



Nursing coalition granted intervener status in Superior Court case to support clean needle programs in prisons

Jan. 5, 2017 – A nationwide coalition of nursing associations comprised of the Association of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (ARNBC), the Canadian Association of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Care (CANAC), the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) has been granted intervener status in an application before the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario for clean needles and syringes to be made available in prisons.

The Prison Needle Syringe Program (PNSP) Nursing Coalition will present a nursing perspective in the lawsuit, filed by four HIV/AIDS agencies and a former inmate who contracted hepatitis C during his incarceration against the Minister of Public Safety, Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), Commissioner of the CSC and Attorney General of Canada. The lawsuit challenges the constitutionality of the decision to treat clean needles and syringes as “contraband” and seeks an order that will bring clean needle exchange programs to federal prisons.

“Research indicates about 80 per cent of Canada’s incarcerated people deal with severe drug or alcohol addiction, while rates of HIV and hepatitis C are exponentially higher in correctional facilities than in the general population,” says CNA CEO Anne Sutherland Boal. “Harm reduction measures such as PNSPs are crucial to address addiction and communicable diseases.”

"Not only are people in our prisons significantly less healthy than in the rest of the country, but they are often the victims of poverty, childhood trauma, and other forms of marginalization," says Doris Grinspun, CEO of RNAO. "By ignoring these realities, and not providing harm reduction services, we are discriminating against this vulnerable population."

"Key prevention strategies such as needle and syringe programs have been shown to dramatically decrease the spread of HIV and other blood borne infections in people who use drugs," adds Julie Kille, past president of CANAC. "Our coalition fully supports extending these human rights to all."

The United Nations *Basic Principle for the Treatment of Prisoners* asserts that people in correctional facilities should have "access to health services available in the country without discrimination." Yet while clean needle and syringe programs exist across Canada, they are not accessible in the country's prisons – where addiction is far more prevalent.

In 2011, members of the coalition presented arguments to the Supreme Court of Canada in support of Insite, Vancouver's supervised injection facility.

The coalition is represented on a pro-bono basis by Rahool P. Agarwal and Kristine Spence from the law firm Norton Rose Fulbright Canada LLP. Court proceedings are scheduled to begin in 2017. The coalition will argue that laws preventing harm reduction programs in prisons pose a risk to the health of inmates who inject drugs, and obstruct nurses from fulfilling their legal and ethical obligation to provide essential health services. Nurses are the largest health-care presence in the country's prisons, and are often inmates' first point of contact when they need health care.

"As direct care providers in correctional facilities across Canada, nurses know first-hand how badly these programs are needed," says Zak Matieschyn, ARNBC president. "Treating clean needles as contraband jeopardizes the health and well-being of prisoners, and puts the public at risk upon their release. Nursing knows it's time to provide these essential, life-saving programs."

The Association of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (ARNBC) is the professional association representing nearly 40,000 registered nurses and nurse practitioners in British Columbia. ARNBC works alongside members to achieve quality patient care through engagement, collaboration, advocacy and policy leadership. To learn more about ARNBC, visit www.arnbc.ca or follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

Founded in 1988, the Canadian Association of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Care (CANAC) is a national professional nursing organization committed to fostering excellence in HIV/AIDS nursing, promoting the health, rights and dignity of persons affected by HIV/AIDS and to preventing the spread of HIV infection. For more information on CANAC, please visit www.canac.org or follow us on [Facebook](#).

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) is the national professional voice representing over 139,000 registered nurses and nurse practitioners in Canada. CNA advances the practice and profession of nursing to improve health outcomes and strengthen Canada's publicly funded, not-for-profit health system. For more information about CNA, visit cna-aiic.ca or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

RNAO is the professional association representing registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and nursing students in Ontario. Since 1925, RNAO has advocated for healthy public policy, promoted excellence in nursing practice, increased nurses' contribution to shaping the health-care system, and influenced decisions that affect nurses and the public they serve. For more information about RNAO, visit RNAO.ca or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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