

Gilead Canada Announces Research Sponsorships to Support Grassroots Projects Focused on HIV Prevention and Improving Access to Care Across Canada

~ As the world commemorates World AIDS Day, organizations are looking to bring the undetectable=untransmittable (U=U) concept to local communities in the fight to end inequalities, end AIDS and end pandemics~

Mississauga, ON – November 22, 2021 – Gilead Sciences Canada, Inc. (Gilead Canada) announced today the winners of its *Canada to Zero* HIV community-based research program. The sponsorships were awarded to ten well-defined grassroots projects that help advance HIV prevention and improve the cascade of care in Canada.

“Despite advances over the past decade, there remains significant unmet needs for people living with HIV in Canada. In order to address these issues, we want to empower the community to be a part of the solution and to better inform the services and support needed,” said Melissa Koomey, General Manager of Gilead Canada. “We share the UNAIDS goal of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths by 2030.”

There are more than 68,000 Canadians currently living with HIVⁱ, many of whom are unable to access the comprehensive support, treatment and prevention options available in Canada due to multiple barriers and health disparities. Even with advances in HIV biomedical interventions, Canada still sees a significant number of new HIV cases every year, with the Public Health Agency of Canada reporting 2,122 new HIV infection cases in 2019.ⁱⁱ Fourteen per cent of those living with HIV are unaware they are infected.ⁱⁱⁱ

Understanding how lived experiences can impede access to care is an all-too-often overlooked dimension of translating effective interventions into public health improvements, and one of the successful programs is aiming to address this. The Afro-Canadian Positive Network (ACPN^{et}) project, “Engaging Sub-Saharan African Migrants in U=U Prevention: Picturing Change Through Participatory Photography,” aims to determine the sociostructural determinants of health among sub-Saharan African migrants living with HIV in British Columbia. The program will also explore the impact of ethnicity, gender, migration and HIV-related stigma on health, as well as examining the community experience of U=U as it relates to accessing HIV information and support.

“Sub-Saharan Africa is the highest source of Black immigration to Canada, and our displaced peoples come here from countries where HIV is endemic. Unfortunately, the challenges of accessing services here is creating a new generation of people living with HIV: while Black females comprise less than one percent of the British Columbia population, they make up over 13% of new diagnoses amongst women in the province” said Patience Magagula, lead researcher of ACPN^{et}.



“Community based organizations like ACPnet already have a legacy of success in reducing risky HIV transmission behaviour, improving medication adherence, and helping members navigate the HIV cascade of care. This not only saves lives but also helps reduce the financial burden on our health system,” Magagula continued.

2021 Canada to Zero Community-Based Research Program Recipients

Sponsorship recipients were selected based on their ability to conduct well-defined community-based research (CBR) projects that aim to advance HIV prevention efforts in Canada, utilizing the concept of U=U. The list of 2021 recipients includes the following organizations:

- Afro-Canadian Positive Network (Vancouver, BC)
- AIDS Committee of Toronto (Toronto, ON)
- AIDS Community Care Montreal (Montreal, QC)
- AIDS Committee of Ottawa (Ottawa, ON)
- Asian Community AIDS Services (Toronto, ON)
- Community-Based Research Centre (Vancouver, BC)
- Ka Ni Kanichihk (Winnipeg, MB)
- Positive Women's Empowerment and Resilience (Toronto, ON)
- Sexual Health Nova Scotia/Community-Based Research Centre/AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (Halifax, NS)
- The Dr. Peter Centre (Vancouver, BC)

About the Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U) Campaign

The Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U) Campaign helps raise awareness about Treatment as Prevention (TasP) and HIV transmission, which will help people living with HIV and the general public understand the negligible risk of transmission, once the virus is undetectable.

About Gilead Sciences

Gilead Sciences, Inc. is a biopharmaceutical company that has pursued and achieved breakthroughs in medicine for more than three decades, with the goal of creating a healthier world for all people. The company is committed to advancing innovative medicines to prevent and treat life-threatening diseases, including HIV, viral hepatitis and cancer. Gilead operates in more than 35 countries worldwide, with headquarters in Foster City, California. Gilead Sciences Canada, Inc. is the Canadian affiliate of Gilead Sciences, Inc., and was established in Mississauga, Ontario, in 2006. For more information on Gilead Sciences, please visit the company's website at www.gilead.com.

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ⁱ Canadian Aids Society. Canada Sees Its Fourth Consecutive Year of Increasing HIV Rates. Available at: <https://www.cdnaids.ca/canada-sees-its-fourth-consecutive-year-of-increasing-hiv-rates/>. Accessed on: November 1, 2021.

ⁱⁱ Haddad, N., Weeks, A., Robert, A., & Totten, S. (2021). HIV Surveillance Report 2019. *CCDR*, 47(1).

ⁱⁱⁱ Canadian Aids Society. Canada Sees Its Fourth Consecutive Year of Increasing HIV Rates. Available at: <https://www.cdnaids.ca/canada-sees-its-fourth-consecutive-year-of-increasing-hiv-rates/>. Accessed on: November 1, 2021.