

AIDS drug plan unveiled

By ANTONELLA ARTUSO
Queen's Park Bureau

A public drug plan for the seriously ill — including AIDS sufferers — will be launched next year, Premier Bob Rae announced yesterday.

This new catastrophic-drug plan will cover anyone not in a private

insurance or existing public drug plan — an estimated 20% of the province's population.

"We're looking at a program that's needed for tens of thousands of people," Rae said.

The provincial government already spends about \$1 billion on drugs for people such as seniors and welfare recipients.

But Rae said the special drug plan must be expanded to include all people suffering from catastrophic diseases whose drug costs aren't covered elsewhere.

"We will not allow (drug) costs to go above a certain portion of income," he said.

The program would begin April 1, be geared to income and include

a deductible.

"We simply can't afford to do a complete freebie," Rae said. He said the plan could be funded within existing budgets but couldn't say how much it would cost.

Glen Brown of AIDS Action Now said he believes the program will help more than half of the province's 13,000 HIV population.



BOB RAE
Program to begin April 1

Activists herald drug fund scheme

Groups cancel demo

By MICHAEL CLEMENT
Toronto Sun

Members of Metro's AIDS community really have something to celebrate today. Big time.

Not only is it World AIDS Day, when attention is focused on the killer disease, but it's also the day the provincial government begins living up to its promise to fund the drugs for people with catastrophic illness, including AIDS.

A noontime demonstration by hundreds of Metro AIDS activists isn't expected to go ahead as a result of the government action.

Carol Yaworski of the AIDS Committee of Toronto said the only demo would be one of celebration.

AIDS activists have long complained many people have been forced to quit their jobs and go on welfare to obtain the costly medicines they needed.

Costly drugs

AIDS patients often require numerous drugs costing hundreds of dollars each.

Yaworski said Metro AIDS activists, especially members of AIDS Action Now! "are to be congratulated for their efforts."

Yaworski said World AIDS Day "focuses people across this country and hopefully across the world that this is a serious issue and it's directly impacting on the lives of Canadians," our kids, brothers and sisters, she said.

Other activities set for today include an exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario and CANFAR's World AIDS Day gala at Toronto's Design Exchange.

The Red Ribbon Campaign ends today. Money collected around Metro goes to the Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research (CANFAR).

It's used directly to fund research by the Canadian scientific community.

Sun Dec 1 '94

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Rae & Co's kids' stuff

Yesterday was bring-your-kid-to-work day and here at Queen's Park politicians jumped in with both feet.

Premier Bob Rae brought with him not just his daughter, Lisa, but someone else's child, Abosede Taiwo, and they all posed nicely for the cameras at a pre-arranged photo-op before question period.

Not to be outdone, Liberal leader Lyn McLeod had her own student, Rishie Binda, a 14-year-old Grade 9 youngster, tagging along.

As he left the House after question period, Rae invited his two young followers to join him for the media "scrum" that happens

each afternoon as he leaves the Legislature.

"Come and see what a scrum is like," he invited. "You'll see how awful it is."

So, if you were a student taking in a day at worker's paradise central, what would you have learned yesterday?

Lesson No. 1: Given an extremely worthwhile educational program organized by the Learning Partnership, you can be assured that politicians will turn it into a shameless publicity stunt.

Lesson No. 2: No matter how tough legislation gets, there's always someone who wants it toughened. This was to be learned at a press conference at which a number of anti-smoking groups pushed for even tougher legislation.

Now I'm all in favor of legislation stopping the sale of tobacco to young people. I'm in favor of limiting where and when and with whom you may smoke. I even tend to agree with the philosophy that says pharmacies should be purveyors of healthy stuff and not an evil weed that makes you sick and causes 13,000 deaths in Ontario annually. By the same philosophy, however, you do wonder just when the government is going to stop pharmacies from selling sodium-laden potato chips that may lead to heart attacks and strokes and sugar-loaded candies that can be deadly for diabetics.

Lesson No. 3: Pay your political debts. We learned this lesson from the

premier, who despite believing scrums are "awful," nevertheless called one to announce his government would be paying catastrophic medicine bills for people who don't have insurance to cover drug bills.

Don't get me wrong. I believe there should be some mechanism that kicks in to help those who are chronically ill and who face financial hardship just paying bills for their medication.

But the timing and the reasons given for doing this are interesting. While media had no inkling before the scrum what the announcement would be, an activist from AIDS

Action Now was on hand with prepared press releases at the premier's scrum, so it was fairly clear which lobby group this measure was aimed to appease.

Secondly, we're told that since the economy is picking up, we can now afford to pay these costs. Well, hey, things may be starting to look a little rosier, but the province still has a \$60-billion-plus in accumulated debt. The government has had four years to do this and now, just in time for an election, the cabinet decides it's a good idea. Are the NDP now going to open the coffers on a wing and a prayer of economic recovery in order to ensure re-election?

Lesson No. 4: Do your math. And your homework. Finance Minister Floyd Laughton gave us all the good news about economic recovery in Ontario.

But, as McLeod pointed out, it's not quite a bowl of cherries yet. Ontario still has 100,000 fewer people working than in 1989.

Lesson No. 5: In Grade 9, if you bang on your desk and make catcalls and interrupt constantly while other people are speaking, you will probably get sent to the principal's office. In the Legislature, it's the way they do business.

And that, folks, is the toughest lesson of all.

Christina Blizzard's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.



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