

## HIV/AIDS Among Injection Drug Users in Canada

### Introduction

Since the early 1980s when the HIV epidemic was concentrated in men who have sex with men (MSM), the Canadian epidemic has continued to evolve with transmission now occurring in virtually every sector of the population. Recent data indicate that HIV transmission among injection drug users (IDUs) is an increasing problem and that it is not just confined to Canada's major cities. This report updates current information on the status of the HIV/AIDS epidemic among IDUs in Canada.

### Injection drug use: an increasing risk factor among AIDS cases

- As of September 30, 1996, 14,185 AIDS cases had been reported to Bureau of HIV/AIDS and STD. Of these, 553 (3.9%) were attributed to injection drug use and an additional 613 (4.3%) were attributed to the combined category of injection drug use and MSM.
- Injection drug use is a more common risk factor for women with 16.9% of adult female AIDS cases attributed to injection drug use versus 3.1% for adult male cases.
- Unlike the overall AIDS epidemic where the annual number of AIDS cases has levelled, the number of cases attributed to IDU alone has risen steadily over time (see Fig. 1 below).
- The proportion of AIDS cases attributed to injection drug use has also increased over time. For adult male cases, this proportion has increased from 1% during the period before 1989, to 2.6% during 1989-1992, and to 5% during 1993-1996. For women, the increase has been even more dramatic: from 6% to 15% and finally to 24% for the respective time periods.

### Injection drug use is also an increasing risk factor in HIV-positive test reports

- AIDS data reflects patterns of HIV infection approximately 10 years in the past, so data on more recent HIV infection are needed to better reflect the current epidemic.
- Data from provincial HIV testing programs in Ontario and B.C. indicate that injection drug use is an increasing risk factor among new HIV-positive test reports. For example, in Ontario, 6.1% of new positive test reports in 1995 were among IDUs compared to 2.8% prior to 1995. The situation is even more marked in B.C. where injection drug use accounted for 38% of new positive tests in 1995 compared to 9% prior to 1995.
- Although such HIV testing data only partly reflect trends in new infections, they nonetheless suggest increasing infections among IDUs. This is supported by the reconstruction of historical HIV infections in Canada up to 1989 (see Fig 2. below).

Fig.1 Annual AIDS reports (IDU)

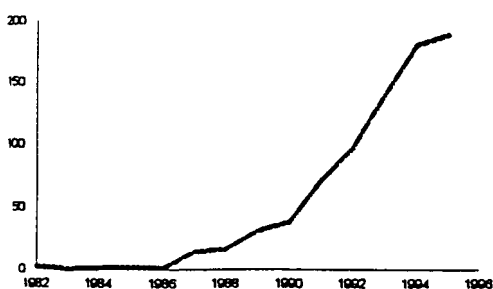


Fig. 2 Annual HIV infections

