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Global Challenges | Newly Reported HIV Cases Increasing in Alberta, Canada [Sep 15, 2008]

The number of newly reported HIV cases in Alberta, Canada, increased by 29% in 2007 compared with 2005, the CP/Calgary Sun reports. Alberta recorded 225 new HIV cases in 2007, compared with 175 in 2005. Of those cases, 99 were recorded in Calgary, compared with 89 in Edmonton. According to the CP/Sun, Calgary has replaced Edmonton as the city in Alberta with the largest percentage of newly reported HIV cases: 43.8% compared with 39.8%, respectively.

Capri Rasmussen of AIDS Calgary said it is difficult to pinpoint why Calgary's percentage of newly reported cases has surpassed Edmonton's. However, she said it could be a result of an increase in Calgary's population, especially young people who are moving to the city for jobs. Rasmussen added that the largest number of new cases occurred in the 25 to 29 age group. "These are people who have always lived in the age of AIDS; they don't recognize how devastating it's been," Rasmussen said, adding, "They're also in the prime of their lives, trying new things."

According to Rasmussen, the increased numbers are discouraging. "I would love to see a day when we'd have no new infections and adequate resources to address them, and until then, we have a big job to do," she said, adding that because of complacency, "[w]e don't necessarily think of HIV as being as serious as it was."

However, the CP/Sun reports that other HIV/AIDS experts say young people constitute a large percentage of new HIV/AIDS cases because they consider themselves "indestructible" and therefore engage in riskier behavior. AIDS Calgary officials said that although Edmonton has more HIV cases related to injection drug use, cases in Calgary tend to be caused by male-to-male sexual activity. Rasmussen added that the prevalence of poverty and homelessness cannot be overlooked as a cause of the increase in HIV cases. "There are issues around poverty and addictions and addictions support," she said, adding that Calgary's HIV/AIDS services are provided at no cost to ensure treatment to anyone who needs it. "There's a need for increased support, education and dollars for support so we don't become as impacted as other jurisdictions," Rasmussen said (Kaufmann, CP/Calgary Sun, 9/12).

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