

# BACKGROUND



## **BC Persons With AIDS Society**

**Communications Department**

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## **The BC Persons With AIDS Society**

The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society) is a registered charitable society run by and for persons living with HIV disease and AIDS. In the words of its mission statement, BCPWA Society “exists to enable persons living with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and Human Immunodeficiency Virus to empower themselves through mutual support and collective action.”

- ▶ BCPWA Society is Western Canada’s largest AIDS organization with a membership of 4,200 HIV-positive full voting members.
- ▶ The Society’s services are also available to and regularly accessed by many of the 12,000 to 15,000 HIV-positive British Columbians.
- ▶ Unique among major HIV/AIDS agencies in Canada, BCPWA Society’s Board of Directors is composed entirely of HIV-positive members.
- ▶ All of its programs are operated by committees led by HIV-positive persons.

### **Leadership**

From its foundation in 1986, BCPWA Society has been in the forefront of the AIDS Movement in British Columbia and Canada. It has exercised a leadership role in the AIDS-related struggles that have changed the very nature of health care and health care delivery in our country, bringing consumers into effective participation in health care, along with government, the health care industry and academia.

- ▶ This leadership continues nationally in such efforts as reform of the Health Protection Branch procedure for approving new drugs.
- ▶ It continues provincially in such work as that seeking to extend dramatically the range of health care goods and services covered by BC’s welfare program, and Pharmacare.

### **Advocacy**

BCPWA Society continues to be the most effective individual advocacy resource available to HIV-positive persons in BC. Helping individuals to help themselves, the Society works to ensure:

- ▶ HIV-positive persons may live free from discrimination in housing, employment, access to health care and other vital areas of life,
- ▶ Those HIV-positive persons needing it have effective access to the full range of available provincial and federal public supports, including income, health, legal and other supports,
- ▶ HIV-positive persons in prison have the care, support and assistance they need, and
- ▶ Harm reduction strategies are in place wherever they are needed to help HIV-positive persons deal more effectively with their disease.

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## Support

BCPWA Society offers its members an array of support programs, including:

- ▶ A Complementary Health Fund reimbursing qualifying members up to \$55 per month for health care
- ▶ Products and treatments (such as vitamins and bottled water) not covered by the public medicare system,
- ▶ Peer and support one-on-one counseling, and peer-facilitated support groups
- ▶ Three- and four-day retreats focusing on healing and well-being,
- ▶ Free clothing, household goods, bedding and small appliances at its in-house second-hand store, Polli & Esther's
- ▶ A drop-in Lounge open weekdays in which members can enjoy the company of HIV-positive peers, have free coffee and juice, see the latest movies, do art therapy, enjoy a Reiki massage or meet with a Naturopath.
- ▶ Free haircuts in the Society's own volunteer professionally staffed in-house salon, and
- ▶ A series of Christmas season events for members and their families.

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## Treatment Information

BCPWA Society operates the most effective and cost-effective HIV/AIDS Treatment Information Program (TIP) in Canada.

- ▶ BCPWA Society's TIP provides peer-based treatment information to HIV-positive British Columbians, caregivers and affected individuals that is understandable, comprehensive, accurate and current.
- ▶ The ABCs of HIV Treatment and Care is an educational program, in partnership with the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, provides current and comprehensive peer-based (including nurses and doctors) HIV treatment-related workshops throughout BC.
- ▶ TIP holds several Lower Mainland-based forums each year on relevant HIV treatment topics for persons living with HIV and interested individuals
- ▶ TIP is known and respected nationally and internationally as a leader in consumer-based treatment information and presents at conferences worldwide.

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## Communications

BCPWA Society disseminates HIV/AIDS information throughout British Columbia, across Canada and to several countries internationally through its magazine, *living* ☺. The BCPWA Society also distributes the Positive Living Manual, a comprehensive guide to living with HIV, throughout BC and Canada. The Society is accessible from anywhere in the world through its website <[www.bcpwa.org](http://www.bcpwa.org)>.

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## Human Resources

BCPWA Society has 20 full-time staff and three part-time staff. But the lion's share of the Society's work is done by a regular monthly volunteer base of close to 200 individuals, most of whom are HIV-positive members. Last year, volunteers donated more than 30,000 hours to the Society's work.