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November 28, 2013

Hon. Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P.
Vancouver Centre

The Hon. Rona Ambrose, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
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Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Dear Minister:

I write to you today as World AIDS Day approaches. We are at a defining moment in the fight against HIV and AIDS: an HIV and AIDS-free generation is within our grasp. It has never before been clearer and more emphatic that the implementation of the recently World Health Organization (WHO) endorsed, scientifically-proven **made-in-B.C.** Treatment as Prevention (TasP) strategy is the answer.

The TasP strategy, initially proposed by the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) in 2006, advocates for widespread HIV testing and facilitated early access to highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) for all HIV-infected individuals. The benefits are twofold: sustained HAART treatment decreases the amount of HIV virus in the blood and sexual fluids to undetectable levels, thus preventing morbidity and mortality, and equally as important, dramatically reducing the likelihood of HIV transmission by more than 95%.

With the unwavering support of the British Columbia government, the BC-CfE has been an exemplary case study of how far TasP can go to change the face of HIV & AIDS. Consider this, in B.C. in 1992, at the peak of the epidemic, more than 800 people per year were diagnosed with HIV and at least one person was dying every day from AIDS. Since then, the number of new AIDS diagnoses have decreased by over 90% and the HIV diagnoses has fallen to 238 in 2012 – a decline by over 70%. Furthermore, vertical HIV transmission has been nearly eliminated and HIV new infections among injection drug users have declined over 95%.

China, was the first country to adopt the BC-CfE's TasP strategy as a national HIV/AIDS policy, and formalized its commitment to further the implementation of TasP with the assistance of the BC-CfE and the province of B.C. This week, in Beijing, B.C. Premier Christy Clark signed a Memorandum Of Understanding (MoU) between the National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (NCAIDS/China CDC), and the BC-CfE that will allow for the continued sharing of expertise regarding TasP. The MOU will establish a Fellowship program to allow six



senior China CDC scientists to spend three months each, over three years at the BC-CfE to gain expertise in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of TasP, and to develop a strategy to expand the reach of TasP to other related therapeutic areas, including viral hepatitis (hepatitis B and hepatitis C infections).

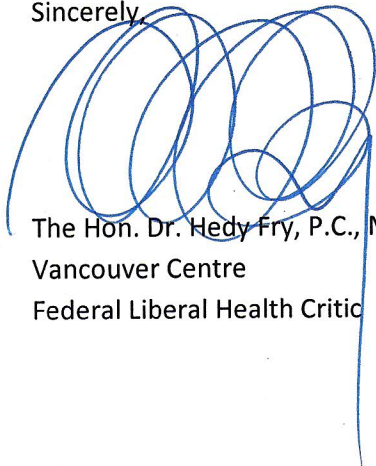
This October, France and Brazil, also announced their adoption of TasP as a National policy to control HIV and AIDS. They join the US, which formally embraced TasP in 2011.

Earlier this past week, Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and Honorary Chairman of Endgame, a global campaign to defeat AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, urged President Obama to double the number of people receiving antiretroviral treatment through PEPFAR; to treat 12 million people by the time Obama's term ends in 2017. In response, the United States Senate approved an extension of PEPFAR to fight AIDS worldwide.

This begs the question – given B.C.'s unprecedented success against HIV and AIDS, why hasn't Canada and our federal government embraced TasP? We have a homegrown strategy that's proven, internationally heralded, and implemented, and a real opportunity to end this epidemic in our lifetime. Currently, an estimated 71,300 Canadians are now living with HIV, a number that could double in the next 15 years if the current infection rate continues and treatment is not expanded nationwide.

We cannot afford the status quo, especially because we know what works to fight HIV and AIDS. It is medically, ethically and morally wrong to ignore the evidence. Science needs to triumph over ideology! The sanctity of human lives needs to triumph over political agendas. Because the simple truth is, if we fail to do so now we will burden our future generations with HIV and AIDS – an epidemic we can conquer.

Sincerely,



The Hon. Dr. Hedy Fry, P.C., M.P.
Vancouver Centre
Federal Liberal Health Critic