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WORLD AIDS DAY 2008 VANCOUVER – A Humanitarian Crisis on Our Streets
Lack of Sufficient HIV/AIDS Care One of Key Challenges to Solving Homelessness

(Vancouver) – Dealing with the seemingly intractable problems of homelessness and drug addiction in Vancouver will not be possible without further action to provide HIV/AIDS treatment and care to the poorest people in the city says Maxine Davis, Executive Director, Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation.

“If you think neglect of people living with HIV/AIDS is happening only in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia, think again,” says Davis on the eve of World AIDS Day. “It’s estimated there are 2000 individuals, mostly in the Downtown Eastside, who should be on Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) and are not – they are very ill, lack access to proper care, and are dying prematurely as a result. The situation on our streets is unconscionable.”

“While British Columbia is a world leader in HIV/AIDS treatment, the care is not available to many who most need it,” continues Davis. “The most marginalized on the street are severely undernourished and have multiple physical illnesses. They need 24 hour nursing care for a number of months in order to reap the full benefits of life extending HAART treatment.”

With only 24 suites, the Dr. Peter Centre Residence is the only HIV/AIDS 24 hour care residence in the province. It has been particularly successful in caring for individuals living on the street with added issues of mental illness and addiction.

A key role of the Dr. Peter Residence is bringing people into care for a number of months to re-nourish them, take care of unaddressed physical health problems, and start HAART treatment. Dr. Peter Residence admissions are currently at a standstill because residents ready to leave have no suitable place to go. Most need supportive housing and there is none available.

Those on the waiting list for admission to the Residence are spending months in an expensive hospital bed or are a community emergency. However, the greatest neglect is people living on the streets, or in substandard living condition, who don’t get on the Residence wait list at all. In a city of plenty, the life extending HAART treatment will be out of reach for them unless someone reaches out and brings them into 24 hour care for a period of time.

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The Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation proposes to build another 24-suite Residence in the area most profoundly affected, the Downtown Eastside. It is a joint venture partnership called TRIO Aboriginal Health and Housing Society (TRIO). Aboriginal people make up 30% of the homeless in the Downtown Eastside and are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS. The second partner, Vancouver Native Housing Society, would operate a 30-suite supportive housing project; the third partner, Vancouver Native Health Society, would finally have a modern medical clinic to replace its aged and inadequate location where it serves approximately 1500 HIV/AIDS patients.

States Doreen Littlejohn, RN, Vancouver Native Health's Positive Outlook Program Nurse Coordinator, "Aboriginal people are living and dying without the dignity of access to adequate care. Is this the Vancouver, the British Columbia we want to be? The way we want the world to remember us?"

"Our hope for World AIDS Day 2008 is that all three levels of government and all political stripes will see to it that the remaining funding needed for the TRIO project is approved. It would be a travesty if the current economic crisis perpetuates the human suffering caused by lack of access to 24 hour nursing care for people living with HIV/AIDS in our city," concludes Davis.