

AIDS ACTION NOW!

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September 28, 1990

Bob Rae
Premier-Elect
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario

BY FAX

Dear Premier-Elect Rae:

On behalf of the AIDS activist group AIDS ACTION NOW!, I want to congratulate you on your recent election victory.

We look forward to working with you and your government in confronting an urgent task: providing the best possible treatment, care and support to every person fighting to manage his or her HIV infection.

The task is large and long overdue, and will require a new sense of urgency and co-operation from the provincial government. I've enclosed a copy of our provincial election brief, which outlines many of the steps that will be necessary.

We will be seeking meetings with the appropriate members of your new cabinet (Health, Community & Social Services, Housing, and Correctional Services) in the coming days to discuss these steps. We are also eager to meet with you to discuss the development of a comprehensive provincial strategy on HIV and AIDS.

There are three crucial issues we wish to bring to your attention today so that you and your new cabinet can address them immediately:

1: AIDS/HIV Drug Funding

A clear and comprehensive funding policy for drugs and therapies is critical to ensure equal access to health care regardless of income or connections. Last week, fluconazole - a treatment for HIV-related meningitis - was licensed, and thus came off the free trial system and into the open market. It is too costly for many to afford. It will not make it through the approval process to be covered under the Drug Benefits Program for weeks. Many other drugs currently on trial will soon reach the same stage, including the most widely used anti-HIV drug, AZT.

A funding policy which covers approved HIV drugs and expands access to alternative and experimental therapies must be implemented without delay.

2: Social Assistance Levels

We are encouraged by your party's commitment to tackle poverty. For people living with HIV, poverty can be fatal. Access to adequate housing, nutrition, and therapies is both a right and a vital necessity for PLWHIVs, and must be provided before poverty claims any further casualties.

Officials administering Family Benefits and General Welfare assistance should be instructed to provide emergency additional funds to people living with HIV as an interim measure pending improvements in all social assistance levels.


3: Chief Medical Officer of Health

The new Minister of Health will need to have on staff professionals who are dedicated to working with community-based groups and who have the respect of AIDS experts, front-line workers and people living with AIDS. The current Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Richard Schabas, fits none of those descriptions. He has opposed anonymous HIV testing, publicly cast doubt on safer-sex education, terrorized people with AIDS with threats of quarantine, and helped spread public panic about people with AIDS. His actions have kept thousands of people away from public health care, thereby preventing early treatment and contributing to the spread of HIV.

A new Chief Medical Officer of Health, dedicated to working with community based organizations to prevent the spread of HIV, should be appointed.

In closing, I should note that we are very hopeful about working with your government to fight AIDS. We have had supportive reactions from many of your caucus colleagues, and we were encouraged by your own election commitments to increase AIDS research, ensure access to drugs and appoint people living with HIV to the Ontario AIDS Advisory Committee.

Yours Sincerely,



Glen Brown
Co-Chair
AIDS ACTION NOW!

cc:Ontario AIDS Network Member Organizations
Canadian AIDS Society