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CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks

Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week Activity Guide 2024

Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/ Week is held every year from December 1 to December 7 beginning on World AIDS Day – December 1. Today, Indigenous people are still dying of AIDS in Canada. Some people choose Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week to memorialize or to commemorate those who struggled living with HIV.

This week is an opportunity to:

-  Increase awareness and knowledge about HIV and AIDS support, testing, treatment and adherence to antiretroviral medication and include information on how HIV is transmitted and how it is not.
-  Establish ongoing prevention and education programs in Indigenous communities.
-  To bring together community and stakeholders with Indigenous people living with or affected by HIV & AIDS.
-  Address common attitudes and misinformation that may interfere with prevention, care and treatment activities.
-  Reduce HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

This activity guide is intended as a resource to help you, and your community, think about what HIV and AIDS awareness activities you might plan for Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/ Week as well as throughout the year.

Why Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week is Important to my Community?

In 2022, Canada saw a 25 per cent increase of new HIV diagnoses compared to 2021, with Indigenous peoples disproportionately affected. The most significant increases are in Prairie provinces, with Saskatchewan having the largest rise of new cases (19%), followed by Manitoba (13.9%). If the same rate of growth persists, Canada will see more new HIV cases in 2027 than in 1984 at the peak of the initial outbreak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This increase in cases disproportionately affects Indigenous communities.

In Canada, Indigenous peoples made up 18% of all new HIV infections in 2020 while comprising only 5% of the population. Significantly, Indigenous women have suffered the most. Although Indigenous women represent roughly 2.5% of Canada's population, they represent approximately 6.6% of new HIV infections with known ethnicity and are often diagnosed in comparatively later stages than settler women — severely limiting their quality of life.

HIV infections among Indigenous people are diagnosed at a younger age than in non-Indigenous Peoples and affect a higher proportion of women when compared to the non-Indigenous population. After two decades of progress in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, Canada is reversing course and facing unprecedented increases in the rates of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) such as syphilis and Hepatitis C (HCV). This increase in cases disproportionately impacts Indigenous peoples in both urban and rural settings when compared to the settler population. It is time for all Indigenous people to have the knowledge to make a difference and be leaders in their own communities.

Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week Activities - Just a Beginning

Every year, between December 1 and December 7, you have an opportunity to begin a dialogue about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) among people in your community – especially among the young males, females, two-spirit and transgender people who may be at greatest risk of infection.

It is an ideal time to begin to raise knowledge about HIV – what the virus is, how it is spread, the importance of knowing how to prevent infection and regular testing, and how the virus is best treated. Perhaps it is an ideal time for your community to memorialize friends, family, and community members who have since departed us and those who are thriving while living with HIV.







Or maybe it's a good time to sit with community Elders and leaders to begin the necessary dialogue about what is needed to educate your community's young people or how best to reduce HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination, or how to best support and care for Indigenous People Living with HIV and AIDS (IPHA) from your community.

But remember, the activities which you may have started during Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week need to continue throughout the year whenever there is an opportunity to raise awareness and knowledge about HIV and AIDS.

Getting Started

This is your opportunity to make a difference in how your community responds to HIV and AIDS risks and realities locally. Be proud that you have chosen to use Indigenous AIDS Awareness Day/Week to take the first step. Here is a simple checklist to help make sure your activity, personal project or planned program gets off to a good start.

1. Do you know what you would like to achieve with your project?

-  I want to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS.
-  I want to share knowledge about preventing HIV transmission.
-  I want to remember friends and family who have passed away.
-  I want to encourage our community to do more.
-  I want to encourage the use of HIV Self Testing Kits.
-  I want to explore HIV and the criminal law.

- 🚫 I want to raise awareness around the Good Samaritan Law and their legal rights.
- 🚫 I want to learn more about effective HIV treatment and Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).
- 🚫 I want to reduce HIV stigma and discrimination in my community.
- 🚫 I want to educate about harm reduction and people who use drugs.

2. Who are you hoping will participate or support in your project?

- 🚫 Everyone in the community.
- 🚫 Our community's young males, females, two-spirit and Indigenous trans people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.
- 🚫 Elders and community leaders.
- 🚫 Chief and Counsels.
- 🚫 Sexual health education and students.
- 🚫 Harm Reduction implementers and people who use drugs.
- 🚫 People who have experience in prison.
- 🚫 Indigenous people living with HIV or AIDS.
- 🚫 Sex workers.
- 🚫 Law makers, activists, policy/decision makers.
- 🚫 Law Enforcement.
- 🚫 Media.
- 🚫 Health and outreach workers.
- 🚫 Sports coaches.

3. Have you told them? Have you invited them?

- 🚫 Informed them personally.
- 🚫 Emailed them.
- 🚫 Put up posters or notices around the neighbourhood or in newsletters.
- 🚫 Made it part of their school course.
- 🚫 Created and shared social media posts
- 🚫 Mailed them a notice or invitation.
- 🚫 Post flyers at Band Offices, Health Centres, Bingo Halls etc.









4. Do you have the resources, information and tools you need?

- 🚫 Yes, I have done some research and have spoken with our community's health representative.
- 🚫 Yes, I have found some information about the local situation for HIV, harm reduction and healthy sexuality
- 🚫 Yes, I have checked with a member from CAAN Community, Alliances & Networks in our community and they will help me.
- 🚫 Yes, I downloaded more of the posters and fact sheets from CAAN's web site and have them ready for my students.
- 🚫 Yes, I have invited a health expert to speak to our community leaders and Elders about doing more.
- 🚫 Yes, I am working with the local AIDS Service Organization, health workers and/or the Indigenous Friendship centre.

Opportunities to Inform, Discuss and Take Action:

Indigenous communities often have regular or traditional gatherings where you may be able to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS by distributing information, setting up a display or information table, or preparing a presentation or discussion. You can approach activity organizers to inquire if there would be space for your awareness activity within their larger event. Even a ‘small’ presence at these events can be very powerful and should not be undervalued.









Traditional Activities to attend may include:

-  Women, Men, Youth, Trans or 2-Spirit Gatherings.
-  Sexual and reproductive health and rights.
-  Healthy sexuality, traditional roles.
-  Powwows.
-  Information booth.
-  Distributing HIV prevention and awareness gifts.
-  Cultural celebrations including Drumming, Singing, Dances and Community feasts.
-  Teaching about and using sacred medicines from the local culture; and/or Engaging Elders to share traditional teaches that relate to HIV.

HIV and AIDS Specific Activities

You may choose to organize a specific activity where the main focus is on raising awareness – that is, sharing information about HIV and AIDS, the illness, the risks, the statistics, and so on. You may want to get help from one of CAAN’s members close to your community or a local AIDS service organization or community’s health office to help in sharing more technical information, like what HIV does to cells in the body, and different treatment options, for example. It is important to remember that it is better to answer a question with ‘I don’t know’ than to provide inaccurate information – you can document ‘unanswered’ questions and publish the answers to these questions on a website, in a community paper, or in an information poster as one way of addressing ‘knowledge gaps’.








Activities may include:

-  Book a time at an AIDS service organization for an open house.
-  An HIV Resource and Information table or display at local events.
-  An HIV and AIDS Awareness fair and/or panel discussion.
-  Community AIDS Walk – where you can fundraise to host other AIDS awareness activities, and hand out HIV and AIDS awareness information.
-  Holding your HIV activity in a local community space such as a bingo hall, community centre, substance-use treatment centre, schools, sports matches, etc.
-  An HIV fundraiser event connect to an annual event in the community.
-  A focus on the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action or the Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice, and/or
-  A candlelight vigil or memorial service for people who have passed on.

Youth and School Activities:

As a concerned teacher or student, you may wish to raise awareness about HIV, discuss important HIV prevention practices or address HIV and AIDS stigma and discrimination in using art, drama, video arts, or writing classes.




Activities may include:

-  Group discussions about how HIV is transmitted, how it affects the body and the effective treatments and about how people living with HIV can live long healthy lives without passing on HIV.
-  A youth led/youth only dialogue about safer sex, drug use and HIV prevention.
-  Use ‘how does HIV and AIDS stigma and discrimination ‘look’ or ‘feel’” as an exploratory art, video or writing assignment.
-  Organizing guest speakers for the school during Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week.
-  Invite an Indigenous Person living with HIV & AIDS (IPHA) to speak to a student and/or group of concerned community members.
-  Decorate red balloons for HIV and AIDS awareness, or an art build in a prominent location; and/or
-  Watch documentaries and video clips on the Indigenous HIV/AIDS movement or about living with HIV and AIDS.

Media Activities:

You may like to share how your community reduced HIV and AIDS stigma and discrimination or invite the community to an event or simply do your part to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS through your local media.

Activities may include:

-  Write a public service announcement for the local/regional radio or TV station to record and air.
-  Share a community HIV and AIDS story or a personal story for your community newsletter, or for the local newspaper.
-  Invite Indigenous or local media to attend your activity – including CAAN staff and members and/or staff and members from a local AIDS service organization. If they are unable to attend, provide media with the names of powerful speakers on HIV.

Need Additional Information or Have Any Questions?

In addition to this activity guide, you may request additional support, resources or advice from the CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks or from one of CAAN’s member organizations or individuals located across the country.

Email info@caan.ca or visit www.caan.ca