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## HIV leaders unveil Declaration to End HIV/AIDS in America

Treatment as Prevention is a key component in the historic document that outlines the values and principles that will guide work to end the epidemic

Dr. Julio Montaner chaired a blue ribbon panel of more than 80 HIV/AIDS activists and advocates from across the United States who, in conjunction with the National Minority AIDS Council, developed the Declaration.

Las Vegas, Nevada, is renowned for being the entertainment capital of the world – a mecca for gambling, shopping, and fine dining. At the centre of it all stands the iconic Caesar's Palace, a hotel and casino that has played host to the top entertainers in the world and has been the setting for countless Hollywood movies.

At first glance, it's an unlikely setting for a gathering of public health officials. But amidst the glitter and glamour that is often associated with the city, more than 2,000 clinicians, care providers, activists, and advocates gathered to discuss the latest trends, groundbreaking interventions, and cutting-edge strategies at the 16th United States Conference on AIDS (USCA). The conference was preceded by the unveiling of the Declaration to End HIV/AIDS in America in a signing ceremony at the first ever Summit to End HIV/AIDS in America.

The Declaration represents a written oath to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic that will require a commitment of money, in-kind donations and human resources. The document focuses on four main points: the

promotion of leadership by people Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in efforts to increase health care engagement and treatment; the elimination of new HIV infections; reducing the stigma, discrimination, and social injustices which increase HIV vulnerability and health disparities; and the maintenance of a strong commitment to finding a vaccine and a cure.

"It is possible to realistically envision an end to HIV/AIDS. We've seen the evidence in British Columbia, where the implementation of Treatment as Prevention has dramatically decreased AIDS-related morbidity and mortality and new HIV infections," said Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS. "But we won't achieve it overnight. It will take ongoing commitment, courage and vision. The signing of the Declaration from leaders across North America represents a compelling first step in making this dream a reality."

The Treatment as Prevention strategy advocates for increased testing and immediate treatment of those who are found to be HIV-positive and medically eligible. Pioneered by Dr. Montaner, it has been

heralded internationally by organizations such as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) as the way forward in the fight against the epidemic. Implementation of this strategy in B.C. has made the province the only one in Canada to show a consistent decline in new HIV infections.

Kali Lindsey, director of Legislative & Public Affairs, National Minority AIDS Council, underscored critical scientific developments such as Treatment as Prevention that will greatly impact the fight against the disease. He echoed Dr. Montaner's comments that for the first time in 30 years, we have the tools to end HIV/AIDS, however a steadfast commitment will be needed to reach the goal of an AIDS-free generation.

The Declaration was opened for public signatures following the conference and had added more than 400 signatures in less than 24 hours, including those of basketball star and HIV activist Magic Johnson and television personality Wendy Williams.



» Easy access to cannabis for our youth, grow-ops that fuel organized crime in our communities and the growing costs of enforcing failed marijuana policies are ample reasons to re-examine cannabis prohibition."

- City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto on the recent vote by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) to decriminalize cannabis and research its regulation and taxation.



# Dr. Evan Wood named Canadian Research Chair in Inner City Medicine at UBC

Dr. Evan Wood, a University of British Columbia (UBC) professor and co-director of the Urban Health Research Initiative at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE), has been appointed the Canadian Research Chair in Inner City Medicine at UBC.

The Government of Canada announced Dr. Wood's prestigious appointment at the University of Toronto as part of a national announcement of research chairs across Canada. The announcement included a regional event at the Vancouver office of James Moore, PC, MP, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.



James Moore, PC, MP, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages (left) and Dr. Evan Wood

"I'm honoured by this appointment and excited to contribute to UBC's research efforts in the area of addiction medicine and urban health," said Dr. Wood, an internal medicine physician specializing in inner city medicine and an internationally recognized expert in drug addiction and related policies. "The success and global impact of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS provides a model for the local addiction medicine system to emulate. As it stands now, there are effective addiction treatment approaches that are not even available in B.C. and this must change."

Under the leadership of Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC-CfE and head of the Division of AIDS in the Faculty of Medicine at UBC, Dr. Wood has made a number of groundbreaking contributions including publishing the first

study ever to show that reducing community HIV "viral load" at a population level reduced rates of HIV infection among intravenous drug users. This HIV Treatment as Prevention strategy, pioneered at the BC-CfE to combat the spread of HIV, involves widespread HIV testing and provision of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) to medically eligible HIV-positive people.

"I congratulate Dr. Wood on being named a Canadian Research Chair," said Dr. Montaner. "Given the serious medical and societal harms associated with untreated alcohol and drug addiction, I am pleased that the future of inner city and addiction medicine will be guided by his research and dedicated leadership."

# Dr. Julio Montaner awarded Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal

Dr. Julio Montaner, director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, was recently honoured with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. Awarded by the Governor General of Canada and through one of its partner organizations, the Canadian AIDS Society, the Medal recognizes exemplary work and service in the field of HIV/AIDS in Canada.

"It is a privilege for the Canadian AIDS Society to present a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for excellence in HIV/AIDS to Dr. Montaner," said Albert McNutt, chair of the Canadian AIDS Society Board of Directors. "The Medal serves as recognition for his outstanding commitment and contributions to end the epidemic and to improve the lives of people living with and affected by HIV, both in Canada and internationally. We congratulate him on this very special honour."

The Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal has been awarded to 30 members of the HIV community. They are among the 60,000 outstanding Canadians selected to receive this distinction in recognition of the 60th

anniversary of the Accession of Queen Elizabeth II to the Throne.

Over the years, Dr. Montaner has led key advancements in the treatment and prevention of HIV and AIDS. He helped pioneer and prove the efficacy of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) and developed the groundbreaking HIV Treatment as Prevention strategy. Following the implementation of this strategy, B.C. has become the only Canadian province to demonstrate a consistent decline in new cases of HIV.

"I am very thankful to the Governor General of Canada and the Canadian AIDS Society for conferring on me such special recognition," said Dr. Montaner. "I share this recognition with my colleagues at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, St. Paul's Hospital and the University of British Columbia, and with the government of British Columbia. None of our successes in fighting HIV and AIDS would have been possible without their support and commitment to improve people's lives and shape better public health policies through scientific research."

# Michael Smith Foundation receives \$48 million for health research

The B.C. government has committed \$48 million to invest in the ongoing work of the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR), which supports health research for diseases such as HIV/AIDS and cancer.

On October 3, Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid made the announcement at the BC Cancer Agency in Vancouver where groundbreaking findings have been uncovered with the help of grants from the Michael Smith Foundation. The Foundation funds research teams and services to support scientists across the province.



B.C. Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid (right) with Dr. Diane Finegood, MSFHR president & CEO

"Our government's \$48-million investment in the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research is a commitment to advancing the health of B.C. families," said Minister MacDiarmid. "From work to improve ovarian cancer outcomes to looking for a cure for childhood diabetes, and to helping patients in remote communities better manage chronic diseases at home, the Foundation supports health research that benefits thousands of families."

In addition to supporting existing programs and awards, this investment allows MSFHR to develop new initiatives. This includes, among other things, launching a funding competition for post-doctoral fellows in early 2013, and

providing ongoing support for platforms that provide the infrastructure researchers need to enable their work.

"We are very grateful to the provincial government for this invaluable investment," said Dr. Diane Finegood, MSFHR president & CEO. "This will help increase the competitiveness of B.C. researchers and position our province to succeed in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century."

## MARIJUANA REGULATION

### Union of BC Municipalities supports researching taxation and regulation of cannabis

At the recent Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) convention, B.C.'s mayors and councillors voted in favour of a resolution calling for UBCM to lobby the appropriate levels of government to decriminalize cannabis and research its regulation and taxation.

With the passing of the resolution, UBCM joins a growing chorus of high profile British Columbians calling for the end to cannabis prohibition, including eight current B.C. mayors, the Health Officers Council of BC, four former mayors of Vancouver, and four former B.C. attorneys general.

"Today's vote to support the decriminalization of cannabis and research its regulation and taxation reflects our commitment as municipal leaders to fiscal discipline and community health and safety," said City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto, whose council passed a motion supporting the regulation of cannabis this past April. "Easy access to cannabis for our youth, grow-ops that fuel organized crime in our communities and the growing costs of enforcing failed marijuana policies are ample reasons to re-examine cannabis prohibition."

The vote followed a marijuana decriminalization debate that opened the UBCM convention. Among those speaking was Dr. Evan Wood, co-director of the Urban Health Research Initiative at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and founder of Stop the Violence BC, a coalition of academic, legal, law enforcement and health experts campaigning to reform cannabis laws to reduce the harms associated with the illegal cannabis trade, including gang violence.

"I commend our municipal representatives for showing leadership in taking steps towards changing a policy that has clearly failed to protect community health and safety," said Dr. Wood.

## WHAT'S NEW

### Fall 2012 HIV/Antiretroviral Update (#hivarv)

**Date:** Friday, November 23, 2012, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

**Location:** Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel

**Topic:** This is an open educational event sponsored by the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS and accredited by the College of Family Physicians of Canada. Topics will include: HIV cure/vaccine, issues on hepatitis, HIV testing guidelines, primary care guidelines and telemedicine, and emerging issues in antiretroviral therapy.

**Contact:** Registration is now closed. To be placed on the waiting list, contact Pat White at [pwhite@cfenet.ubc.ca](mailto:pwhite@cfenet.ubc.ca). Please note that on-site registration will not be available.

## BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

- > Improve the health of British Columbians with HIV through comprehensive research and treatment programs;
- > Develop cost-effective research and therapeutic protocols;
- > Provide educational support programs to health-care professionals;
- > Monitor the impact of HIV/AIDS on B.C. and conduct analyses of the effectiveness of HIV-related programs.

Physician Drug Hotline  
1.800.665.7677

St. Paul's Hospital Pharmacy Hotline  
1.888.511.6222

Website  
[www.cfenet.ubc.ca](http://www.cfenet.ubc.ca)

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