



## **Combating a global pandemic: a community-based response**

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### **Issues:**

Technologies have increased our connection with the world and what we are discovering is we have an impact on each other. HIV and AIDS unites and divides people, transmits problems and solutions, and challenges institutional and governmental systems.

Interdependence in the response to this disease is the new background of our reality.

At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS in June 2001, a Declaration of Commitment was adopted to guide a global response to HIV/AIDS for the next decade. This Declaration is a tool that organizations at all levels can use for advocacy, activities and solidarity building.<sup>i</sup>

The Declaration calls for commitment in leadership, prevention, care, support and treatment, human rights, reducing vulnerability, children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, alleviating social and economic impacts, research and development, HIV/AIDS in conflict and disaster-affected regions, resources, and follow-up.<sup>ii</sup>

As a global community becomes a reality, we have the opportunity to build solidarity and further unite in the fight against HIV/AIDS. To this end, we call on regional, national, and international organizations to grasp informal and formal opportunities for enhancing their response to HIV/AIDS. In an effort to improve the effectiveness of this work, the Declaration of Commitment can be implemented as a guide for community-based organizations.

### **Description:**

This poster presentation describes the initial efforts of developing a domestic and global response to HIV/AIDS within a Canadian community-based AIDS Service Organization (ASO). The proposed guide for this strategy is the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

At a time when ASOs are expected to do more with fewer resources, formulating a global response can seem beyond reach. This presents an ethical dilemma when the need for global action is so urgent and the resources are so scarce. We explore one organization's efforts to move into this arena.

Recognizing that our own direct action needs to extend beyond our borders has become a strongly held value at AIDS Calgary.

The initial efforts of using the Declaration of Commitment at AIDS Calgary as a guiding tool in developing a global response to HIV/AIDS involves starting small at a local level:

### **Step 1:**                    *Human Resources*

Dedicate a staff member to assess the feasibility of using the Declaration as a template for a domestic and international response to this global pandemic.

As we create stronger links with other community-based organizations involved in this important work more information becomes available and the process becomes clearer.

### **Step 2:**                    *Areas of Commitment*

Identify areas of the Declaration that AIDS Calgary is already involved in to support those we serve in understanding our role in the global fight against HIV/AIDS.

These can include current regional, national, and international involvements. Recognition that the issues we are dealing with here are similar around the world, for example poverty as an underlying determinant of HIV/AIDS.

### **Step 3:**                    *Stakeholder Consultation*

Consult with clients, staff, management, and the board of directors to ensure the support and sustainability of national and international involvement over the next decade.

This is a critical step and should not be underestimated. Building solidarity toward a collective movement can be enhanced by using tools such as community-based social marketing. It is important to support stakeholders in recognizing a personal link with the global HIV/AIDS pandemic.

**Step 4:** *Endorsing the Declaration*

Formally endorsing the Declaration to show continued leadership and commitment in the national and global response to HIV/AIDS.<sup>iii</sup>

This will enhance the solidarity with others who are working with the Declaration of Commitment. Everyday more voices join – everyday the silence is broken a little bit more.

**Step 5:** *Supporting Action*

Continue current initiatives and identifying future opportunities locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

As we become interdependent in the response to HIV/AIDS, many informal and formal opportunities will surface. Smaller organizations may choose to respond to one area while larger organizations address several – the HIV/AIDS struggle is one.

**Step 6:** *Evaluation*

Ongoing evaluation of AIDS Calgary's commitment to the Declaration will ensure there is no gap between what we say we will do and what is actually done.

Evaluation is an opportunity to record our global response to HIV/AIDS, which in turn provides written information to share with others. This also enables us to hold our governments and ourselves responsible for promises made.

**Lessons Learned:**

Change is slow.

Assisting staff, volunteers and the board of directors of a community-based organization to look beyond their mission statement takes determination and patience. Supporting those involved in making the link between regional and international HIV/AIDS work is vital to the success of this endeavour.

**Recommendations:**

To ensure the success of this long-term commitment, it is important that community-based organizations in the developed and developing world join together in their response to HIV/AIDS. All organizations involved in HIV/AIDS work, no matter their size, urgently need to participate. Recognition of the importance of community-based organizations in the global response to HIV/AIDS will generate the support needed at national and international levels to fight this disease. In order to promote involvement at all levels, sharing of knowledge and skills is vital. Together we can stop AIDS!

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<sup>i</sup> The complete United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS – Declaration of Commitment can be viewed at [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

<sup>ii</sup> Health Canada. International Affairs Directorate Health Policy and Communications Branch. Report on the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS. 2002. [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/datapcb/iad/ih-e.htm](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/datapcb/iad/ih-e.htm).

<sup>iii</sup> See the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO). Advocacy Guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. October 2001. [www.icaso.org](http://www.icaso.org).

### **About the Author:**

Le-Ann Dolan is a Social Worker currently working as Community Developer with AIDS Calgary Awareness Association in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. In her work, Le-Ann holds a position with the Calgary Coalition on HIV and AIDS as advocacy representative. She is also co-managing an international twinning project with the Alberta Community Council on HIV (ACCH) and IMIFAP in Mexico. Le-Ann is currently an ACCH representative on the Global Treatment Access Group (GTAG). Her work involves capacity building with communities and organizations to create a comprehensive response to HIV and AIDS on regional, national and international levels.

### **About AIDS Calgary:**

AIDS Calgary operates from a harm reduction philosophy, and provides safer sex education in a variety of settings for over one million people in the greater Calgary region. Our prevention initiatives targets street-involved youth, Aboriginal populations, men who have sex with men, women, injection drug users and the general public. Our prevention initiatives are also carried out through our Speakers network, which provides AIDS '101' and AIDS '201' presentations to students enrolled in the Calgary Board of Education.

Our Support Services team provides one to one counselling, as well as advocacy and referrals to over 450 registered clients. Programs within the support team include a community kitchen, and emergency assistance funds for childcare and transportation to families unable to access our services, as well as group support counselling. Through these initiatives AIDS Calgary is helping to enhance the quality of life of those living with HIV/AIDS.

The promotion of general awareness of HIV/AIDS issues is carried out in a variety of ways. The most extensive of which is our bi-monthly newsletter 360 Degrees. This newsletter covers a variety of topics related to increasing awareness of HIV/AIDS issues and has a distribution of 18,000 copies bi-monthly. AIDS Calgary also has a website which provides access to current HIV/AIDS information. This website, which averages approximately 8,000 hits / six months, can be accessed at [www.aidscalgary.org](http://www.aidscalgary.org).

The Community Development area is the newest addition to AIDS Calgary's team. This position leads the agency in its partnerships with regional, national, and international organizations responding to HIV/AIDS. This response includes the implementation of the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment for AIDS Calgary's domestic and international response to the global HIV/AIDS pandemic.