

LACK OF CLEAR GOVERNMENT POLICY

Québec has set up no general policy on AIDS and HIV infection dealing with education, prevention, anti-discrimination and health care and all of these areas are suffering as a result. This is despite clear guidelines set at the federal level by the National Action Committee on AIDS and the Royal Society, as well as models provided by other provinces. At the same time, Quebec has one of the highest rates of AIDS in the country with 25 new cases reported every month. The ministries of Health, Education and Justice all share this responsibility.

- No anti-discrimination policy protecting HIV infected people exists, at the provincial level, meanwhile the municipal government in Montréal has established one. This means that the rights of workers with HIV infection are not protected provincially and no provisions are made against mandatory testing in the workplace, guarantees of adequate care and access to information about HIV infection.

- This has already resulted in gross violations of rights. Inmates in provincial prisons are routinely placed in isolation if it is discovered that they are HIV positive - regardless of their health status or needs and the fact that day-to-day contact in prisons poses no risk of infection to other inmates or prison staff. Neither adequate education or resources (condoms, clean needles) are provided within prisons.

- No education policy has as yet been provided by the provincial government.

A campaign was set up in 1987 at a cost of \$60 000 promoting the use of condoms and safe sex practices. It was scrapped because "communications experts said the campaign was not the best way to get the message across." But is silence any better?

A media campaign was launched in the winter of 88-89 to promote STD awareness. The campaign failed to mention either AIDS or condoms.

In February of this year, \$550 000 was spent on pamphlets explaining AIDS that were delivered door-to-door. They were simply translations of outdated pamphlets produced a year ago by the U.S. federal government.

No school education policy exists in Québec, even though every other province already has one.

The government has promised to provide \$3.4 million/per year over the next three years. In a letter written March 27 of this year, a coalition of interested groups and individuals working within and around the health care system believe that three times that amount is necessary given the current situation.

Lack of funding is also an issue in the area of health care and resources. In December, the Québec government promised \$21 million towards this area (well after similar measures had been taken in other provinces.) This money still sits on paper and in limbo as need for adequate health care grows larger daily. No real body exists to allocate these funds where they are most needed, and care suffers.

Within hospitals, no staff and resources have been added to deal with the special needs of people living with AIDS (PWAs). Thus hospital resources are over-extended. Extra needs, care and counselling are taken on by regular staff in addition to their duties - given that the province's nurses are already overworked, both their quality of work and the quality of care for PWAs suffers.

Training provided for staff around AIDS and AIDS care is sporadic, so not all staff deals humanely with PWAs. Some still insist on wearing gloves and gowns when providing medication, dehumanizing the PWA and delaying care.