



**Over the next five years the world must act to meet the UN 95-95-95 Target, end inequalities in HIV treatment and HIV prevention, and reduce the stigma and discrimination that holds back the HIV response. If these steps are taken, and governments commit to the actions and policies required to end the severe inequalities facing those living with HIV/AIDS, the world could be on its way to ending AIDS as a pandemic concern by 2030.**

Dr. Julio SG Montaner, BC-CfE Executive Director,  
Physician-in-Chief, and architect of the  
90-90-90/95-95-95 Target



BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CENTRE for EXCELLENCE  
in HIV/AIDS

## UNAIDS calls for greater focus on ending inequalities to end AIDS with new 95-95-95 Target

In 2014, an ambitious new strategy was developed, under the leadership of BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) Executive Director & Physician-in-Chief Dr. Julio Montaner with the support of the BC-CfE, under the auspices of the United Nations Joint AIDS Program (UNAIDS). This was formally endorsed by UNAIDS after extensive international consultations. The new strategy had the specific goal of ending AIDS as an epidemic concern by 2030, defined as decreasing AIDS related mortality and HIV new infections globally by 90% using 2010 as the baseline. The short-term goal of the strategy was to ensure that at least 90% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) were diagnosed, at least 90% of those diagnosed were on antiretroviral therapy (ART), and at least 90% of those on ART were virally suppressed (meaning they cannot transmit the virus) by the end of 2020.

The new ambitious goal thus became known as the UN 90-90-90 Target. By the end of 2020, B.C. and a few other jurisdictions around the world had met or surpassed the target, with consequent significant favourable impact on their respective rates of AIDS related morbidity/mortality as well as HIV transmission. The original plan called for the UN 90-90-90 Target to become the UN 95-95-95 Target as of the end of 2020.

Of note, by World AIDS Day, Dec. 1st 2020, the BC-CfE was proud to announce, alongside BC's Minister of Health Mr. Adrian Dix, that BC had surpassed the 90-90-90 Target, with an estimated 92% of PLHIV in BC diagnosed, 91% of them on ART, and 95% virally

suppressed; and as a result BC had decreased AIDS related morbidity and mortality by over 90% and HIV new infections by over 85%. This provided tangible proof that the strategy worked as originally intended.

However, as of the end of 2020 most of the world had failed to meet the UN 90-90-90 Target. Regrettably, there were a number of factors that contributed to this, most notably insufficient international political leadership, flattening of global investments following the 2008 economic crisis, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic. Failing to meet the UN 90-90-90 Target by 2020 created significant anxiety in the field, as well as considerable concern regarding next steps. The new report, titled Addressing inequalities and getting back on track to end AIDS by 2030, details how the global HIV response which was unfortunately already off track in 2019, has been further undermined by COVID-19. Currently, 38 million people are living with HIV and more than 12 million people are awaiting life-saving HIV treatment. In the report, UN Secretary-General Guterres calls for enhanced global solidarity to close the HIV resource gap and increase annual HIV investments in low and middle-income countries to \$29 billion (USD) by 2025 with a renewed aim to achieve the UN 95-95-95 Target globally.

"It is imperative to break out of an increasingly costly and unsustainable cycle of achieving some progress against HIV but ultimately not enough to bring about an end to the pandemic," said Guterres in the report.

"Inequalities are the key reason why the 2020 global targets were missed. By ending inequalities, transformative outcomes can be achieved for people living with HIV, communities and countries."

The United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting next month will be a key moment for Member States like Canada to recommit towards the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic as a global public health threat. As UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima said, "No country can defeat the colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19 on its own. Such global challenges can only be defeated through global solidarity and shared responsibility."

Canada's Federal Minister of Health Hon. Patty Hajdu voiced her support for the targets saying "We remain committed to our 95-95-95 targets, moving toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and to reducing stigma and discrimination. By bringing together domestic and international partners, we can redouble our collective efforts to improve the health of all our citizens and finish the fight against HIV and AIDS."

"Ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is still within reach—many countries are showing that rapid progress against HIV is possible when evidence-informed strategies and human rights-based approaches are adopted," said Byanyima. "But it requires bold political leadership to challenge and address the social injustices and inequalities that continue to make certain groups of people and entire communities highly vulnerable to HIV infection."

» "Working in partnership with the BC-CfE, B.C. has become a leader in reducing AIDS-related morbidity, mortality and new HIV infections. We owe this achievement to the leadership of Dr. Julio Montaner and the bright minds and dedication of the many researchers, scientists and health-care providers who call B.C. home. The future of a world without HIV/AIDS is well within our grasp. We know there is always more we can do and along side our partners, we remain committed to this work. B.C. will continue to lead the world in this area and this is something that all British Columbians can be proud of."

— BC Minister of Health Hon. Adrian Dix



## BC-CfE researchers well represented at 2021 CAHR Conference

BC-CfE researchers presented their latest findings and publications at last month's annual Canadian Association for HIV Research (CAHR) conference. CAHR represents all Canadian HIV/AIDS researchers and its annual conference includes presenters of all disciplines of the scientific approaches to HIV/AIDS with the ultimate goals of better prevention and treatment of the disease and its eventual cure and eradication.

This year's 30th edition of the CAHR Conference was the second year the event took place virtually due to COVID-19. The conference theme was CAHR 2021: Maintaining Our Focus.

As CAHR organizers state, "Our current context also brings with it many parallels to the early days of HIV. Not so long ago, we anxiously monitored the rise and fall of new HIV case numbers around the world and carefully watched the daily updates on the spread of what was a lethal and barely understood disease. The stark reality is that the HIV virus will continue to be a major health concern, long after a COVID-19 vaccine is distributed and people adapt to a new normal. And while the attention dedicated over the last year to COVID-19 has been critical, at the same time, we must maintain our focus on the reality that thousands of new HIV infections continue to occur each year in Canada and the number of people living with the disease in Canada is rising."

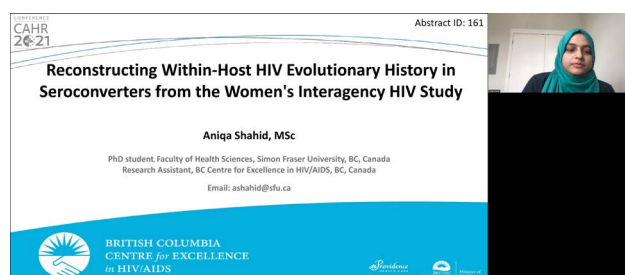


Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, presided over the conference's official opening by presenting the annual Dr. Mark Wainberg Lecture. Dr. Fauci's lecture was titled "Lessons from the Concurrent HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 Pandemics". As one of the principal architects of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a program that has saved millions of lives throughout the developing world, and as the face of the American COVID-19 response, Dr. Fauci is uniquely prepared and eminently qualified to discuss both COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS.

BC-CfE researchers covered many topics at CAHR 2021, as the event saw seven oral presentations from BC-CfE staff or affiliated researchers and 20 poster presentations.



Among the many topics covered by BC-CfE researchers was the subject of women living with HIV. Kalysha Closson presented on "Sexual relationship power, condom use and violence among women living with HIV in Canada". Anika Shahid presented on "Reconstructing Within-Host HIV Evolutionary History in Seroconverters from the Women's Interagency HIV Study". And Claudette Cardinal, a Peer Indigenous Research Associate with the BC-CfE's Epidemiology and Public Health Group, talked about "Allied in researching gender and combination antiretroviral therapy treatment change" when she presented her poster.



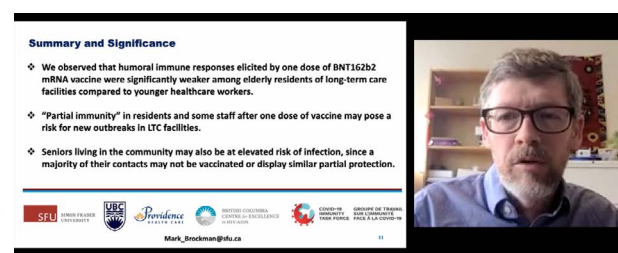
In Canada, despite Indigenous people representing about 3% of our population, the HIV infection rate

among Indigenous people account for up to 8% of reported HIV cases. This disproportionate representation and the concomitant issues of discrimination, stigma, and the legacy of colonialism informed the numerous presentations by First Nations members of the BC-CfE.



BC-CfE Peer Indigenous Research Associate Valerie Nicholson and Research Coordinator Rebecca Gormley, both with the Epidemiology and Public Health Group, gave an oral presentation titled, "It interferes with me Getting in Touch with my Culture: Indigenous Women with CHIWOS-PAW Speak Out about Denial of Culture in Healthcare". Nicholson also presented a poster of her own, titled, "Researcher Journeys: Water Connects us All. Using Water Teachings to Enrich the Work and Practice of Indigenous and Allied HIV Researchers".

Claudette Cardinal presented a poster titled, "Finding the Balance: Embracing the Two-Eyed Seeing Approach to Understand What Cultural Safety in Care Means to Older Adults Living with HIV".



As the population living with HIV/AIDS grows older, and as the majority of deaths attributed to COVID-19 are among the elderly, the subject of seniors' health came up repeatedly at CAHR 2021. Dr. Mark Brockman, SFU Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair Tier II in Viral Pathogenesis and Immunity, presented on the topic with his work titled, "Elderly residents of long-term care facilities develop partial humoral immunity following one dose of mRNA vaccine BNT162b2".

The BC-CfE's Hope Lapointe, who works within the BC-CfE's Laboratory Program, presented a poster titled, "An Inter-Laboratory Genomic Cross-Validation of a COVID-19 Outbreak in a Long-Term Care Facility". Antonio Marante, a BC-CfE Peer Research Associate, showcased the creativity and ingenuity required in creating COVID-safe methods of delivering care in his poster presentation titled "Innovating to remain connected while staying apart: The Thrive PRAs maintain focus on Older Adults Living with HIV in Vancouver Coastal Health despite pandemic restrictions".

Anna Vorobyova is Research Coordinator for the BC-CfE's Thrive team, which is a community-based research study measuring trends in healthcare utilization and health outcomes among older adults living with HIV (OALHIV). Thrive uses its findings to highlight potential gaps in care for OALHIV and to comprehensively assess how OALHIV manage their health and navigate the health systems in BC. Vorobyova presented two posters at CAHR 2021: "Home Care Our Way - Findings from a Community-Based Study on Access to Home and Community Care Services amongst Older Adults Living with HIV in British Columbia" and "I'm Positively Positive - Exploring how Older Adults Living with HIV maintain resilience".

And finally, the COAST study (Comparative Outcomes And Service Utilization Trends) is a population-based study examining the health outcomes and health service use of people living with HIV (PLHIV) as compared to a random 10% sample of the total population of BC. Andreea Bratu is the COAST Research Coordinator and her poster presentation was titled, "Indigenizing our Research: Indigenous Community Leadership in HIV Epidemiology Research".

All BC-CfE presentations can be found online at: [bit.ly/BCCfEatCAHR2021](https://bit.ly/BCCfEatCAHR2021).

## BC-CfE recognizes National Indigenous Peoples Day

This June 21st is the 25th anniversary of National Indigenous Peoples Day. This year the occasion, which celebrates the cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples and their contributions to Canada, closely follows the horrific discoveries of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the sites of former residential schools.

Consequently, this National Indigenous Peoples Day the other critical purpose of the day has added emphasis: to recognize Canada's brutal colonial history, and the contemporary inequalities Canada's Indigenous Peoples continue to endure.

The residential school system, which forced the assimilation of 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples by the Canadian government, didn't end until 1996. Today, there are more Indigenous children in government care than there was during the era of the residential school system.

The estimated HIV prevalence rate among Indigenous peoples is about two times higher than the rate of the general population in Canada.

Data from last year shows BC's First Nations people died from overdose at a rate 5.5 times higher than other residents.

The BC-CfE recognizes National Indigenous Peoples Day as an opportunity for every one of us to deepen our understanding and awareness of the struggles faced by Indigenous peoples. The BC-CfE is humbly grateful for the many significant contributions Indigenous peoples have made and continue to make to our mission.

PHC's Indigenous Wellness & Reconciliation team led an early celebration of National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 18th with a virtual screening of the documentary "Searching for Winnetou" followed by a conversation with the film's creator, Drew Hayden Taylor.

## 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 BC and conduct analyses of the effectiveness of HIV-related programs.

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Website

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