



COMMUNICATING ABOUT HIV/AIDS  
WITHIN BC'S ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

**THE RED ROAD HIV/AIDS NETWORK**

Developed by:

The Red Road HIV/AIDS Network  
Suite 804-100 Park Royal South  
West Vancouver, BC, V7T 1A2

Tel: 604.913.3332

Fax: 604.913.3352

Toll Free: 1.866.913.3332

Email: [info@red-road.org](mailto:info@red-road.org)

Website: [www.red-road.org](http://www.red-road.org)

Funding assistance for this project gratefully received from:

Aboriginal Health Division  
Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 1520 Blanchard Street,  
Victoria, BC, V8W 3C8

Tel: 250.952.3151

Fax: 250.952.3225

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

HIV/AIDS IS A REALITY THAT NEEDS TO BE TALKED ABOUT	4
BARRIERS TO UNDERSTAND	5
HIV/AIDS IS EVERYBODY'S ISSUE	7
GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT	11
WORKING WITH THE MEDIA	15
TOOLS OF THE TRADE	24
HANDLING THE TOUGH ISSUES	27
GLOSSARY & SAMPLE MATERIALS	30

## **HIV/AIDS IS A REALITY THAT NEEDS TO BE TALKED ABOUT**

The statistics are pretty scary. In British Columbia, 16% of newly diagnosed HIV infections in recent years have been with Aboriginal people.

When you consider that Aboriginal people make up only 4 to 5% of the province's total population, this rate of infection is of great concern. In fact, if this trend is not reversed, HIV/AIDS could well become an epidemic within BC Aboriginal communities on and off reserve.

One of the real problems is that HIV/AIDS is not something most people want to talk about. All too often it is thought of as somebody else's problem, not something that will happen to our families, our communities or us. But, a closer look at the stories behind the numbers tells us that the problem is one that all Aboriginal people must be concerned about.

Fifty percent of all newly diagnosed HIV infections between 1995 and 1997 were with people aged 30 to 39. This is a very troublesome trend because it means this disease is threatening the future of all Aboriginal communities across the province.

Overall, 60% of all newly diagnosed Aboriginal HIV infections identified injection drug use (IDU) as their primary risk factor. Aboriginal women also identified involvement in the sex trade as a frequent risk factor.

Women make up 40% of all new infections in the Aboriginal community as compared to only 17% of total non-Aboriginal cases. Given the higher birth rates 3 to 6 times among Aboriginal women compared to the general population, this means that HIV/AIDS is touching the lives of many families in BC Aboriginal Communities through the spread of the virus to the fetus during pregnancy. This direct transmission means that the most vulnerable members of the community, the children could face an entire lifetime of living with HIV/AIDS.

This booklet aims to provide community-based educators, care givers and leaders in Aboriginal communities across the province with practical information on how to increase awareness on HIV/AIDS. It provides some tools and advice that will assist in your prevention efforts. This guide complements other resources available on the subject of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS in BC including the BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force.

The BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force identified community-based communications as a key need. In their strategy, *The Red Road: Pathways To Wholeness*, the BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force highlighted the need to create open communication on HIV/AIDS as a part of an overall plan to increase prevention efforts.

The Red Road HIV/AIDS Network is carrying on the work recommended by the Task Force. Of great importance are efforts to open discussion on the issues and raised awareness of the threat HIV/AIDS holds for Aboriginal people.

HIV/AIDS holds a unique threat to BC's Aboriginal people. A number of barriers have prevented effective communications and access to proper care.

### **BARRIERS TO UNDERSTANDING**

HIV/AIDS is a subject that tends to make many people uncomfortable - after all, it is about two things that are not easy to talk about - sex and illness.

In the general population HIV/AIDS is most commonly associated with homosexuality, another subject that is taboo for many people. Of course, the reality is that HIV/AIDS touches many peoples' lives – men, women, young people and even children are now living with HIV/AIDS.

For some people there is a fear that if they seem interested in HIV/AIDS issues that people will assume that they are infected and must be homosexual. That fear is a real barrier, it gets in the way of people seeking out the information they need for themselves and their families. Again, the reality is that many people are interested and involved in the creating an open dialogue on the subject regardless of their HIV/AIDS status. It's increasingly clear that not talking about it won't make it go away.

Because a high percentage of newly diagnosed Aboriginal HIV infections are within injection drug users and sex trade workers, it could seem easy to dismiss the problem as something that affects only a few people who are outside of a general community. Sex trade workers and injection drug users face special challenges when seeking information and treatment from health care system. Their access to treatment is reduced and in some instances refused. Also, it is often difficult for people in these circumstances to maintain good nutrition, healthy physical surroundings and take medications on a regular schedule.

It may also seem easy to think of sex trade workers and drug users as people the average family and community doesn't have to worry about – these are not people that will touch our lives. But it isn't that simple. The fact is high birth rates and transmission through sexual contact brings the risk of HIV transmission into many Aboriginal communities.

In order to stop the rise of infection rates within these vulnerable groups, prevention efforts must be improved. And that means meeting the challenges of reaching people no matter where they live or what their lifestyles.

For some time, HIV/AIDS was thought of as a problem outside the Aboriginal community. Other diseases like diabetes and alcoholism have been seen as greater concern to Aboriginal leaders. And while these and other diseases need to be taken seriously, attention to them can't get in the way of dealing with HIV/AIDS. The disease is a serious problem within BC's Aboriginal communities. It threatens the future of all Aboriginal people and can't be overlooked.

A key solution to long-term containment of infection rates effective treatment is bringing discussion out in the open. The active involvement of the entire BC Aboriginal community is needed to address HIV/AIDS.

Aboriginal people face a challenge when dealing with the traditional health care system. Lower literacy rates, language barriers and the lack of culturally sensitive services mean many Aboriginal people do not seek out health care and prevention. This increases the risk of infection and complications in managing HIV/AIDS.

Overcoming these barriers is essential. The problem has and continues to grow at too great a rate to be ignored. Aboriginal leaders need to make education and prevention a priority. Community based health care workers need to recognize that HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and support needs to be a priority. It is important that a spirit of openness be created in which Aboriginal people needing diagnosis and treatment are encouraged to step forward and seek the help they need.

Public education and communication has a big role to play in stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS. Making the most of every opportunity to take the prevention message public is an important part of this education process.

For more detailed information on HIV/AIDS and BC Aboriginal people, the Red Road HIV/AIDS Network is an excellent resource. Copies of *The Red Road: Pathways to Wholeness* can be obtained from them. This provides a detailed look at Aboriginal HIV/AIDS in the province.

## **HIV/AIDS IS EVERYBODY'S ISSUE**

Improving prevention and education efforts on HIV/AIDS within BC's Aboriginal community will take the support and assistance of many groups and individuals.

Talking openly about HIV/AIDS and getting interested in the issue can help bring about needed changes in government policy. Governments at all levels respond to public pressure and media coverage. Raising the general awareness on the impact HIV/AIDS is having on BC's Aboriginal people is an important step on the path to overcoming the disease.

As you begin to look at ways to increase the profile on this very important issue, consider ways in which the following groups of people can be helpful.

### **ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS**

- ❑ Aboriginal people living with HIV/AIDS are potentially an excellent source of information for the public and the media. They understand the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS and know first-hand what services are in place to assist people.
- ❑ It is important to remember that not all people living with HIV/AIDS will want to talk publicly about their situation. People must feel comfortable in doing media interviews or making public appearances and shouldn't ever be pressured to do these activities.
- ❑ A person's HIV/AIDS status should not be revealed without their permission. This means that no one should talk about another person's situation amongst community members or publicly without their permission.
- ❑ People living with HIV/AIDS can send a powerful message about the importance for prevention and what's needed to live a healthy life if you have been infected with the virus. They can also help reduce the fear that sometimes surrounds the disease and help correct misinformation that all too often gets circulated.

### **ABORIGINAL ELDERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS**

- ❑ Leadership on this issue is needed at all levels within. Aboriginal communities, but no more so than with elders and leaders. They can play an important role within their communities in bringing focus to the issue and confirming that it is important.
- ❑ Elders and leaders need to be asked for their assistance in making HIV/AIDS an issue that can be talked about within Aboriginal communities. They can also be very important in speaking out on the issue and in working to reduce barriers to information and care.

- ❑ Elders and leaders have a role to play in sending a message of acceptance and the willingness to help people living with HIV/AIDS. This message will help create much needed understanding and commitment to providing the care that is needed to face this challenge.
- ❑ Elders and community leaders need information on how HIV/AIDS is affecting Aboriginal people and what resources are available to help with prevention and treatment. In many cases this information is easily obtained from Aboriginal people who are specialists in HIV/AIDS. Also, community health workers can provide community leaders with needed information.
- ❑ Because there is a lot of misinformation about HIV/AIDS it is important that Aboriginal leaders know the facts and help play a role in supporting people in their communities who are living with HIV/AIDS. Reducing the fear and confusion about the issue is the starting point for helping communities deal openly with HIV/AIDS.

### **ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ACROSS THE PROVINCE**

- ❑ Knowledge is the key to prevention of HIV and the treatment of AIDS within BC's Aboriginal community.
- ❑ It is clear that too many Aboriginal people know too little about HIV/AIDS and how it might affect them and their families. Many Aboriginal people are fearful of discussing HIV/AIDS or feel a general sense of discomfort in talking about the subject. While this unease and fear is shared by many people in the non-Aboriginal population, it is a major barrier that needs to be taken down, step by step.
- ❑ Knowledgeable people in the community must be asked to make the commitment to help spread needed information and the facts about HIV/AIDS.
- ❑ It is important to stop the spread of fear and misunderstanding in individual Aboriginal communities. The spread of inaccurate information and a sense of fear can lead to people living with HIV/AIDS feeling isolated and unwelcome in their communities. This is a barrier to understanding and constructive dialogue that only hurts all Aboriginal communities.
- ❑ Getting information on HIV/AIDS prevention techniques and where to go for testing is the essential first step in stopping its spread.
- ❑ HIV/AIDS needs to be talked about openly amongst BC's Aboriginal people. It is touching Aboriginal people of all ages and in all circumstances.
- ❑ The nearly 200 bands across the province have a stake in this issue and are important contributor to stopping the spread of the virus.



- ❑ The subject of HIV/AIDS needs to be integrated into topics that are discussed at various cultural and other events and other events and gatherings that Aboriginal people attend across the province. For example, a community meeting organized by a band council is a good place to communicate HIV/AIDS messages.
- ❑ This is not a problem that will go away. An open dialogue focused on finding solutions for the many Aboriginal people who face this challenge needs to take place at every available opportunity.

## **ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS**

- ❑ Community-based health workers have a special role to play in communicating important information about HIV/AIDS. Community health workers include nurses, alcohol and drug counsellors and social workers. More than anyone else, they deal with Aboriginal people on a one-to-one basis about their health concerns. They are often the first points of contact with people who are ill or who are in vulnerable health situations.
- ❑ Community health workers need accurate information about HIV/AIDS, how to prevent the spread of the disease and where to go for information and help in managing the disease.
- ❑ Community health workers can be effective advocates within local communities. They can break patterns of silence and help look after people's individual needs, including assessing personal risk.
- ❑ They can help reduce the fear some people have about HIV/AIDS and help communities deal with the issue in a productive and respectful way.
- ❑ Community health workers also have a role to play in protecting individual's rights to keep their HIV status private and confidential. Their role is to support people who have been infected.
- ❑ Finally, community health workers can be a contact for local media and other interested people on the real facts about HIV/AIDS within the Aboriginal community.

## **GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

- ❑ While healthcare is largely a provincial issue, all levels of government have a role to play in acknowledging the threat HIV/AIDS presents to the Aboriginal community and beyond.
- ❑ Continued support is needed from the federal and provincial governments to fund prevention, treatment and support programs.

- ❑ Also, the issue of the role Aboriginal communities should play in the delivery of health services for people with HIV/AIDS is not yet resolved. All people who have a stake or interest in this issue will want to remain involved in communicating the importance of this to government.
- ❑ It is important that elected and staff officials at all levels of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal government know how HIV/AIDS is impacting the Aboriginal community. Government officials need to include the HIV/AIDS issue within the healthcare transfer process. It is essential that they be reminded of the importance of this need.
- ❑ Local government leaders are also important because HIV/AIDS has a direct effect on their communities.
- ❑ Communicating with all governments is an important part of the public education and awareness efforts that are needed within BC.

## **MEDIA**

- ❑ In this information age, we all know the importance the media plays in shaping our understanding and awareness of issues.
- ❑ Media across the province can be an important avenue for communicating information on HIV/AIDS and how it affects the Aboriginal community.
- ❑ It is important that the media have and up-to-date information on the subject. Everyone associated with HIV/AIDS and BC's Aboriginal people have a role to play in getting the media involved in talking about the issue.
- ❑ It is also important that the media respect the privacy of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in terms of their willingness to go public on their situation.

This review shows that there are many distinct groups of people who can benefit from information about HIV/AIDS. From a communications perspective, these groups are called “target audience”.

In simple terms, target audiences are groups who have a direct and distinct information need on an issue. For instance, while all the groups listed above need information about HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal community, the type of information they need differs. For example, an Aboriginal person engaged in a high-risk behaviour such as intravenous drug use needs different information than a federal MP from Prince George.

This concept of target audiences is important to remember when planning any communications on the subject. In short, you need to remember who you are talking to and what their information needs are to reach them effectively. Successful communications is always based on reaching people with a message that is relevant to them.

## **GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT**

We're all familiar with the power of advertising. We see it used everyday to sell products and services and we know its impact. While advertising has a role to play in public education, it can only do part of the job. Advertising tends to carry very simple and short messages.

Some advertising has been done on the issue of HIV/AIDS and BC's Aboriginal people. Public service messages on radio and television talk about the importance of the issue and tell people where they can get more information. Television and radio stations carry these messages as part of their community service commitment. This means that they run at the discretion of the media outlet.

Advertising can be used to announce community meetings on HIV/AIDS prevention issues.

While advertising can't be counted on to do all the work in raising awareness of the issue, there are other things that can be useful in the public education process.

One of the primary purposes of this manual is to provide practical information on how to use public relations techniques to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS to BC's Aboriginal people.

While there are many definitions for public relations, basically it refers to all non-advertising methods used to communicate a message to defined target audiences.

A key focus of public relations (PR) includes **media relations**, which is the action an organization takes to get the media interested in their issue or story. To do this, media conferences are sometimes organized, media releases are sent out and one-on-one media interviews are arranged. The result is a story in the newspaper, on radio and/or television news.

There are a number of Aboriginal media in the province that reach the community on and off reserve. Aboriginal media has a special role to play in getting out the important facts on HIV/AIDS within the Aboriginal communities across BC.

Also, most bands and Aboriginal organizations have newsletters. Opportunities to have HIV/AIDS information carried in these publications should also be explored.

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD NEWS STORY

The media have an informal “checklist” that they use to decide whether to carry a news story. Understanding what the media sees as important in judging the newsworthiness of a story helps explain why some things get covered and others don’t.

Here’s the checklist use it next time you read a newspaper or listen to the TV or radio news and see if you can tell why a story made the news:

<b>TYPE OF EVENT</b>	<b>EXAMPLE</b>
Change: something different now Than it was yesterday.	Truck hits school buss causing major Injuries for the passengers on the bus.
Conflict: Differences of opinion Between groups or individuals	Aboriginal leaders seek more funding for HIV/AIDS public education, a representative for AIDS Vancouver says this money should go to more mainstream AIDS education.
“Firsts”: Events or situations that are new, have never happened before.	Announcement of first HIV/AIDS Vaccination now widely available at a very low price.
Local: It has been said that all news, Like all politics must have a local Perspective.	The Prince George paper’s interest in a new HIV/AIDS Aboriginal public Education program will be whether the program will be available in Prince George. If not, they probably won’t run the story.
Human Interest: The people behind The news	The person who has waited three months for surgery because of a hospital bed shortage tells the story of healthcare funding needs better than statistics.

Public relations also involves organizing **special events** to which key target audiences are invited to attend. This could take the form of a community meeting on a specific issue, seminars and workshops, trade show booths or any event that is organized to attract a defined group with interest in an area. Often these types of activities are called **community relations**. Special events in Aboriginal communities provide excellent opportunities to discuss HIV/AIDS.

Healing Our Spirit, BC First Nations AIDS Society, and the AIDS Vancouver office have a speaker's bank and can arrange for someone to come to a community to address various aspects of the HIV/AIDS issue. Arranging for a speaker provides a good opportunity to host a community meeting. Also, it would be a good idea to invite local media people to attend.

Public relations also includes **government relations** activities. In situations where any level of government can have influence over an issue, organizations often plan ways in which to communicate with targeted government members.

For many people the only time they think of their local MLA or MP is during an election. In Aboriginal communities, government issues may be most closely related to treaty negotiations. It is important to remember that local elected officials can be helpful in supporting all issues that matter to their constituents.

Letter writing campaigns, delegations, written position papers, receptions and phone campaigns are all used to reach elected officials and government staff people. The important thing is to be sure to let elected officials know that on this issue you need their support and commitment to stop the spread of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS.

Collectively, the various public relations activities highlighted here can be used to increase awareness about Aboriginal HIV/AIDS issues in British Columbia. Media announcements, information meetings and contact programs for government and elected officials all have a role to play in public education on the issue.

The information that follows is designed to help people concerned about the need for greater education on HIV/AIDS and Aboriginal people to get the message out to all key target audiences.

## **A GOOD STORY GOES BAD**

The following fictitious story highlights how easily a good news opportunity can turn into a bad-one:

Gerry, a community health worker on a reserve near Nelson, has agreed to do an interview with local newspaper. The topic is a general issue of rising rate of HIV infection in BC's Aboriginal community.

The reporter starts by asking Gerry just how high the rates of infection are compared with BC's non-Aboriginal community. She's not really sure but thinks she remembers seeing a number somewhere that said 30% higher, she says she thinks it is because of the transmission from mother to infant. The reporter is rather surprised about the information she has received, but walks away thinking she has a great story.

The next day the headline in the paper reads: "Whole Generation of BC's Aboriginal Children will be lost to AIDS". The story talks about the already 30% higher rate of infection and goes on to speculate that the mother to infant transmission means a near total rate of infection in Aboriginal community before too long.

Needless to say, the facts are all wrong and the story would cause a great deal of anxiety and fear for many Aboriginal people.

What went wrong? Gerry should never have used information she wasn't clear about. Always check the facts before doing any interview --- once you've said something it is on the record and can't be taken back. If in doubt, call any one of the Ministry of Health, Aboriginal Health Division or the Red Road HIV/AIDS Network for information or ask the reporter to check for statistics with them.

## WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

There's an old saying that applies to how many people feel about the media – “can't live with them and can't live without them.”

In some way we are all dependent on media for information about the world at large, our communities and issues that concern us. In this age where information is key we rely on the media for much of what we learn about current issues and events.

There is no doubt that the media can be very helpful in communicating the importance of prevention in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Equally, the media can influence people's opinion about the disease and can help to sort out fact from fiction on the issue. For example, the media often influence the language we use about an issue or situation. People living with HIV/AIDS don't like to be thought of as “victims” so it's important never to use this language in media situations.

For anyone involved in Aboriginal HIV/AIDS public education efforts, working effectively with the media can yield great results. To do so, understanding something about the media and how they work is the first step.

For as much mystique as the media holds for most people it needs to be remembered that media are simply facilitators and filters of the information we call news.

The challenge faced by all organizations wanting media coverage is framing their information in a way that fits one of these criteria. For example, the release of *'The Pathways to Wholeness, an Aboriginal Strategy for HIV/AIDS in BC'* in the spring of 1999 received a lot of media coverage for a number of reasons.

The release was considered newsworthy by media because it was the “first” strategy of its kind; it had information never released before, it clearly had a human interest angle and it was about a BC initiative to respond to a growing problem with Aboriginal people. It had many of the elements needed to interest the media in the story.

There are essentially three types of news:

**Hard or Breaking News** – “bus hits man” – these types of news stories are time sensitive and are generally related to a specific event.

**Feature Stories** – Often thought of as the “why” behind an event. In the case of Aboriginal people and HIV/AIDS, this could be a story about why the rates of infection are so high with women when compared to the non-Aboriginal community.

The media is also often interested in the personal stories of people with HIV/AIDS. For people who agree to share their stories with the media, they need to remember that they have no final say on how the story appears. They should not feel they have to tell reporters anything about their personal situation that they don’t want shared publicly.

**Editorials** – This is the opinion about the news and issues of the day. Typically, editorial coverage states an opinion. An example might be an editorial urging more funding for community based public education on HIV/AIDS.

When dealing with the media it is important to target your story to the correct kind of news coverage. In most cases, the opportunities will be greatest for feature news coverage – stories about the impact HIV/AIDS has on BC’s Aboriginal communities, what’s being done to improve prevention efforts, etc.

The media can also be helpful in publicizing a community meeting on an issue, especially if the event is not commercial. In the case of HIV/AIDS, this would not be a barrier. Public information sessions on the issue would qualify for media coverage as a public service. There’s more information on public service announcements later in this guide.

Remember that if you invite the media to a community event they are able to report on anything that happens in the meeting. People need to be comfortable with this before making presentations or sharing their experiences in such meetings.

Anyone speaking with the media has the right to as much privacy on their personal situation as they want. In practical terms this means not telling a reporter anything a person doesn’t want made public. In short, if you don’t want to see it in print, don’t tell it to the reporter.

The “Letters to the Editor” section of the paper is a good place for readers to correct misinformation that may have been in a publication or to respond to the position the paper may have been taken on an issue. For example if a newspaper article appeared with a clearly inaccurate fact, a letter to the Editor is a good way to call attention to the error and correct the facts.



Letters get published because they state a clear opinion, relate to current issues in the news and don't attack the newspaper. While it's fine to state your opinion about something, don't take a swipe at the newspaper in the process or use rude language or swearing to make your point.

## **A DAY IN A NEWSROOM**

In order to be successful in working with the media it is also important to understand how a newsroom operates and the needs of the average reporter. The following is a quick review of how a newsroom works and what that means to groups or individuals seeking media coverage of their issues.

- ❑ No matter whether you're in a radio or TV station or newspaper office, the basic functions of how news coverage is decided is the same.
- ❑ For most people's purposes, the most important person to deal with is the "Editor" and the "Beat Reporter".
- ❑ Editors come in many forms – news directors, assignment editors etc. but in many media outlet a senior editor will decide what assignments will be covered on any particular day and what the "line-up" of the day's news will be for the paper or news broadcast.
- ❑ When an organization is seeking news coverage it ultimately comes down to whether an editor decides the story is of interest to the media outlet.
- ❑ It is important to find out who the news or assignment editor is and to send that person the information you want them to cover.
- ❑ Beat reporters are those reporters who have an area or subject assigned to them to cover on an on-going basis. For instance daily newspaper reporters will be assigned to the technology, forestry and government "beats" or assignment areas.
- ❑ Radio and TV stations are less likely to assign beats than are major newspapers.
- ❑ When addressing information material to any media outlet it is important to determine if there is a beat reporter who covers health or Aboriginal issues. Information should always be sent to the beat reporter as well as the assignment editor or news director.

## **TIMING IS EVERYTHING**

Newsrooms are busy places and have key times during the day that can be a great or not so great time to contact an editor or reporter. Sometimes calling at the wrong time can mean the difference between getting your story covered or not. The following is a general guide to the important times during the daily schedule in every newsroom.

### **DAILY PAPERS**

- ❑ Assignments for the day are confirmed at some point in the morning. While editors may “book” events and stories in their calendars several days in advance the final decision on what news to cover comes on the actual day the paper is developed.
- ❑ If you have a specific event you want the media to attend you should send them information several days in advance, call them to confirm they received the material and follow-up the morning of your event.
- ❑ Once the editorial group at the paper has met and confirmed assignments for the day reporters and photographers are sent out to cover the stories as soon as possible.
- ❑ Reporters do their research and conduct interviews as early in the day as possible, allowing themselves as much time as possible to write and “file” their stories.
- ❑ Reporters store their stories on computers, the story is reviewed and edited and sent off, electronically, to be “pasted up” and the paper comes together.
- ❑ By no later than 8:00pm of every day the newspaper must be fully assembled and on the press to ensure it reaches peoples doors early the next morning. When the paper is complete and on the press it is called having “gone to bed”.
- ❑ The timelines in a daily newspaper are very short. This means that reporters need people to return their calls promptly and provide them with information they can absorb quickly.
- ❑ Always call reporters and editors early in the day. Mid-morning is often best and never expect to get their attention any time after 5:00pm.

## **WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS**

- ❑ While the process for making decisions about what news will be covered and overall assembly is the same as daily newspapers, the pace is a little more manageable in a weekly newspaper.
- ❑ The key thing to remember when dealing with weekly newspapers is that they rarely have “beat” reporters and they have “copy deadlines” at least a day before the paper is printed.
- ❑ Always call to check on when the copy deadline is to be sure you don’t send material or call with an interesting story at the wrong time.

## **MONTHLY PUBLICATIONS AND NEWLETTERS**

- ❑ Many Aboriginal print publications and band newsletters are published monthly or even quarterly.
- ❑ As with weekly publications, it’s important to check when the materials deadline is and how much lead-time they need to place a story.
- ❑ Generally, these publications will be short staffed so anything you can do to make carrying your story easier is appreciated. If you can send a story that doesn’t need to be re-written and include a photograph, your chances of getting placement will improve.

## **RADIO**

- ❑ Radio stations generally have major newscasts at least once an hour with updates at half and/or quarter-hour.
- ❑ This allows the news director to update news coverage throughout the day from Canadian and International wire services that provide news stories to media outlets and from news releases they receive throughout the day.
- ❑ However, just like newspapers, news coverage assignments are generally confirmed early in the day and reporters plan their schedules for the day.
- ❑ As with print, notice of events should be sent several days in advance to allow the newsroom to tentatively book their schedules.
- ❑ Radio has the most flexible in terms of making last minute decisions about what news to cover.
- ❑ Remember that there are radio stations in BC that serve the Aboriginal community exclusively. Northern Native Broadcasting Radio and CFRO reach Aboriginal communities. While they have a more specialized format and target audience the other attributes of radio apply. Radio stations are usually run with no frills and a minimum number of staff people.

- ❑ Always check with radio stations about their program format and when they run news and information on particular subjects. For instance a health-related program would be a good place to get an interview discuss HIV/AIDS prevention and resources.

## **TELEVISION**

- ❑ Like radio, television is governed by a rigid daily schedule of newscasts: early morning, noon, dinner hour and late news.
- ❑ Each newscast has an individual deadline but there is some common thread between newscasts on a particular day.
- ❑ Because TV stations have a limited number of reporters and camera operators, there are a limited number of stories that can be covered on any one day. As such, assignments for the major news stories of the day are decided early in the day.
- ❑ Again event notices should be sent to assignment editor of the TV news outlet several days in advance and followed up with a phone call.
- ❑ It is not unusual for story assignments to change at the last minute – a reporter and camera may be booked for one event but a late-breaking situation over-takes the importance of the original booking.
- ❑ Television competes with radio for its ability to respond quickly to issues despite having to deal with scheduling challenges for equipment.

## **COMMUNITY CABLE TELEVISION**

- ❑ Cable television and closed circuit television programming on reserves are both excellent places to consider using for public education.
- ❑ Cable television generally has health programs and tends to set aside longer periods of time for feature programs.
- ❑ On-reserve closed circuit television is ideal for reaching people with the HIV/AIDS prevention message in their own communities. It can also be an effective place to deal with specific questions that may arise in individual communities.

## **IT'S BEST TO MAKE PERSONAL CONTACT**

The best approach to media relations is through personal contact with the appropriate reporter. Many organizations rely on simply sending news releases to the media in hope of getting coverage. This approach is rarely successful.

Editors and reporters get hundreds of new releases across their desks in the course of a week. No matter how well written the material, it can't replace a person explaining why an issue is important. It's best to think of any written material sent to the media as an "invitation for a conversation".

Getting to know reporters who cover health and Aboriginal issues will be a good investment in any public education efforts. Never pass up the opportunity to call a reporter with information you think their audience may be interested in knowing.

### **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Remembering how little time most reporters have to review facts and documents sent to them it's important to remember to keep your information simple and never assume that all reporters have the same amount of knowledge of a situation.

It's important not to use jargon that isn't broadly understood when talking to a reporter or in material you send the media.

### **DEALING WITH THE MEDIA**

#### **IF THEY CALL YOU**

- ❑ If a media person calls always return their call promptly to determine what their specific interest is and what deadlines they are working under.
- ❑ You shouldn't feel that you have to do an interview when you make a call back to the media. Use your first contact with them as a "fact finding" mission.
- ❑ Always be clear about what you will not talk about. If you are living with HIV/AIDS and don't want to share your personal story, that's okay, just make it clear to the reporter.
- ❑ Also, if you don't have the information on something, don't try to answer questions you aren't comfortable in handling.
- ❑ Always ask yourself how doing this media interview will help you spread the word on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.
- ❑ Remember any interview is your opportunity to talk about the issues that are important to you, not just answering the reporter's questions.

## WHEN YOU CALL THEM

- ❑ You might choose to call a reporter for a number of reasons: to follow-up on a story that has appeared that is inaccurate, to invite the reporter to attend a community event related to HIV/AIDS or to interest them in a new development on the issue in your community.
- ❑ Whatever reason you have for contacting the reporter, there are some simple steps to take when making the first contact:
- ❑ Always identify who you are, the topic you are calling on and why you are calling about the issue. For example you might call say, “My name is Sam Livingstone, I live in Prince George, I am living with HIV/AIDS and working in the prevention area. I am calling to tell you about a new resource centre that has been set up at the local library on HIV/AIDS and the Aboriginal community and how helpful this information is for those people.”
- ❑ Always tell the reporter why you think the story is of interest to them and their readers/viewers/listeners. For instance in the example used above the reason might be “because access to HIV/AIDS information for Aboriginal people is hard to get outside of Vancouver, this is a really important addition to the Prince George community.”
- ❑ Never suggest to a reporter that they “should” cover an issue or that they “owe” it to you or your organization because you have placed ads with them before. Reporters are very independent and believe that they choose to cover stories based only on merit.
- ❑ Remember that nothing is ever “off-the-record”. Don’t say anything to a reporter you are not prepared to say publicly.

## USING STATISTICS

Also be careful when using statistics. Sometimes one set of statistics is only understandable when put in the broader context. Also, statistics can change quickly and you always want to be sure that you have accurate and up-to-date numbers when working with the media.

You also want to be sure what any set of statistics means before using them publicly. For instance when talking about the rate of HIV infections within BC’s Aboriginal population its important to know what date the statistics apply to; if it’s new cases of infection or all known infection. As you can see these are subtle but important distinctions, which change the meaning of the statistics.

In general the statistics kept on HIV/AIDS are not very comprehensive and are not current. The federal government keeps some records but they tend not to be very useful when looking at the impact on relatively small populations such as BC's Aboriginal community.

The BC Centre for Disease Control has more data relevant to BC, but again, the statistics on small sub-groups are not always meaningful.

It is always best to avoid quoting statistics if there is any uncertainty about what the numbers really mean. All too often incorrect use of statistics can paint a very inaccurate picture of the true situation. This can do more harm than good in raising awareness and understanding of the issues related to Aboriginal HIV/AIDS.

Statistics can tell powerful stories, but they need to be used cautiously and only when their meaning is well understood. If a reporter or member of the public wants statistics it is probably best to send them to the BC Centre for Disease Control in Vancouver.

Finally, it is wise not to comment on statistics you are familiar with. Don't assume the media has accurate information. Only comment on numbers you know to be true.

## **PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW**

Whether you are called to do an interview or arrange an opportunity to talk with a reporter about HIV/AIDS in the Aboriginal community, you'll want to go into the interview well prepared.

Here are some tips that can help you make the most out of any interview.

- 1. Know the reporter's area of interest:**
  - ❑ Ask the reporter what is the focus of the story. What issues on the subject are of most interest to them.
  - ❑ Ask whether or not they are talking to somebody else, how many other people and why.
  - ❑ Ask when they intend to run the piece. Will it be just their TV station or will it be used by other stations?
  - ❑ The more information you have about the reporter's angle the better equipped you will be to communicate your information.
  
- 2. Set some ground rules:**
  - ❑ Determine how long the interview will last and where it will be held.
  - ❑ If there are subject areas that you are not comfortable talking about or are outside your area of expertise make that clear to the reporter in advance of the interview.

- 3. Speak to the audience:**
- ❑ Remember to speak to the final audience that the reporter's media outlet reaches.
  - ❑ Use simple language – an interview is a conversation, one where you have a point to make, but it is a conversation not a presentation.
  - ❑ Get your important facts out first and don't be afraid to say them over and over again – while this may not be new information to you, it is to the reporter.
- 4. Managing the interview:**
- ❑ Don't argue with the reporter or lose your cool.
  - ❑ Be direct; answer questions in a simple, straightforward fashion.
  - ❑ Listen to the questions and answer them simply – avoid speculating and exaggeration.
  - ❑ Always tell the truth.
  - ❑ There is no such thing as “off the record” – if you don't want to see it in print, don't say it!
  - ❑ Always think the reporter for their interest.

## **MEDIA RELEASES**

- ❑ The media release is the primary tool used to communicate with the media.
- ❑ It is written in a standard format that gives the media basic information of any situation: who, what, where, when, and why.
- ❑ A media release should always include the date on which the material is sent out, who to contact for more information and somewhere in the release should be information on the person sending out the release.
- ❑ The media release included in the appendix shows how to format a release.
- ❑ Generally a media release is issued only when an organization has something “new” to report. For instance, a group of Aboriginal women may set up a support group for women with children living with HIV/AIDS in Kelowna. This is news of value to the community and something the local Kelowna media would be interested in knowing about. This “news” could form the basis for a news release.
- ❑ A good media release should be concise and provide a logical progression of material. Ideally they should never be longer than two pages.



## **MEDIA CONFERENCES**

- ❑ Often called “press” conferences, a media conference is an event where an organization calls the media to meet at a specific location to hear an announcement. Generally it is a major announcement such as a new hospital opening in a community.
- ❑ Media conferences are great for the organization making the announcement because they draw all the media together in one place. However, if you call a news conference and the news isn’t major the media will not be very happy with the organizing group. Going to a media conference means the media has to arrange their plans to fit an outside schedule. If they’ve done this and the event really doesn’t meet the criteria of a “big” news story you will lose some credibility with them.
- ❑ In short, only hold a media conference if your announcement really is major. Otherwise, send out a media release and contact the media directly.

## **MEDIA ADVISORIES**

- ❑ Closely related to media releases are media advisories. They are used to simply alert the media to events that they may want to attend and cover.
- ❑ Generally one page in length they provide a re-cap of the details of the event – where, on what date and at what time, who is hosting the event, why, and who will be available to speak to the media.
- ❑ A contact person needs to be listed on a media advisory and the reporters who are sent the material need to be contacted to confirm their interest and attendance.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT (PSA)**

- ❑ Not unlike a media advisory, a PSA is generally used as a notice of an event. The difference is that PSAs are sent to the media in hopes that they will advise the public of the upcoming event as opposed to inviting the media to attend the event.
- ❑ PSAs can also be done to communicate some general information on a good cause or important subject. As noted earlier, a radio and television PSA on the subject of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS has been produced and sent to media outlets across the province.

## LETTERS TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

- The “pen” can be a powerful tool when dealing with politicians. Letters are used as one of the ways to gauge public opinion on a subject.
- There are many instances where governments have changed their minds on an issue as a result of a “protest” from various groups. Often this protest takes the form of letters written to MLAs, MPs or local elected officials.
- All federal and provincial politicians have two offices: one in the parliament or legislature and another in their home constituency.
- In general issues related to local constituencies are sent to the constituency office and those dealing with government policy issues are sent to their legislative offices.
- For instance if you’re writing the Ministry of Health and your local MLA on an issue related to the administration of budgets for Aboriginal HIV/AIDS prevention programs the letter would best be sent to Victoria.
- On the other hand if writing your MLA to raise concerns about the closure of a local community centre where public meetings are held, this letter might best be directed to the constituency office.
- One thing to keep in mind is whether the legislature or parliament is “sitting”. In other words, is your MLA or MP in Ottawa or Victoria or on a break in their home constituency. This will often determine where to send the letter regardless of the subject.
- When writing to Cabinet Ministers you should always send correspondence to their offices unless it relates to a personal problem that you want them to deal with in their capacity as your local elected official.
- Letters to municipal politicians should always be sent to the City or Town Hall office.
- Remember to keep your letters brief, to the point and polite. Be sure to state your position clearly and what your request is of the politician e.g., you want them to support a particular piece of legislation or initiative.
- Also remember to send elected official’s letters of thanks when they have made good decisions or supported an issue you feel strongly about. Too often people send only negative feedback and don’t congratulate a job well done.

## GENERAL COMMUNITY MEETINGS

- BC's Aboriginal communities come together for many reasons over the course of a year. General community meetings, Potlatch ceremonies and other cultural events are places in which the open dialogue on HIV/AIDS can begin.
- Members of the Aboriginal community and people working with the community on this issue need to find ways to get community leaders and organizers of cultural events to put his issue on the agenda.
- Talking about the issue and reducing the fear and misinformation that exists is the first step on the road to prevention and effective treatment.
- A good deal of positive work has been done in the area of making HIV/AIDS an issue that is understood by Aboriginal people. However, the job has only just started.
- There is good information on the disease and resources that are available to Aboriginal people in the province. Sharing this knowledge is the responsibility of all Aboriginal people.

## HANDLING THE TOUGH ISSUES

HIV/AIDS can be a tough issue to talk about with some people. Whether you are dealing with the media, an elected official or a member of the public, the issue can get pretty heated.

Perhaps the greatest threat to communication on the issue of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS is misunderstanding. Incorrect information and myths have a way of spreading quickly and being accepted as truth. The task of anyone dealing with people on this issue is to identify situations where myths or errors in information occur and move quickly to correct the situation.

Misinformation or gossip can harm the reputation of individuals and communities at large. Releasing information about a person's HIV status without their permission could be harmful to an individual. Similarly, an inaccurate media story on the rampant growth of HIV infection in an Aboriginal community could have many negative impacts.

The communications industry has a number of definitions for what a "crisis" is and there are standard ways for dealing with a crisis, should one evolve. For purposes of HIV/AIDS and BC's Aboriginal people, the following definition of a crisis applies:

*"A crisis is a circumstance or event that, when exposed by public or media attention, has the potential to affect the continued prevention and education of British Columbians on the issues of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS and impact the reputation of an individual or community."*

An example of this would be allegations made in the media that public education monies allocated by the provincial Ministry of Health were being misspent in a region of the province. Instead of going to public education the funds had been directed into supplies for an on-reserve health clinic.

Such a public accusation could threaten the future public education on Aboriginal HIV/AIDS on several fronts – the Ministry could halt all funding pending an investigation, Aboriginal leaders could refuse to participate in future prevention projects, etc.

There are a number of common characteristics of a crisis. The following is a brief summary of the circumstances that are likely to exist when any organization faces a crisis:

- ❑ **Surprise** – while the issue at hand may have been known within the affected organization, the public notice of the issue is a surprise.
- ❑ **Insufficient Information** – there is likely to be a lack of reliable information on the situation – what happened to take this issue public, why now and what does it mean?
- ❑ **Over-focus on the Media Itself** – pressure from the media for answers tends to create an over-focus on the media – the priority needs to be getting the facts of what happened and fixing the problem.
- ❑ **Siege Mentality** – when the heat gets turned up the instinct is to hide out until things blow over – this almost never works.

The key in any reputation crisis is to act quickly and decisively. Here's a tip list on how to take control of any crisis situation:

- ❑ **Define the Real Problem** – find out what happened and why. Get the facts straight so you can answer the media and public questions reliably.
- ❑ **Manage the Flow of Information** – in order to maintain control of the situation and ensure accurate information is released only one person should speak publicly on the issue.
- ❑ **Assume the Worst Case Possible for Planning Purposes** – think about just how badly the situation could turn out. Ask yourself what's the worst thing that could happen. That will allow you to anticipate problems before they emerge and move to take corrective action.

There are also some things you can do to help prevent a crisis of this nature from happening:

- ❑ Respect people's privacy and right to confidentiality on HIV and all health issues.
- ❑ Get the facts. Don't rely on gossip and third-hand information, seek out accurate information on the issue.
- ❑ Keep an open and honest dialogue on the issue in the community.
- ❑ Call in the Resources you Need – BC Red Road HIV/AIDS Network has experience in dealing with tough issues on the subject. Also the BC Ministry of Health's Aboriginal Branch is an important resource and can help in a crisis situation. If in doubt about how to handle a question or if there are signs a situation is growing in concern, reach out to these resources.

## GLOSSARY & SAMPLE MATERIALS

### Glossary

**Media/News/Press Release:** All terms used to describe written material sent to the news media to interest them in a subject. Generally a media release is used to announce something new e.g. a grant, start-up of a new facility etc.

**Media Advisory:** a written invitation to the media to attend an event, which they would have an interest in covering.

**Media Beat:** A reporter's assigned area of specialty e.g. healthcare, forestry, Aboriginal issues.

**Media Deadline:** The time by which all news material must be finalized for airing or publication. Deadlines can be hourly, daily, weekly or monthly.

**“Off-the-Record”:** A term sometimes used to describe not-for-publication conversations held with reporters. In fact, there is no such thing as an off-the-record conversation with a reporter. Never say anything to a reporter that you don't want to see in print or hear on air.

**Public Relations:** All non-advertising methods used to communicate a message to a defined target audience.

**Target Audience:** Groups of individuals that have a direct and distinct information need on an issue.

**Government Relations:** Any contact with an elected official to advocate or advise them of an issue of interest to a group of people.

**Public Service Announcement (PSA):** An unpaid advertising message that publicizes an issue or event. The media donates some time to assist not-for-profit organizations in the community in getting their message out to the public.

## **MEDIA INTERVIEW CHECKLIST**

Use the following checklist with a reporter before doing any interview:

1. What's the purpose of the interview?
2. What's your specific area of interest?
3. Where will the story appear – what section of the paper or on what newscast?
4. Who else are you interviewing on this subject?
5. How much time do you need to do the interview?
6. What's your deadline?
7. What's your phone number so I can back to you?

Always remember to tell the reporter if there are subjects you are not willing to discuss, including personal stories, new statistics you are unfamiliar with of the HIV status of you or anyone else in the community.

## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

- Date:** Fill in the date you are sending the advisory out to the media.
- What:** Provide general details on the event, for example “a public information meeting on important prevention HIV/AIDS methods is being held for Aboriginal teens.”
- Where:** The place where the event will be held.
- When:** The date and time when the event will be held.
- Who:** List the presenters or speakers who will conduct the event.
- What:** You will learn: provide a quick overview on what the media will see and learn if they come to the event. e.g. “The media will have the opportunity to learn about a resource group that has been set up to take important information on HIV/AIDS prevention to BC Aboriginal teenagers. The founder of the program will be available to talk about the approach can be put to work in the community.”

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Provide contact name and phone number for the person organizing the event or dealing with the media.



## **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT (PSA)**

A PSA can be provided to the media to promote an up-coming meeting or event. Newspapers, radio and television stations will agree to run these notices free of charge for a worthy community groups and events.

It is important to keep information straightforward, brief and easy to understand. Remember, there are no guaranties that a media outlet will run your notice, so don't rely on them exclusively to promote and issue or event.

A PSA does not replace a Media Advisory. It can be used as advertising material in the event that advertising space is purchased.

Here's sample PSA that could be taken to media on the general issue of Aboriginal HIV/AIDS:

**“BC's Aboriginal people face a special challenge as they head towards the millennium. This threat is the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is harming Aboriginal people – particularly women.**

**Empower yourself, your friends and your community by learning how to prevent HIV and HIV/AIDS. By doing so, you can save lives and alter history.**

**For more information, please phone “Healing Our Spirit, BC First Nations Society” at 1.800.336.9726.”**

This PSA could run on local radio, in newspaper or be sent to local television stations for their use. Unless you are looking for promotion of a specific event on a specific date, keep PSA material general so it can be used any time the media outlet choose.