



InfoLine
1-800-665-2437

WebSite
www.avi.org

email
info@avi.org

The Update

April 2004

Dear Friend of AIDS Vancouver Island,

We hope the spring is giving you hope and energy. The staff at AVI are excited about some changes and opportunities currently underway.

AIDS Vancouver Island is now administering the North Island AIDS Society

Thanks to AVI, HIV/AIDS prevention, education and support services centered in Courtenay, Campbell River and Port Hardy, will continue without interruption when the current community-based service provider, the North Island AIDS Society (NIAS), wraps up operations in April 2004.

Miki Hansen, our Executive Director has worked closely with the Vancouver Island Health Authority and the Board of NIAS to ensure a smooth transition of administration and services to the North Island region. AVI will begin administering North Island HIV/AIDS programs in April.

Sex Pack Included

We have included a sex pack in this mailing. The packs are regularly distributed to many of the bars downtown, especially the gay bars, as well as at special events. Although they're not a solution to all of the issues facing us, they are one simple way to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. Please pass the pack on others as a way of talking about AVI with your friends, co-workers and family, (or use it). The enclosed pack is especially designed to promote the upcoming benefit performance of *Opera Erotique*...

Opera Erotique

AIDS Vancouver Island is pleased to co-host of a unique benefit performance, *Opera Erotique*, from May 6th through 16th at the Multicultural Centre. Tickets are on sale at the McPherson Box Office 250-386-6121.

AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI) will benefit from 50% of the net proceeds.

Opera Erotique explores the "erotic" women of opera and their tragic fates. "It's a novel style called lounge opera that is at once intimate and physically



Canadian AIDS Society



United Way
OF GREATER VICTORIA

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free," said Victoria-based artistic director Gwen Dobie. "Opera Erotique will present repertoire from the world's hottest operas," she said. Dobie and William Mackwood, co-artistic directors of Victoria's newest Out of the Box Productions combine opera, dance and visual arts to "weave amazing tales that will leave you breathless," Mackwood said.

Dobie and Mackwood have gathered an all-star team for the Victoria premiere:

- ❖ Musical direction - internationally acclaimed Nancy Argenta and Ingrid Attrot;
- ❖ Cast - soprano Panthea, mezzo Melissa Schiel and baritone Matthew Leigh;
- ❖ Creative support - award-winning international dancer Jung-ah Chung
 - Victoria-based artist Miles Lowry.

AVI will make HIV/AIDS and sexual health information available at each performance and promote the recent launch of our new interactive website, www.avi.org. Our web site focuses on grassroots community-based interactivity and provides users with up-to-date facts about HIV/AIDS, sexual health, a calendar of events, on-line forums, user polls, a chat room and the ability to donate on-line.

This is a rare opportunity to see affordable and creative opera that benefits AIDS Vancouver Island. The **AVI Members Night is Tuesday, May 11th**, which is also the *Pay What You Can Night*. If you need a financial break and still want to see opera, this is the night for you. The **GLBTQ and Friends Night is Sunday, May 9th**.

For more information: www.outoftheboxproductions.ca. McPherson Box Office 386-6121. If you need the elevator, call Rebecca Mulvihill at 213-1826 cell.

Safe Injection Site: Public Forum

I hope you, and others who are interested in Harm Reduction, will come to an AVI co-sponsored Public Forum at City Hall on **April 28th** at 7:00 p.m. There will be representatives there from Vancouver's Safe Injection Site, Vancouver Police, Vancouver Business Community, and the Vancouver Chinese Community. Moderators will be AIDS Vancouver Island's Executive Director, Miki Hansen and the Vancouver Island Health Authority's Chief Medical Health Officer, Richard Stanwick. AVI is co-sponsoring the forum along with the City of Victoria and the Vancouver Island Health Authority.

Men's Wellness Program

The next Men's Forum will be on June 5, from 7 – 9 pm at the James Bay Community Centre, 140 Oswego St. Free admission. This event is open to gay and bi men. The forum will focus on the issue of stigma and discrimination. The Forum is called "*Deep Down Inside*" and focuses on relationships and our views of people different than us.

The forum started out with skits and rapidly developed into a one-act play. *Michael Yoder*, Executive Director of VARCS is the playwright. The play has five local guys acting, some for the first time, and a professional director is volunteering. We are working with a local filmmaker to record the event. We are calling our group of thespians "*Gay Boys Acting Out*".

The second portion of the forum will be a dating game where people will be paired up and be asked to plan the perfect date. This exercise has two people learning a little about each other, perhaps someone they would not have talked to before.

This effort is part of a larger campaign underway in partnership with Victoria AIDS Resource and Community Service Society (VARCS) and Victoria Persons With AIDS Society (VPWAS). The campaign includes "Gay Boys Buy Bulk" and will extend well into the *National Gay Men's Assumptions campaign*, (speaks to gay HIV- and HIV+ men about our assumptions.) Each is an effort to encourage Negative and Positive men to talk by removing some of the barriers. For Information on any program for gay or bisexual men contact Rick, one of the gay guys at AVI. Email rick.barnes@avi.org.

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

SYPHILIS IN BC ~ Get tested!

The Facts: There has been a dramatic increase in the number of infectious syphilis cases in BC. 272 cases occurred in 2003 (46% increase over 2002). 72 of the cases were men who have sex with men (MSM) and Gay men. (In 1999 only 15 people tested positive in BC.)

The increase in infectious syphilis occurring in BC is similar to a trend of increasing rates being seen over many parts of Canada, the United States and Europe.

If you have syphilis you are increasing your vulnerability to contracting HIV. You can contract syphilis and not know it. Some times you will see a small purple chancre sore. Check out AIDS Vancouver Island's Website (<http://www.avi.org/men/node/view/318>) for more info.

If you are sexually active, or have had sex with someone who is sexually active, get tested for Syphilis. You can do this through your doctor or by contacting Vancouver Island Health Authority (in Victoria 388-2200) for testing information. You can also call the AIDS Infoline at AIDS Vancouver Island at 384-2366, or 1-800-665-2437

Action for Funding Dollars Needed

We are asking everyone to write letters/emails and/or make phone calls to let Ottawa know that they need to increase funding for the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS. The following is a News Release from the Canadian AIDS Society.

Canadian AIDS Society

MEDIA RELEASE

An Increase in Funding to the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS is Needed Now

(Ottawa, April 8, 2004) – The Canadian AIDS Society (CAS) supports representatives from HIV/AIDS organizations in Québec and Réal Ménard, Member of Parliament for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve in their call today for Health Minister Pierre Pettigrew to increase the federal funding allocation for the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS (CSHA) to \$100 million.

Members of the community-based AIDS movement were surprised not to see an increase in last month's federal budget. Funding for the CSHA has remained at \$42.2 million since 1993. According to Gail Flintoft, Chair of the Board of Directors of CAS, all signs suggested that an increase was forthcoming. "Last June, the former Minister of Health, Anne McLellan, made the commitment that she would be going to Cabinet for an increase in funding. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health, also in June, recommended the funding

allocation be increased to \$100 million and Minister Pettigrew stated in the House of Commons that HIV/AIDS was a priority for this government. If HIV/AIDS was a priority for this government, I would ask the Minister why he hasn't gone to Cabinet to request an increase and why was an increase not included in last month's budget," said Flintoft.

Recent statistics indicate that approximately 55,000 Canadians are living with HIV/AIDS. Of that number, 17,000 Canadians are unaware of their HIV infection. Last year alone, there were 5000 new infections in Canada. Canada is falling behind the epidemic and every new infection places extra costs on the health system. "An increase in funding would result in long-term cost savings. Each prevented case of HIV would save approximately 180,000. If the current rate of infection at 5,000 cases per year was even reduced to 1,700 cases per year, \$4 billion would be saved in the next five years," said Flintoft.

It is expected that the responsibility for the CSHA will shift from Health Canada to the new Public Health Agency. Consequently, the community-based AIDS movement fears that the focus of the government over the coming year will be setting up the bureaucracy for the Agency and not on fighting HIV/AIDS. "Shifting HIV/AIDS to the new Agency is only going to cause further delays for a funding increase to the CSHA," said Flintoft.

Community-based AIDS organizations are facing multiple demands with a lack of resources. A renewed Strategy with a larger funding allocation will provide much needed assistance. "HIV/AIDS is preventable," said Flintoft. "Until there is proper funding in place, more and more Canadians will become infected. When will the government wake up and do the right thing and increase the funding allocation to the CSHA?"

The CAS is a coalition of 115 community-based AIDS organizations across Canada. The CAS mandate is to speak as a national voice and act as a forum for a community-based response to HIV infection, as well as to advocate for persons so affected.

Information contact: Mark Creighan, Canadian AIDS Society (613) 230-3580 ext. 122
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Please write to:

The Right Hon. Paul Edgar Philippe Martin, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister
E-Mail: pm@pm.gc.ca

Copies to: **The Honourable Pierre S. Pettigrew, Minister of Health,**
E-Mail: minister@www.hc-sc.gc.ca

And a copy to: **The Honourable David Anderson, P.C., M.P., Minister of the Environment**
E-Mail: Anderson.D@parl.gc.ca

Postal address for all: Parliament Hill, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6
*You can write Ottawa for free any time of the year (for regular sized envelope).

We want to develop closer relationships with our supporters and members through our new web site and regular update mailings. If you would like to be added to AVI's email list, send a note to: kealey.pringle@avi.org.

On behalf of the clients, staff and Board of Directors,

Thank you for your continued support.