

For Immediate Release – 18 May 2009

HepCBC and AIDS Vancouver Island Host Community Event to Bring Attention to Hepatitis

Victoria – HepCBC and AIDS Vancouver Island have partnered to host a World Hepatitis Day event at the legislature building on **May 19**, from 12 to 2pm, to increase awareness of the shocking statistic that one in 12 people on the planet are living with hepatitis B or hepatitis C and yet the majority of those infected are unaware.

"It is important to have a day such as World Hepatitis Day because there is a lack of awareness in the public as well as a lack of awareness in the governmental authority despite the high numbers of people affected by hepatitis and the severe consequences that may occur in these people including liver cancer and other progressive liver diseases," said Dr. John Farley, Internal Medicine specialist from Vancouver, BC, and outspoken advocate for the hepatitis C community.

Dr. Farley is one of three guests scheduled to speak at the May 19 event. The other speakers include City of Victoria Councillor Philippe Lucas who will be present the City of Victoria's "May is Hepatitis Month" proclamation, and award-winning hepatology nurse and advocate Fran Falconer.

"Approximately 500 million people in the world have either hepatitis B or C and the majority of those infected do not know," said Jessica Chan, acting executive director for HepCBC. "While rates in Canada are not as high as global figures, British Columbia boasts hepatitis C rates that are twice as high as the national average."

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, rates of hepatitis C in British Columbia are twice that of the Canadian average with 66 new cases per 100,000 people in 2007, and rates on Southern and Central Vancouver Island are above this provincial number. The number of acute hepatitis B cases identified in BC has continued to decline keeping below the national rate since 2002.

In the spring of 2005, 250 people who inject drugs in Victoria volunteered to complete an anonymous questionnaire and blood test as part of the Public Health Agency of Canada's *I-TRACK Survey*.¹ Findings from the survey included the fact that 7 in 10 respondents tested positive for hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is transmitted by blood-to-blood contact and can be transmitted through the sharing of injection equipment or straws, unsterilized piercing or tattoo equipment, and, is transmitted, although rarely, through the sharing of anything that might have blood on it (ex. razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes), or through unprotected sex with someone who has hepatitis C. People who received blood transfusions prior to 1986 should also be at-risk. Hepatitis B can be transmitted through direct blood-to-blood contact unprotected sex, unsterile needles or from an infected woman to her newborn during birth.

HepCBC is a non-profit organization run by and for people infected and affected by hepatitis C. AIDS Vancouver Island provides community health services focused on the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

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For more information, contact Jessica Chan at HepCBC at (250) 595-3892 (office) or (250) 516 5532 (cel).



Event agenda:

12:05 - 12:10: Opening remarks and moment of silence

12:10 - 12:20: Victoria City Councilor Philippe Lucas.

* Photo opportunity: At 12:20pm, Councilor Lucas will present the City of Victoria's "May is Hepatitis Month" proclamation.

12:30 - 12:45: Dr. John Farley will present his petition to change treatment criteria for those with hepatitis C.

* Photo opportunity: At approximately 12:35pm Dr. Farley will present the petition.

12:55 - 1:05: Fran Falconer, hepatology nurse

1:10 - 1:15: Wrap-up/Closing remarks

1:15 - 2:00: Interview opportunities with Councilor Lucas, Dr. Farley, Fran Falconer, and a community member living with hepatitis C.

Speaker Bios:

Philippe Lucas: Philippe is an elected city council member and the Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Compassion Society. He has also worked with a countless number of organizations including HepCBC and Harm Reduction Victoria.

Dr. John Farley: Dr. Farley is an Internal Medicine specialist from Vancouver, BC. He is an outspoken advocate for the hepatitis C community and has been featured in many articles for several newspapers and media outlets, including CBC.

Fran Falconer: Fran is a hepatology nurse advocate who has won several awards for her services. Her most recent award was the Clinical Practice Award for her excellence in hepatology care.