

NOTES FOR PRESS CONFERENCE**March 7, 1994****The Needs Assessment**

In order to help plan effective strategy for HIV/AIDS in the province, the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV and AIDS commissioned a comprehensive needs assessment. The assessment has just been published and it confirms what we and other people living with HIV/AIDS have been telling the government for years.

- The needs assessment conducted interviews with PLWA/HIVs across the province. The most consistent theme it found was "the inadequacy of current drug benefit programs." (p. 16)

We quote:

Many people living with HIV/AIDS said that the cost of medications was so high that they had been forced to quit their jobs or go off disability insurance in order to qualify for drug coverage. Many expressed frustration because they were able and willing to work, and felt that having nothing to do increased their level of stress significantly. Many also felt that improved drug coverage would decrease the financial drain on the province by greatly reducing the number of people living with HIV/AIDS receiving social assistance. (p. 16)

The needs assessment identified priority areas for urgent action. The first was:

Ensuring that medications and therapies which help promote health and wellness for people living with HIV and AIDS are affordable and accessible. This includes the development of a comprehensive catastrophic drug plan and a system by which people living with HIV and AIDS do not have to quit jobs and be forced into the social service system in order to obtain coverage for drug treatments. (p. 44)

Finally, the needs assessment concluded:

The people who participated in the current needs assessment have made it clear that it is now time for action, not more study...It is time for the government of Ontario to take responsibility for moving ahead. (p. 47)