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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **On World AIDS Day, ending HIV is the goal**

**HALIFAX, NS, November 30, 2023** – World AIDS Day 2023 is December 1<sup>st</sup>, and the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) reminds all sexually active Nova Scotians that **getting a full HIV/STI screen is recommended at least once per year.**

Research suggests that a key factor in the transmission of HIV - and all other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) - is the result of contact with someone who is **infected but not yet diagnosed.**

“Very often it is newly infected people being the source of many and perhaps most new infections – for HIV and all STIs” says ACNS Executive Director Chris Aucoin. “This is possible because it’s very common to not have any obvious symptoms when you first have HIV or other STIs.”

### ***Regular Annual Screenings are important***

The presence of other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) can significantly increase the risk of HIV transmission if HIV is present. A lack of symptoms does not mean you aren’t infectious, and may mask the harm that the HIV or STI is doing to your own health over time. “STIs do not go away on their own like a cold does” says Aucoin. “So you’ve got it until you treat it.”

### ***Catching HIV Infections Sooner is HIV Prevention***

Delayed diagnosis and treatment endangers the individual’s health and may also put others at risk for infection. “Until one is put on anti-retroviral treatment for HIV that person remains highly infectious for years” says Aucoin. All STIs can be treated to be cured, or at least controlled.

### ***Catching HIV Sooner Means Minimizing the Damage HIV Can Do***

With early diagnosis through effective testing and access to treatment, HIV positive people no longer get AIDS, and most will have a typical life-expectancy. “Treatment will not start until you get tested, so testing regularly means we catch new infections sooner, and they can get on treatment sooner rather than later, both for their own long-term health and to prevent future infections” Says Aucoin.

***HIV Prevention Has More Options today!***

**Condoms** which are approximately 80% effective for HIV prevention are no longer the only evidence-based prevention option in sexual transmission. Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis - or **PrEP** (taking medication to prevent HIV) is up to 99% effective, and **U=U** (which is short for “Undetectable HIV = Untransmittable HIV”) is proved to be 100% effective.

U=U is founded on the research that proves HIV positive people who are diagnosed, on effective treatment, and who maintain a very low undetectable viral load, are medically unable to be the source of infection to others via sexual transmission! Both PrEP and U=U are better for HIV prevention than condoms alone. There’s no reason to choose only one prevention option!

**ABOUT ACNS**

The AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia provides support services for those living with HIV, prevention programs targeting those most at risk for HIV in Nova Scotia, and offers trainings to health and other service providers to better work with both. Our aim is to end HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination, and to end new HIV infections in Nova Scotia.

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