

Interconnected



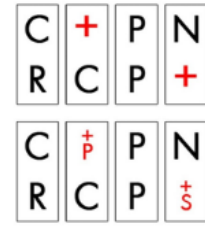
Photo by [Andres F. Uran](#) on [Unsplash](#)



In 2020, the world's attention has been focused by the COVID-19 pandemic on health and how pandemics affect lives and livelihoods. COVID-19 is showing once again how health is interlinked with other critical issues, such as reducing inequality, human rights, gender equality, social protection and economic growth. With this in mind, this year the theme of World AIDS Day is

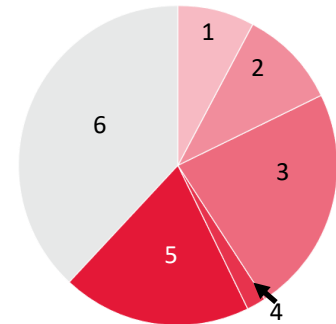
“Global solidarity, shared responsibility”.

([UNAIDS](#))



According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#):

- In July 2020, it was estimated that 38 million people are living with HIV globally; a 24% increase over 2010.
- Nearly 10% of the global HIV burden exists in North America, with an estimated increase of new infections at 7% over 2020.
- The graph below illustrates the WHO's estimated “distribution” of new HIV infections by key population in 2019.



1. Sex workers (8%)
2. People who inject drugs (10%)
3. Gay men and other men who have sex with men (23%)
4. Transgender women (2%)
5. Clients of sex workers and sex partners of other key populations (19%)
6. Remaining population (38%)

The focus for World AIDS Day over time...

1988	Communication
1989	Youth
1990	Women and AIDS
1991	Sharing the Challenge
1992	Community Commitment
1993	Time to Act
1994	AIDS and the Family
1995	Shared Rights, Shared Responsibilities
1996	One World. One Hope.
1997	Children Living in a World with AIDS
1998	Force for Change: World AIDS Campaign With Young People
1999	Listen, Learn, Live: World AIDS Campaign with Children & Young People
2000	AIDS: Men Make a Difference
2001	I care. Do you?
2002	Stigma and Discrimination
2003	Stigma and Discrimination
2004	Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS
2005	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise
2006	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise – Accountability
2007	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise – Leadership
2008	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise – Lead – Empower – Deliver
2009	Universal Access and Human Rights
2010	Universal Access and Human Rights
2011	Getting to Zero
2012	Together we will end AIDS
2013	Zero Discrimination
2014	Close the gap
2015	On the fast track to end AIDS
2016	Hands up for #HIVprevention
2017	My Health, My Right
2018	Know your status
2019	Communities make the difference
2020	Global solidarity, shared responsibility

Here are some notable Canadian data...



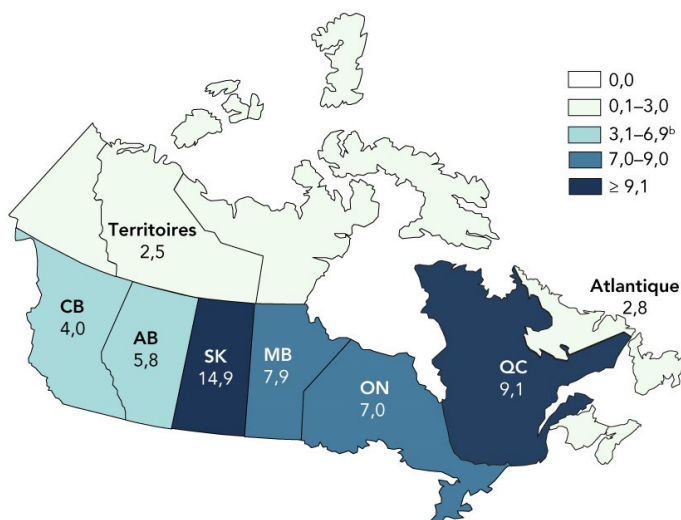
According to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), summary estimates from 2016 indicate that:

- ⇒ Between 60,000 and 65,000 people in Canada are living with HIV;
- ⇒ Nearly 85% of people living with HIV are aware of their status;
- ⇒ Almost 80% of people living with HIV are receiving antiretroviral treatment; and,
- ⇒ Nearly 90% of people on antiretroviral therapy are sustaining an undetectable viral load.

[Surveillance estimates from 2018](#) indicate that:

- ⇒ Of the 2,561 newly diagnosed people living with HIV, slightly less than 71% are male;
- ⇒ While trending downward, gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with other men are still among the greatest number of people who are newly infected with HIV;
- ⇒ Among the reported HIV cases among females, slightly more than 34% are between 30 and 39 years old; among males, almost 29% are the same age; and
- ⇒ Nearly 20% of the reported HIV cases in 2018 were attributed to Indigenous Canadians (a continuing over-representation).

HIV diagnosis rate (per 100,000 population) by province and territory, Canada, 2018





“Long-term survivors see things differently”

Bob Leahy reports on what World AIDS Day means to him

The recognition of World AIDS Day in December of each year started in 1988. It was a way of highlighting the enormity of the AIDS pandemic and to ensure universal treatment, care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS. Since then its mission has morphed into something slightly different. More on that later.

My own record of recognizing World AIDS Day should have started in 1993, scarcely three months after my diagnosis in September of that year. In truth, though, it didn't. Yes, I was in care at the time but not yet out about my status. I was still working, but pretending to all but my partner that nothing had happened, that my life expectancy had not suddenly been drastically curtailed, that I still could hold onto a job. It was not until the spring of 1994 that declining health and the impact of watching the movie Philadelphia changed everything. I came out HIV-positive. I did so with a splash. Work, colleagues, friends, neighbours were all told I had HIV. More significantly and with time on my hands after leaving work for good, I threw myself into volunteering with my local AIDS Service Organization. I read everything I could about HIV. I became an AIDS information junkie. So it was not really until December 1, 1994 that I celebrated World AIDS Day.

Over the years I've recognized the significance of December 1 in a smorgasbord of ways. I've stood shivering on the sidewalk selling red ribbons. I've been on radio and TV. I've attended, with some misgivings, black-tie fundraisers. I've stood on the steps of Ottawa's Parliament Hill, glowing with pride as Canada officially endorsed U=U. Other years I've done nothing. “Every day is World AIDS Day” some have said - and sometimes I've agreed with them.

Truth is World AIDS Day means many things to many people. It's hard to embrace all those things at once. Officially its purpose is to show support for people living

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with HIV and to remember those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. It has a more personal connotation for many people living with HIV, though. For this long term survivor it's an emotional day. For the general population, it likely goes unnoticed or, worse, has become a bore.

Long term survivors like me, increasingly vocal and wanting a place at the table, turn often to the need to remember our history. We see the need to remember our fallen as a prime focus of World AIDS Day. Whether we experience survivor guilt or not (I used to), we also want those of us who experienced those pre-treatment, pre-1996 days not to be forgotten. We have inevitably seen our social circle decimated back then. Remembering those passed has a very personal component for us. We vividly remember names, faces and life stories of those who died so tragically. Those more recently diagnosed will likely not have had that experience. Thus the long-term survivor's view of World AIDS Day, coloured by our place in history, is unique.

But it's complicated. The recognition of World AIDS Day shouldn't be exclusionary. It shouldn't exclude the newly diagnosed. It shouldn't exclude recognition of our HIV-negative allies. It shouldn't exclude celebration of how far we have come. It shouldn't exclude the need for more focus on HIV. And it shouldn't exclude the need to beat this damned epidemic to the ground.

World AIDS Day. Many things to many people - and I think that's OK!

“GIPA, MEPA and the importance of Champions”



CPPN Board member, Deborah Norris, says “we can change the world!”

In 1991, I received some devastating news. I had been diagnosed with HIV. I was a single parent of two small children, there were no medications that worked to treat the disease, I was told to “get your affairs in order” because I didn’t have long to live. I began attending a support group for people living with HIV, where I met others living with HIV who taught me that I was living, not dying. At the beginning of 1992, one of the members of the support group approached me about serving as a community representative on an interagency committee for a Federal project in Edmonton, Alberta, called Caring Together. I was pretty much a token woman living with HIV but I was excited to be doing something other than worrying about my imminent death. It was here that I first believed that I was doing meaningful work that mattered. GIPA and MEPA would not be coined until much later, but I knew, at first, that I was just a token appointment and really should keep my mouth shut. Well, they really didn’t know who they had invited. Quiet isn’t my *modus operandi*. Haha! I suggested that I bring together a Client Advisory Committee (CAC). They agreed. Little did they know that I would be able to bring together 13 people living with HIV from very diverse back grounds to “advise” the work of the Interagency Committee.

At our first meeting, the members of CAC said they wanted to have the power to decide which initiatives the project would carry out and oversee them. At the next meeting of the Interagency Committee, I

informed them of the CAC request. One of the Infectious Disease specialists on the Interagency Committee said, quite incredulously “Are you asking for veto power?” I said, “Well, yes, we are.” They began to discuss our request and it became clear that there was a lot of push back at the table. Then a woman who was ED of a large inner-city support agency, who I consider a mentor, said “If I were you, I would walk out of this meeting if you aren’t supported.” That one statement, emboldened me, and taught me the meaning of meaningful engagement and the value of champions. It was put to a vote and we won. The project was completely turned on its head- they called it a “paradigm shift”. All the initiatives were vetted by the CAC. Every initiative (this was a multi-million-dollar project so there were many) had several people living with HIV as part of carrying it out. We demanded honoraria be paid to every person living with HIV who was involved. Our time was valuable and valued. It was exciting.

Over the years, I have had the good fortune to be involved in many projects and community initiatives. I have never forgotten what I learned on the Caring Together project: that I am valued and valuable. That the voices of people living with HIV matter. That we should speak out when we can and that we should also support each other to do so. That we need champions in the non-profit sector to support us to do so and be by our sides mentoring us as we do. When that happens, we can change the world!



“Last Man Standing”

Jeff Potts wonders, after nearly three decades of World AIDS Days,
“Am I left with survivor guilt or a sense of belonging?”

From birth, we are “shaped”. First, in a perfect world, we are shaped by our parents – taught about right and wrong, encouraged to learn and to grow as individuals; to adopt a moral code and a commitment to social responsibility.

As we mature and change, so too do the people who shape us. We make childhood friends, some of whom are lifelong. We grow increasingly comfortable interacting with strangers, sometimes very easily with folks who are likeminded and perhaps more often than we anticipate with people who hold opposing views on this-or-that. After all, who does not enjoy or thrive upon a great debate or in healthy exchanges of quips and witticisms?

Eventually, we find ourselves shaped by the loves in (and of) our lives, and we become (sometimes) hyper-vigilant on shaping the relationships we enter into: those that are fair-weather, and those which are intensely intimate (if even fleetingly).

As a long-term and aging survivor of HIV, I reflect on nearly three decades of my own World AIDS Days and realize that I am who I am (for better or worse) because of the many people who had hands in influencing – defining the shape of my character, my intellect, my values and morality, and my role in the family, intimate, social, community, and societal relationships that I’ve been so privileged to enjoy and to foster in my life. To borrow from Shakespeare’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy... *therein lies the rub*. So many (too many) of the people who contributed to shaping my 52 years of life and my 30 World AIDS Days are gone.

I don’t suggest that I’m left without personal guides – there are still, thank goodness, many people with whom I place great trust and confidence in to help ensure that my capacity to learn (or to teach) and grow is not forever stunted by the losses I’ve experienced. But, as I reflect on my most-intimate relationships as a gay man who lives with HIV and who has surpassed my “best before date” by 22 years (and climbing), I realize that I am the last man standing.

For me, this is a profound truth that leaves me to wonder if my days of being shaped and of shaping the most-personal relationships are gone forever.

As a gay man, I have had my share of intimate flings and one-night-stands. But I have had three long-term intimate relationships since growing out of the ‘novelty’ that coming out as a gay man represented. JL was first. Things were great in the beginning, but the relationship turned quite volatile later. JL deliberately infected me with HIV in 1990 because, in his words, “If I’m going down, you are coming with me. I won’t die alone.” Sadly, die alone he did. MP was my second partner, and we were both aware of our HIV infections. Paul was my third partner – my true soulmate. Paul was not HIV-positive... we lived a perfectly sero-discordant life together for more than two decades. I still intensely grieve having lost Paul to cancer just last year.

I recently learned that MP died just a short time ago. Thankfully, he did not die alone; he found love after mine, as I did. He thrived. He inspired. He shaped! The news of his death hit me hard and I know that I will save space to grieve for him over time.

On this World AIDS Day, I am intensely introspective (I hope not selfishly). Realizing that the three men who truly shaped who I am as a gay man aging with HIV are gone, I am experiencing feelings of survivor guilt more profoundly than ever before. I am left wondering if I will ever find love again... the kind of love that most assuredly means amazing opportunities for mutual influence over who we continue to be and who we can be. At the same time, this is another World AIDS Day that I can observe and share with a community of my peers and all the important folks in our amazing health and social support circles. The three loves in my life motivated me to beat the odds; they prepared me to be the last man standing. How? By leaving me with the intense understanding that I am NOT the last ‘man’ standing. **None of us are!**

The Seeking Help Project



The CPPN is very proud to support the Seeking Help Project and we want to take this opportunity to shine a light on the amazing work that the Project does assisting front-line service providers who experience mental health concerns and/or addictions.



Founded by Eric Cashmore (pictured) and continuing to benefit from his extraordinary leadership as Executive Director, the Seeking Help Project is an invaluable organization which strives to assist front-line service providers who experience mental health concerns and/or addictions.

It's Mission:

"The Seeking Help Project is a grass-roots, non-profit organization committed to promoting wellness in the workplace through education, mediation and individualized case management. The Seeking Help Project supports the individual worker and creates healthier communities by strengthening the front lines."

The Seeking Help Project's work is guided by pivotal core values: safety, compassion, accountability, professionalism, and perseverance; certainly values that the CPPN supports and stands in solidarity with.

The CPPN also proudly joins the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premiers of Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan (among countless others) in congratulating Eric and his stellar team:

- Mike Delfre, Special Advisor
- Patricia Valcourt, Chair of the Board of Directors and Director of Indigenous Services
- Scott Dargie, Vice-Chair of the Board
- Aaron Babin, Treasurer
- Brenda Miller, Director of Support Services for the Front Line Response to Human Trafficking
- Silvie Horner, Secretary of the Board
- And, Andy Wang, Victoria Barr, Chris Moret, and Breklyn Bertozzi... all At-Large Members of the Board.

Those of us who live with HIV know that it is not always easy... and certainly not as easy as some assume it is given the amazing advances in science. Imagine, though, how tough it is (or certainly can be) for the incredible people we so often rely upon... on the front lines. The Seeking Help Project understands that our front-line champions can be quite affected by the immense responsibility they bear in service to us; the CPPN can not be more proud of these champions, and we certainly look forward to working more closely with The Seeking Help Project going forward.

On this World AIDS Day (and everyday)... pause; reflect. Many of us who live with HIV also work in the HIV sector, but so many more of us do not. Let's take a moment to acknowledge that the Seeking Help Project's whole focus is on the people we so often rely upon... the front-line service providers who are there for us, but are too often overlooked when it comes to the impact that their focus on us has on THEM.

And, on this World AIDS Day, the CPPN is happy to be among the firsts to congratulate The Seeking Help Project for its recent partnership agreement with [Hasu Behavioural Health](#). This amazing partnership will make it possible for front line service providers to access counselling and support services at a discounted rate!

Get to know Eric and his Team; get to know The Seeking Help Project. Visit their incredible Website at:

[The Seeking Help Project | Mental Health & Addiction Help \(seeking-help.com\)](http://seeking-help.com)



Introducing the 2020-2021 Board of Directors

Following a successful Annual General Meeting of Members,
(November 28, 2020)

We are very happy to introduce our 2020-2021 Board of Directors

There were five new Board members elected:



Jimi Lister
Regional Director, Ontario
(Secretary of the
Board of Directors)



Designated Director,
Indigenous Peoples



Designated Director,
Ethnocultural and Migrant Communities



Director At-Large (re-elected)



Director At-Large

Our continuing Board Members are:



Brittany Cameron
Designated Director,
People who identify as
Women and Girls
(Co-Chair of the
Board of Directors)



Kathleen Bird
Director At-Large
(Co-Chair of the
Board of Directors)



Deborah Norris
Regional Director,
The Prairies
(Treasurer of the
Board of Directors)



Marlo Cottrell
Designated Director,
People Living with
HIV Co-infections

You may learn more about these fine folks and amazing advocates at:

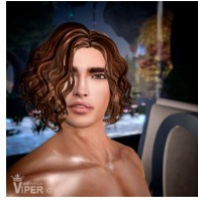
[Our leadership team \(www.cppnrcps.ca\)](http://www.cppnrcps.ca)

You will find a copy of our 2019-2020 Annual Report there also.

A World AIDS Day fundraising event!



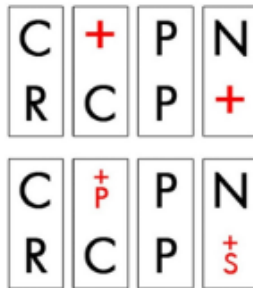
Did you know that one of the CPPN's Co-Founders and former Board Member is also a virtual disc jockey?



DJ EZ
Martin with Prostate Cancer

It's true! Emerald (Ezzie) Gibson is **"DJ EZ"** and he has named the CPPN as one of the beneficiaries of his World AIDS Day 2020 annual fundraiser, "Second Pride; Celebrate Diversity". Thank you DJ EZ!

Click [here](#) for more information.



Your perspective is important to us. Let us know if you would like to contribute to a future issue of Interconnected.

Send an email to connect@cppnrcps.ca.

Are you a CPPN Member? If not, would you like to be? Click [here](#) to complete our Membership Registration form.

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