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30 June 2011

Mr. Neil MacDonald, Executive Director
Public Health Strategic Policy and Planning Branch
Alberta Health and Wellness
23rd Floor, Telus Plaza North Tower
10025 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 1S6

Dear Mr. MacDonald;

Re: Lack of Point of Care Rapid HIV Testing in Alberta

The Alberta Community Council on HIV (ACCH) is a coalition of 13 AIDS service organizations (ASOs) that provide HIV/AIDS education, support, and prevention services across the province. We are writing to you to bring to your attention the lack of Point of Care (P of C) Rapid HIV testing in Alberta and therefore the lost benefits of having this available in the community.

Rapid HIV testing at point of care provides testing in an accessible way, especially for those at increased risk. It greatly decreases the risk of patients not returning for results weeks later, and thus not knowing their status, nor receiving post-test counselling and the development of prevention or treatment strategies. P of C Rapid Testing can be an extremely powerful intervention in HIV/AIDS prevention and ensuring adequate treatment for all people living with HIV.

Recent research has shown that Point of Care Rapid HIV is especially effective with groups who may be at most risk, and can be provided in non-primary health care facilities – which is a significant cost savings. We applaud the recent STI Blood Borne Pathogen Strategy which identified the need for more testing – especially for those communities and individuals at high risk. We work with people and communities who are highly vulnerable on multiple fronts and can and do reach the “hard to reach”. We welcome the opportunity to provide Rapid HIV testing through locally based ASOs.

A true commitment to preventing and treating HIV/AIDS in our community must include Point of Care Rapid HIV testing and we look forward to the opportunity to work in partnership with Alberta Health and Wellness to make this happen.

Sincerely;

Brenda Yamkowy
Chair
Alberta Community Council on HIV

c.c. Dr. André Corriveau, MD, MBA, FRCPC
Chief Medical Officer of Health
Alberta Health and Wellness

Margaret King
Assistant Deputy Minister
Alberta Health and Wellness