

## **Health Initiative for Men (HIM) to Participate in First National HIV Testing Day in Canada** *Establishment of day promotes the importance of testing and treatment of HIV*

**(Vancouver, B.C. June 25, 2018)** – Health Initiative for Men (HIM) will join more than 40 community based HIV/AIDS organizations across Canada to deliver the country’s first national HIV Testing Day. The inaugural event will be held on Wednesday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, at HIM’s health centres in Vancouver’s Lower Mainland ([www.checkhimout.ca/health-centres/hours-and-locations/](http://www.checkhimout.ca/health-centres/hours-and-locations/)). “The goal of the day is to effectively target groups disproportionately affected by the disease,” said Greg Oudman, Executive Director, Health Initiative for Men.

“A National HIV Testing Day helps reduce the stigma associated with testing. Knowing your HIV status is important for your health. If you are living with HIV, we encourage you to start treatment as soon as possible. HIV medicine can keep you healthy for many years and greatly reduces your chance of transmitting the virus,” said Oudman.

“*Know Your Status*” is the theme of this year’s event. “The only way to know for certain if you’re HIV-positive is to get tested,” said Gary LeCasse, Executive Director of the Canadian AIDS Society. “The sooner you know, the sooner you can control the virus and prevent damage to your immune system.”

The National HIV Testing Day aims to reach individuals at risk of HIV exposure who lack adequate sexual health resources and capacity for HIV testing, including members of the LGBTQ2 community, off-reserve Indigenous communities and people who use drugs. It is expected more than 1,500 people will participate in the initiative and the pilot project will lead to more newly identified patients with HIV in the month of June across the country, compared to other months of the year. The project also aims to transfer knowledge to vulnerable populations and drive behavioural change to adopt best practices for sexual health and drug use.

About 75,000 people in Canada have HIV, and one in five HIV-positive Canadians are not aware of their status, which makes the possibility of transmitting the virus to others much

more likely. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there were 2,344 new HIV infections in Canada in 2016, an 11.6% increase from 2015.

Local and provincial health authorities across Canada are also collaborating to deliver the project, stating it addresses an unmet need in the current Canadian healthcare system.

On HIV Testing Day, rapid HIV tests will be administered using point-of-care testing (POCT) kits (where available), which give results in under a minute. If a positive result is detected, blood draws will be administered, which will also be used to test for other STBBIs. Pre- and post-test counselling will be provided to all participants to help determine their risk factors. If a participant tests positive for HIV or another STBBI, the local community based organization will be able to form a long-term relationship with the individual and work toward ensuring their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

“This inaugural National HIV Testing Day provides an opportunity for Canadians to take charge of their health to learn their HIV status, particularly in rural and remote areas with one-minute testing at the point-of-care in both conventional and unconventional settings,” said Livleen Veslemes, of bioLytical Laboratories, the maker of INSTI.

The sustained benefits of the National Testing Day initiative and ensure information will be accessible to as many people as possible, to increase testing year-round so more Canadians living with HIV know their status and can take proper precautions to protect themselves and their sexual partners.

More information on the National Testing Day is available at [www.cdn aids.ca/testing](http://www.cdn aids.ca/testing). Additional information about Nation *Health Initiative for Men (HIM)* is available at [www.checkhimout.ca](http://www.checkhimout.ca).

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