



TORONTO  
HIV/AIDS  
NETWORK

EX621.37

Good afternoon,

I am Murray Jose, Executive Director of the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation, stepping in for Hazelle Palmer, Executive Director of the AIDS Committee of Toronto. I am speaking on behalf of the Toronto HIV/AIDS Network which includes AIDS Service Organizations, HIV-related programs, people living with HIV, community members, and broader organizations that have an impact upon the lives of people living with and at risk of HIV.

I am speaking to you on the item before you on City funding for Pride Toronto to ask for your continued support for the city's largest public event for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities. Although the most obvious benefit of city funding for Pride is economic, we shouldn't forget the other important benefits to our City and community-building that goes with it.

For many AIDS Service Organizations, Pride is one of the busiest times of the year for our work. Pride Toronto allows us opportunities to connect with diverse communities, in particular, gay and bisexual men, who account for the majority of HIV infections in Toronto, and have been deeply impacted by HIV.

Stigma and discrimination impact both HIV prevention efforts and the health of people living with HIV/AIDS. A common experience is the rejection by family, friends and cultural communities. Social isolation means that people living with HIV/AIDS can often lose traditional caregivers and support networks. HIV stigma is further compounded by the many other forms of discrimination – homophobia, racism, sexism and discrimination based on immigration status. These many forms of discrimination further isolate people living with HIV/AIDS.

Thanks to support from the City of Toronto, Pride season is an important opportunity to counteract stigma and isolation. It provides opportunities for outreach – to people at risk of HIV with prevention messages and to people living with HIV with messages to connect them to services. Our Member agencies' volunteers make hundreds of contacts in outreach sessions, and distribute tens of thousands of information and prevention materials. Pride attracts city residents from a wide range of ethno-cultural communities and ethno-specific AIDS programs are able to take advantage of opportunities for outreach.

Without the forum provided by Pride Toronto, our AIDS Service Organizations would require significantly more resources to reach this diverse and large number of people through other means. Pride brings the people together, and our volunteers carry out the outreach for free. This is an efficient and cost-saving method of delivering public health education. It saves our organizations money, it saves public health money, and it saves taxpayers money.

The large and diverse crowds at Pride have also allowed us to recruit participants for several research studies on HIV in our communities. The City's public health officials use this research to identify trends in communities at risk, and to inform the City of Toronto's AIDS prevention strategy. Without Pride, and the city funding it depends on, this crucial information would not exist.

On behalf of the local AIDS Service Organizations, our Boards of Directors, front-line volunteers, community members at risk and those living with HIV, I urge you to consider the bigger implications when you debate this item.

Two people are infected with HIV every day in our city, but Pride allows us valuable opportunities to connect vulnerable populations with prevention messages and to connect people with HIV to services that help them manage living with HIV, all through efficient, affordable and effective community education. Our hope is that city councillors may look to Pride and understand it as an important model for developing strong and healthy communities in our city

Thank you.

Murray Jose,

Executive Director, Toronto People With AIDS Foundation

Co-Chair, Toronto HIV/AIDS Network

To the City of Toronto Executive Committee, May 24, 2011