and treat and link people to care. Just as important, is the role that community-based organizations play in adherence, supporting people once they are linked to treatment –with housing, food security, counselling and other critical supports.

We agree with the statement of Premier John Horgan, that “Breakthroughs in treatment and prevention, along with education, awareness, community work and fighting stigma, have contributed to huge advancements toward the elimination of this epidemic.”

But further to the passion and enthusiasm of Premier Horgan's statement, we want to underscore the importance of not losing momentum. 208 new cases of HIV in 2018 is still far too many. We are concerned about the current lack of a comprehensive provincial strategy vis-à-vis HIV and AIDS in this province. When it was announced in 2013, *From Hope to Health: Towards an AIDS-free Generation*, the Ministry of Health rightly assumed an important leadership role providing direction to the health authorities and articulating clear goals and targets along the cascade of care. However, there has been no progress report published on *From Hope to Health* and the STOP HIV program, since 2016; and the STOP Steering Committee has been “sunsetting”. So, while the province may continue to fund HIV-related services with each of the health authorities and at the BC-CfE, a vital accountability piece has been lost.

It is also imperative that the amount of resourcing made available to community-based organizations, not be lessened. Thousands of people across BC work in community-based non-profit organizations, supporting some of the most marginalized people in this province. They often work in challenging circumstances, and for lower wages and longer hours. Many others are volunteers that donate their time. These are some of the same people and organizations that were the first to step up to address BC's ongoing overwhelming opioid crisis, and continue to do so.

Premier Horgan also referenced the key role of combatting stigma as part of the ongoing success of addressing HIV/AIDS in BC. We very much agree, and in this area in particular, we feel that there is still much work to do.

We refer you to the recent report of Canada's Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO), Dr. Theresa Tam- [Addressing Stigma: Towards a More Inclusive Health System](#). Her report details the significant adverse impacts that stigma has on mental and physical health outcomes, particularly for persons that are vulnerable in our society - including people living with, and most at risk for, HIV.

Certainly, here in BC the research we have undertaken through the People Living with HIV Stigma Index clearly documents the detrimental impacts of stigma on people's health outcomes. And surely, the negative effects of stigma are perhaps nowhere more tragically evident than in the ongoing and unacceptable crisis of overdose and overdose deaths in this province. We are not going to be able to tackle the impacts of stigma until we recognize and address the intersectional and compounding discrimination that people face daily. PAN member organizations have done an admirable job of addressing stigma but we cannot do it alone, and with the limited resources we have to work with, we need the commitment of multiple levels of government, including the provincial government, to truly move the needle.

Therefore, Minister Dix, we would like to request a meeting with you to celebrate the many successes achieved in BC in the last decade- but also to discuss how we can truly achieve an AIDS free generation, how to lessen the number of new infections, to ensure linkage to care and adequate supports for those living with HIV, and realize a province free from stigma and discrimination.

Sincerely,



Katrina Jensen
Co-Chair, PAN
Executive Director, AVI Health and Community Services



Patrick McDougall
Co-Chair, PAN
Director of Knowledge Translation and Evaluation, Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation

*By way of background, PAN is a proactive provincial network of over 40 community-based and allied organizations working to address HIV, hepatitis C and related conditions across BC. PAN facilitates communication and the sharing of best practices, and provides professional/workforce development and leadership training to members and people living with HIV (PLHIV). We provide face-to-face networking opportunities, build capacity in research and evaluation; and undertake collective action to influence public perceptions and policies affecting persons living with HIV, hepatitis C and those most "at risk". See www.pacificaidnetwork.org.