



# POPULATION-SPECIFIC HIV/AIDS STATUS REPORT – FACT SHEET

## Women

### Why focus on this population?

Women are one of eight key populations identified in *The Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada*. Canadian epidemiological data reveal that certain populations of women are particularly affected by HIV and AIDS.

### Why this report?

The status report presents current Canadian information about the impact of HIV and AIDS among women, including a demographic profile of the population; epidemiological data about HIV and AIDS in the population; information on the factors that increase women's vulnerability to, and resilience against, HIV; and an outline of recent Canadian research and response initiatives.

### Who should read this report?

Individuals involved in the development of HIV/AIDS policy, programs, and research activities targeting this population, including communities, governments, non-governmental organizations, public health practitioners, and researchers.

### When will this report be available?

The status report will be released in 2012 and its Executive Summary will be available on the Public Health Agency of Canada website. Printed copies will be available by contacting the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, at [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca).

## INFORMATION SUMMARY

### Status of HIV/AIDS among Women

The trend in sex distribution since the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been one of steady increase in the proportion of positive HIV test reports for women. Among adults (15 years of age and older) in 2009 with reported sex information, women accounted for 609 (25.7%) of all positive tests reports. Heterosexual transmission is the most commonly reported exposure category for women who test positive with HIV, accounting for 53.9% of cumulative HIV case reports (with known exposure category) from 1985-2009 among women. During that same period, injection drug use represented 37.3% of cumulative HIV case reports (with known exposure category) among women.

Surveillance data reveal that Aboriginal women and women from countries where HIV is endemic are over-represented in positive HIV test reports compared to their numbers in the general population. Other available data indicate that women in prison, women involved in sex work, and transwomen experience higher rates of HIV infection.

### Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS among women is closely linked to a variety of factors and determinants of health which influence their vulnerability to infection. These factors include poverty, housing insecurity, racism and discrimination, childhood abuse, lack of social support networks, barriers to accessing health services, and, for women in particular, gender inequality, culturally-specific norms, stigmatizing attitudes, certain cultural practices, and men's violence against women.

### HIV/AIDS Research and Response

The report identified 87 Canadian research projects underway from 2006-2009. General areas of investigation included HIV prevention, interventions, access to care, treatment strategies, and community research capacity development. In addition, many projects focused on particular populations of women, including Aboriginal women, women living with HIV/AIDS, women who use injection drugs, women involved in sex work, female youth at-risk, women in prison, and lesbian, bisexual and transwomen.

The report also identified a number of women-specific responses to HIV/AIDS over the same period. In Canada, a variety of organizations are involved in delivering prevention, care, treatment and support services to women, including community-based HIV/AIDS organizations, organizations such as women's health and sexual health centres, and government organizations.

### How do We Better Address HIV and AIDS in Women in Canada

The report's findings support the development of HIV prevention strategies aimed at distinct female populations. The report's findings also encourage the development of HIV/AIDS responses that focus on empowering women to redress power imbalances so that they are better able to control and act on the decisions they make to protect themselves from HIV infection.

In summary, approaches, interventions and projects targeting women need to:

- Target women who are most vulnerable to HIV infection
- Be gender and culturally-specific
- Consider the underlying inequalities present in women's lives
- Focus on empowering women to redress gender power imbalances
- Be evaluated to determine their effectiveness for different groups of women
- Address the underlying causes that render women vulnerable to HIV infection