

SÉRO ZÉRO

HIV/AIDS Awareness and Prevention

“Do they have what it takes?”

Innovative and provocative campaign
targets men who have sex with men

PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

Montreal, Wednesday February 11, 2009 – “Do you have what it takes?” This is the question gay and bisexual men will be asked across Canada with the launch of a new community-based social marketing campaign by the Montreal organization Séro Zéro in partnership with organizations from seven other Canadian cities (Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Halifax).

Why a campaign targeting men who have sex with men?

The epidemiological data speak for themselves. Although HIV infection is present in different segments of the population, men who have sex with men remain the group most affected by HIV in Canada. In 2006, the most recent year for which national statistics are available, 53.2% of new HIV infections occurred in men who have sex with men.

The situation is equally worrisome with regards to other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Increasing rates of STIs among gay and bisexual men are an important indication that high-risk sexual practices are on the rise.

“We are well aware that for some men, HIV and STI prevention efforts must go beyond the traditional reminder that it is important to use condoms,” explains Robert Rousseau, Executive Director of Action Séro Zéro, the organization coordinating the campaign. Some situations and some settings can lead men to engage in high-risk sex and to set aside the safer sex rules that they usually observe. It is important to explore the factors that can lead to this. The ‘Do you have what it takes?’ campaign has been developed in order to encourage gay and bisexual men to reflect upon the various scenarios that can lead to high-risk sex. A range of outreach activities will be undertaken at the community level during the run of the campaign in order to enable men to identify the personal strategies, adapted to their own tastes and sexual preferences, that will help them to understand and address some of the underlying factors that can lead to risk-taking during sex.”

The concept behind the “Do you have what it takes?” campaign

Three different illustrations have been created for this campaign. Each is intended to evoke a scenario related to a search for intimacy or romance, a taste for adventure, or an interest in sensation-seeking.

1. Adam and Steve – this tale of the “original sin,” with its basis in Christianity, was chosen to depict two men at the foot of an apple tree in a suggestive dynamic that evokes seduction and romance. The illustration has been designed for use in settings where it may be seen by the general public.
2. Tarzan and John—a story where the protagonists are in the jungle in pursuit of sexual adventure. This illustration is intended to be more sexually-charged than the first.
3. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs— as with the others, this illustration adapts a well-known story to the gay context, in this case using the Seven Dwarfs to evoke the variety of sexual interests present in the gay community in a manner more explicit and daring than the other two. Given its “dirty but in good taste” flavour, this visual will be used on a more limited basis in certain bars, saunas, and sex clubs.

All of these illustrations are accompanied by the same caption: “Sex, Passion, Romance, Adventure ... Do you have what it takes?” By formulating the caption as a question, the campaign aims to encourage gay and bisexual men to engage in self-reflection, striving to do so in an open-minded way that avoids imposing value judgments or making assumptions about a person’s sexual practices. The slogan “Do you have what it takes?” also serves to refer the target audience to the campaign web site (www.what-it-takes.org) for additional information about the campaign, health and wellness tips, and links to local HIV prevention and health promotion organizations that provide services adapted to the needs of gay and bisexual men.

This innovative campaign, developed in collaboration with Inspirato Consulting Services, has been designed to foster self-reflection among gay and bisexual men regarding certain aspects of their sex lives. Going beyond traditional HIV prevention messages that focus on condom promotion, the campaign, and related community outreach activities that will be undertaken over the next several months, aims to encourage gay and bisexual men to identify some of the factors that can make them vulnerable to high-risk sexual behaviours. “Having what it takes,” in this sense, involves more than just condoms.

The campaign will nonetheless communicate the message that condoms remain the most effective way to prevent HIV and STI transmission, but in addition it offers information and tips aimed at supporting members of the

target audience to identify situations in which they are more likely to take risks, such as:

- Consuming drugs or alcohol before or during sex
- Being afraid of one's sexual orientation becoming known
- Having a taste for risk-taking and sensation-seeking
- Having difficulty communicating what one does or does not want

These are some of the key themes that the campaign will seek to address through outreach to gay and bisexual men.

Social marketing on the Internet

Each of the campaign's illustrations has also been developed into a thirty-second video clip intended to reinforce the campaign through social marketing techniques. To this end, groups have been created on Facebook and myspace.com and an account has also been opened on YouTube in order to encourage "viral" circulation of the campaign's promotional materials.

Banners are also being placed on various existing web sites in order to increase the visibility of the campaign and its impact as well as to reach men who live outside of major urban centres and are less likely to spend time in gay social venues. In addition, a discussion space has been created on www.what-it-takes.org where comments about the campaign can be posted. Campaign materials can also be downloaded from this site so that they can be forwarded to friends.

"What is different about this campaign in comparison to previous ones is that, in addition to the use of viral marketing techniques, the campaign is being supported by outreach activities that will be taking place at the community level in each region of the country," explains Dr. Terry Trussler, Research Director at Vancouver's Community-Based Research Centre and member of the team responsible for evaluating the success of the campaign.

A guide book has been produced to accompany the launch of the campaign in order to assist outreach workers in developing these activities so as to promote the campaign to members of the target audience on a local level.

Representatives from the community organizations who participated in developing the campaign were on hand to support the launch of "Do you have what it takes?". These organizations were members of the campaign's national steering committee, and most were also involved in the development of two previous cross-Canada campaigns: "Think Again," undertaken in 2004, and the 2005 "Gay Men Play Safe" campaign.

Action Séro Zéro is a community-based health promotion and HIV/STI prevention organization. Since 1991, the organization has provided a range of services, all free of charge. These include support and accompaniment in relation to HIV and STI testing, and one-on-one counselling for both HIV-negative and HIV-positive gay and bisexual men. Action Séro Zéro undertakes outreach work in numerous gay social venues in Montreal and maintains a health promotion web site: www.sero-zero.qc.ca.

Media Contact:

To arrange interviews in English or in French, please contact Daniel Leblanc, 514-521-7778 ext. 234 or communication@sero-zero.qc.ca

Media Spokespersons:

Robert Rousseau, Executive Director, Action Séro Zéro
Ken Monteith, Executive Director, COCQ-sida

Members of the campaign's National Steering Committee:

Alexander, Stephen	Canadian AIDS Society (Ottawa)	Program Consultant
Banks, Phillip	Health Initiative for Men (Vancouver)	Representative
Kerr, Ted	HIV Edmonton	Artist and writer
Hapanowicz, Mark	AIDS community care Montreal	Executive Director
Mac Intosh, Maria	AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (Edmonton)	Executive Director
Maxwell, John	AIDS Committee of Toronto	Director of Special Projects
Owen, Katie	Rainbow Resource Centre (Winnipeg)	Outreach Worker
Rasmussen, Capri	AIDS Calgary	Team Leader
Trussler, Terry	Community Based Research Center (Vancouver)	Research Director
