

Press release

June 27 is National HIV Testing Day CBRC Launch Videos to Promote New HIV Self-testing Technology and End Stigma

Thursday, June 24, 2021 – For this year’s National HIV Testing Day (Sunday, June 27) Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC) has created two videos to help address HIV-related stigma and draw attention to a ground-breaking HIV self-testing technology, recently made available in Canada.

ABOUT THE TEST

The INSTI HIV Self Test is a rapid, single-use test kit that detects HIV antibodies in minutes using a drop of blood. Approved for use by Health Canada in November 2020, there has been little access to date to the test in the country. With the support of REACH Nexus, CBRC is making 15,000 of these kits available for free to gay, bi, trans, and queer men and Two-Spirit and non-binary (GBT2Q) people who take their [2021 Sex Now survey](#), now underway. Participants can opt-in to take part in Test@Home and request up to three kits to either use on themselves or give to those in their sexual or social networks.

At the most fundamental level, there is not enough access to HIV testing in Canada. “Even though a rapid HIV self-test kit has been approved for use in Canada, governmental leadership is lacking when it comes to ensuring that anyone who wants a test can get one,” says Chris Draenos, CBRC’s Test Now Research Manager. Accessing HIV testing requires navigating a health system with many barriers, such as identification requirements, limited availability of services and providers, and potential stigma or discrimination from healthcare providers or staff.

“Although HIV self-testing technology is not for everyone, it has the potential to reach those who experience barriers within a traditional healthcare setting where they may be subject to intrusive or discriminatory behaviour or practices,” says Draenos. Estimates suggest that there are over 9,000 people living with HIV in Canada who aren’t aware of their status (14% of people living with HIV) and don’t have access to treatment. With the introduction of HIV self-testing, Canadians now have a new option to help manage their sexual health on their own terms. “These are people who are going under the radar and we need to empower them to take their own health into their hands and encourage people to get tested for HIV, know their status, and get linked to care and treatment.”

ABOUT THE VIDEOS

To draw attention to the new HIV self-test kits and demystify their use, CBRC has released two videos with Canadian model Travis L’Henaff. A person living with HIV, L’Henaff speaks frankly on camera about his own experience testing positive and the importance of knowing your status and working to eradicate HIV-related stigma. The videos also show L’Henaff taking the test and educating viewers about any common issues they might face. [You can watch the videos here.](#)

“It was important for us to show a positive test result on camera,” says Draenos. “Other videos only show people receiving a negative HIV result. An unspoken message is that when you test for HIV you should be expecting a negative result. This emphasis unintentionally perpetuates fear and stigma for people who are unaware of their HIV status.”

In addition to providing free INSTI HIV Self Test kits to those who opt-in through the Sex Now survey, CBRC has also created the *Test Now* Buddy Program, which will help connect GBT2Q men and non-binary people to support people using the HIV self-test, HIV care/prevention resources, as well as other important services, such as STBBI testing or mental health services.

ABOUT SEX NOW

Developed by CBRC with recruitment from coast to coast to coast in five languages, Sex Now has been collecting and sharing valuable data on the physical and mental health of the country’s GBT2Q communities for more than twenty years. As part of the 2021 Sex Now study, CBRC has partnered with [REACH Nexus](#) to provide 15,000 HIV self-test kits to Canadians. REACH is also running its own national HIV self-testing initiative, the [I’m Ready research program](#). I’m Ready will see 50,000 free HIV self-testing kits distributed across Canada with the goal of getting undiagnosed Canadians connected to care. I’m Ready aims to reach all key populations who are disproportionately affected by HIV and is open to anyone in Canada over the age of 18.

If you are interested in learning more about the 2021 Sex Now study, which launched in April, visit <http://sexnowsurvey.com>. For information on the REACH Nexus I’m Ready research program, visit www.readytoknow.ca.

ABOUT CBRC

Community-Based Research Centre promotes the health of GBT2Q through research and intervention development. CBRC’s core pillars—community-led research, knowledge exchange, network building, and leadership development—position the organization as a thought leader, transforming ideas into actions that make a difference in our communities. CBRC was incorporated in 1999 and is a non-profit charitable organization. Our main office is located in Vancouver, British Columbia; we also have satellite offices located in Edmonton, Toronto, and Halifax.

For more information about Test Now and HIV self-testing, please contact Chris Draenos, CBRC's National STBBI Testing and Linkage Implementation Manager, chris.draenos@cbrc.net

For interviews, please contact Michael Kwag, CBRC's Knowledge Exchange and Policy Development Director: michael.kwag@cbrc.net