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HIV

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HIV/AIDS in Ontario



Ontario

# HIV/AIDS in Ontario

The Ontario government will spend approximately \$55 million in 2008 on HIV/AIDS-related programs. This does not include physician billings to the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) or drugs covered through the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) formulary for HIV/AIDS treatment and services.

## Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funded programs include:

- More than 90 organizations and initiatives across the province that deliver HIV/AIDS education and support programs for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and those most at risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS.
- The Ontario HIV Treatment Network, an independent multi-stakeholder agency that develops research expertise in a number of HIV/AIDS-related areas. Visit [www.ohtn.on.ca](http://www.ohtn.on.ca) for more information.
- 50 province-wide anonymous HIV testing and rapid point-of-care testing sites that offer pre-test and post-test counselling, including information on risk reduction, partner notification and referral.
- Supportive housing for people with HIV/AIDS and programs that provide volunteer-based in-home hospice care, and a supportive housing program for people with HIV who have mental health concerns.
- 19 HIV outpatient clinics across the province that provide multidisciplinary care for people living with HIV/AIDS.
- A prenatal testing program where HIV testing is offered with informed consent to all pregnant women in Ontario. The initiative funds a communications campaign to promote awareness of the HIV prenatal testing program among pregnant women, HIV test providers and women considering pregnancy. Since 1999, test uptake has increased from 34 per cent to 94 per cent.
- Programs like Oasis, at the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre in Ottawa, which offers integrated HIV/AIDS health and social service support for people at risk of HIV infection and persons living with HIV.
- The province-wide AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine (1-800-668-2437) provides information and anonymous counselling, referral to anonymous and rapid, point-of-care HIV testing sites, and information about community service agencies on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, safer sex options and harm reduction in intravenous drug use. Calls are answered in English and 16 other languages.

- All HIV diagnostic testing in Ontario (HIV, prenatal HIV and viral load testing) is conducted through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Public Health Laboratory, which ensures a high standard of testing and provides the ministry with data analysis capabilities.
- Casey House, a 12-bed residence and home hospice program for people with HIV/AIDS at the end stages of their lives. Casey House offers medical and nursing care, counselling, nutrition, massage therapy and other services.
- The Injection Drug User Outreach Program, which provides community-based prevention resources and education to injection drug users who are at risk of contracting HIV and HCV (Hepatitis C virus) infection.
- Public health programs on sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Laboratories and physicians report HIV to the local medical officer of health, and health unit staff collaborate with physicians for case management including partner notification and condom distribution.
- Vaccinations against pneumonia, meningitis and chicken pox for children living with HIV/AIDS.
- The Multi Provincial/Territorial Assistance Plan which provides financial compensation for individuals infected with HIV through the blood supply.

## Other initiatives include:

### Gay and Bisexual Men

A provincial HIV prevention strategy for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ontario. This strategy uses evidence-based information to support gay men's HIV prevention efforts across the province.

The strategy is driven by a Provincial Advisory Body that includes researchers, community organizations, health care providers, government representatives and funders. The strategy supports the work of various working groups. Some examples are:

- Ethno-racial MSM Research: A committee of researchers and community organizations that is developing ways to strengthen research in Ontario that is specific to MSM from diverse ethnic and racial communities;
- Poz Prevention: A committee comprised of a majority of gay men with HIV which aims to address the sexual health and well-being of gay men with HIV while reducing the possibility of new HIV infections;

- **Gay, Bi, Queer, Trans Men's Working Group:** This working group has been advising the Gay Men's Strategy on ways to ensure that HIV prevention work in Ontario meets the needs of trans men who are part of a gay and bisexual men's community.

### **Ontarians from African and Caribbean Communities**

The ministry supports the work of the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), including funding a coordinator position to assist in implementing recommendations contained in the "Strategy to Address Issues Related to HIV Faced by People in Ontario from Countries Where HIV/AIDS is Endemic." This strategy was launched in April 2005 and includes a public awareness campaign called "Keep it alive." For more information, visit [www.preventaids.ca](http://www.preventaids.ca).

### **Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy**

The ministry provides funds to the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy to promote HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment, and support work among off-reserve Aboriginal populations.

### **People Who Use Injection Drugs**

As well as the Injection Drug User Outreach Program, the ministry supports 28 needle exchange programs (NEPs) in parts of the province that have high rates of injection drug use. Basic services include needle distribution and disposal, condom distribution, education and information, and referrals and counselling. Many of the NEPs also provide testing for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, immunization, food and clothing banks, job referrals, methadone maintenance clinics and medical care.

### **Women and HIV/AIDS Working Group**

The ministry supports a provincial working group to address increased rates of HIV among women in Ontario. As part of this work, the ministry supports research into best practices in HIV prevention in women, as well as the development of a strategy to address HIV/AIDS amongst women in Ontario.

## Ministry-funded, Community-based HIV/AIDS Organizations in Ontario

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funds organizations across the province that deliver HIV/AIDS education and support programs.

AIDS Committee of Simcoe County	Barrie
AIDS Committee of Guelph and Wellington County	Guelph
Hamilton Public Health and Community Services	Hamilton
The AIDS Network	Hamilton
Wassay-Gezhig Na-Nahn-Dah-We-Igamig (Kenora Area Health Access Centre)	Keewatin
HIV/AIDS Regional Services	Kingston
Kingston Community Health Centres	Kingston
ACCKWA – AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area	Kitchener
AIDS Committee of London	London
Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians	London
Peel HIV/AIDS Network	Mississauga
AIDS Committee of York Region	Newmarket
AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area	North Bay
Union of Ontario Indians	North Bay
AIDS Committee of Durham Region	Oshawa
AIDS Committee of Ottawa	Ottawa
Bruce House	Ottawa
OASIS, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre	Ottawa
Ottawa Public Health	Ottawa
Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa	Ottawa
Peterborough AIDS Resource Network	Peterborough
AIDS Niagara	St. Catharines
Access AIDS Network	Sudbury
Sudbury Action Centre for Youth	Sudbury
AIDS Thunder Bay	Thunder Bay
Nishnawbe-Aski Nation	Thunder Bay
2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations	Toronto
African & Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario	Toronto
Africans in Partnership Against AIDS	Toronto
AIDS Committee of Toronto	Toronto

Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention	Toronto
Asian Community AIDS Services	Toronto
Barrett House	Toronto
Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention	Toronto
Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange	Toronto
Casey House Hospice	Toronto
Central Toronto Community Centres	Toronto
Centre for Spanish-Speaking Peoples	Toronto
David Kelley HIV/AIDS Community Counselling Program	Toronto
Deaf Outreach Project, Ontario Association of the Deaf	Toronto
Fife House	Toronto
Hassle Free Clinic	Toronto
Hemophilia Ontario	Toronto
HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic (Ontario)	Toronto
Hospice Toronto	Toronto
Maggie's: the Toronto Prostitutes' Community Service Project	Toronto
New Heights Community Health Centre	Toronto
Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy	Toronto
Ontario AIDS Network	Toronto
Ontario HIV Treatment Network	Toronto
PASAN: Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network	Toronto
South Riverdale Community Health Centre	Toronto
St. Stephen's Community House	Toronto
Street Outreach Services, LOFT Community Services	Toronto
Syme-Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre	Toronto
Teresa Group Child and Family Aid	Toronto
Toronto People With AIDS Foundation	Toronto
Toronto Public Health, The Works	Toronto
Voices of Positive Women	Toronto
Warden Woods Community Centre	Toronto
Youthlink – Inner City	Toronto
AIDS Committee of Windsor	Windsor

# HIV Testing Programs Provide Choice

Getting tested for HIV, and knowing your status, is an important health benefit. Ontario offers many choices in HIV testing.

## Anonymous Testing Program

Anonymous testing is one of the three ways – along with nominal testing and non-nominal testing (See Testing by Physicians on page 7) – that people in Ontario can be tested for HIV. In anonymous testing, the name or identity of the person being tested is not requested, recorded or reported. The test is ordered using a code known only to the person being tested.

Because of the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, some people are anxious about being tested. Anonymous testing offers them a way to be tested without revealing their identity. Although anonymous HIV testing sites do not ask for clients' names, they do ask for information about the person's age, gender and risk factors that are used to help understand how HIV is spreading.

A person's anonymity is only guaranteed during the testing process. If people who test anonymously are diagnosed with HIV and decide to seek treatment, they can no longer remain anonymous. They will have to give their name and health card number to receive health services.

Anonymous HIV testing is only offered at 50 anonymous testing sites across the province. Like all other types of HIV testing in Ontario, anonymous testing includes pre- and post-test counselling and referrals to other services and supports. For information on an anonymous testing site near you, call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 1-800-668-2437 and in Toronto 416-392-2437.

## Point-of-Care HIV Testing

Point-of-care testing is done by pricking your finger and testing your blood while you wait. If you test negative – that is, the point-of-care test says you are not infected – you receive your results immediately. If you test reactive – that is, the result of the point-of-care test is not certain – the clinic will take a blood sample and send it to the public health laboratory for standard testing. It can take up to two weeks to get the final results, and you will have to return to the clinic to get your results. Point-of-care HIV testing is available free at 50 sites across Ontario, including all anonymous HIV testing sites, some public health units' sexually transmitted infections clinics and some community health centres. For information on a point-of-care testing site nearest you, call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 1-800-668-2437 and in Toronto 416-392-2437.

## **Standard HIV Testing**

Standard HIV testing is done by taking a blood sample and sending it to the public health laboratory. It can take up to two weeks to get the results, and you have to return to your doctor's office or the clinic to receive the results.

## **Testing by Physicians**

All doctors in Ontario can order HIV tests. They can order the test using your name (nominal testing) or using a code (non-nominal testing) that they can link back to your name.

## **Prenatal HIV Testing Program**

All pregnant women in Ontario are offered HIV testing as part of their prenatal care. When pregnant women with HIV are diagnosed early, they can receive treatment for themselves and treatment for their babies. Prenatal testing has helped prevent more than 50 babies in Ontario from becoming infected. In the past, about 25 per cent of babies born to women with HIV were infected. With prenatal testing and treatment, fewer than two per cent of babies born to women with HIV are infected.

# Epidemiological Facts on HIV/AIDS

The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Ontario has risen significantly from 17,656 people living with HIV/AIDS in 1999 to 26,356 in 2006. The increase is due to decreases in mortality and instability of the epidemic in specific populations.

There are four priority populations in Ontario – gay and bisexual men, Ontarians from African and Caribbean countries, injection drug users and Aboriginal Peoples.

## In 2006

- There were an estimated 15,656 gay or bisexual men infected with HIV in the province. This accounts for 60 per cent of all HIV-infected people. In the same year, gay and bisexual men represented 49 per cent of 1,802 new HIV infections, or 888.
- Ontarians from African and Caribbean communities accounted for 16 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS (4,181) and 24 per cent of new HIV infections, or 426.
- People who use injection drugs, male and female, accounted for seven per cent of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the province (1,935) and five per cent of new HIV infections or 82.
- Women (who are represented in the above populations or who engage in HIV risk activity with them) accounted for 16 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS in the province (4,260) and 23 per cent of new infections, or 420.
- Heterosexual men and women – who did not have a history of injection drug use, come from an African or Caribbean country or are gay or bisexual men – accounted for 20 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS in the province (3,715) and 20 per cent of new infections, or 355.

Ontario does not currently track HIV rates in Aboriginal communities. However, federal statistics indicate that HIV disproportionately impacts Aboriginal Peoples.

## Current Situation in Ontario

### HIV Diagnoses

By the end of 2006, 27,621 people in Ontario had been diagnosed with HIV – an increase of 29 per cent since 1999 – and 8,799 had died. Based on these numbers, Ontario would appear to have approximately 18,000 people living with HIV in the province.

However, since not everyone who has HIV has been tested and diagnosed, these figures understate the number of people living with HIV and the prevalence of Ontario's HIV/AIDS epidemic. Epidemiologists estimate that, as of the end of 2006, there were 26,356 people living with HIV/AIDS in Ontario.

### **Mortality Rate Decreases**

More people are living with HIV longer: Since the introduction of anti-retroviral therapies in 1996, the number of HIV-related deaths has dropped by 75 per cent.

## **HIV Infections**

### **Infection Rate Increases**

Epidemiologists estimate there were a total of 1,802 new HIV infections in Ontario in 2006, a 46 per cent increase in HIV incidence (the number of people infected each year) compared to 1999.

Between 1999 and 2006, the total number of people infected with HIV increased significantly in people from African and Caribbean countries (72 per cent) and in gay and bisexual men (30 per cent). Increases in infections in gay and bisexual men have been documented since 1996.

Ontario does not collect data on the proportion of people diagnosed with HIV who are Aboriginal. However, Health Canada reports that Aboriginal People represent 2.8 per cent of the Canadian population, but in the first six months of 2002 they constituted 10 per cent of new AIDS cases in Canada.

### **People Living with HIV who Don't Know They're Infected**

About three out of every 10 people living with HIV in Ontario don't know they are infected. Since it is possible to live for many years with HIV without experiencing symptoms, many people do not seek testing. This means people may be unknowingly transmitting HIV.



For more information about your local AIDS service organization or anonymous HIV testing site, including its location, please call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 1-800-668-2437.

Pour obtenir plus de renseignements sur les organismes offrant des services liés au sida ou les centres de dépistage anonyme du VIH en Ontario, y compris leur emplacement, veuillez communiquer avec la ligne d'information sida-santé et sexualité, sans frais, au 1 800 267-7432.

**Or contact the AIDS Bureau:**

AIDS Bureau  
Provincial Programs Branch  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
393 University Avenue, Suite 2100  
Toronto ON M5G 1E6

Tel: 1-800-268-6066 or 416-327-8797

Or visit [www.health.gov.on.ca/hiv](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/hiv)