

FOR THE RECORD

AIDS treatment specialists take on prevention

The provision of treatment and prevention information about HIV/AIDS is being amalgamated and centralized as a result of a Public Health Agency of Canada initiative.

The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE, www.catie.ca), since 1991 a source of treatment information for AIDS service organizations and individuals with HIV, successfully bid on an agency proposal to create an HIV/AIDS “national knowledge exchange broker.”

The Exchange, which had its origins in the grassroots AIDS Action Now! organization, is taking over the function of the HIV/AIDS Information Centre (better known as “the Clearinghouse”), which had been operated by the Canadian Public Health Association since 1989. It will add the supply of information about prevention, care and support to its established role of providing treatment information.

The Exchange’s role expansion is accompanied by an increase of about 50% in federal funding (to \$3 million in 2008/09, from about \$2 million in 2006/07).

It’s hoped the move will improve the effectiveness of front-line prevention efforts. “Even though rates haven’t gone down in a decade, effective treatment has made AIDS almost invisible [in Canada]. It has fairly much fallen off the radar and become seen as an African issue,” says Ian Culbert, corporate and business development officer for the Canadian Public Health Association. — Ann Silversides, *CMAJ*

Smog-free Beijing?

Rainy day blues proved to be a misnomer for smog-wary Olympic athletes in Beijing, China. Heavy rain on Aug. 10 washed away smog-laden air. The next day, particulate matter, a prime measure of pollution, had dropped by more than half, registering at 38 µg per m³. The World Health Organization has set a minimum



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In addition to its regular role, the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange will provide information about prevention, care and support.

level of 50, with a target of 20.

The rain’s cleansing power was boosted by emergency smog-slashing measures, including temporarily closing 200 factories, closing all construction sites and taking about half the city’s vehicles off the road.

An independent air pollution expert from the Italian National Research Council confirmed that both rain and emission reduction measures played a part in clearing the smog.

Air quality remained a concern just 3 days before the Games began on Aug. 8, with organizers preparing to postpone or relocate endurance events, such as the marathon, if the smog levels reached dangerous limits. Athletes also raised concerns about the impact of the city’s pollution on their health and performance, with a number opting for face masks. Yet, midway through the Games, those concerns were proving largely unfounded, although air quality is always an issue for high-performance athletes (see page 543). — Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

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Briefly

Medpedia: Four of the world’s most prestigious medical schools have banded together to help establish the most comprehensive online encyclopedia of medicine. To be called Medpedia and made freely available to all, the initiative proposes to be a medical clearinghouse for data about health, medicine and the body. Harvard, Stanford, California-Berkeley and Michigan are leading the project (www.medpedia.com). It’s expected to be fully operational by the end of 2008.

Island fever: Health officials in the South Pacific island nation of Niue have proposed banning smoking and the sale of tobacco in both public areas and private homes. They must still convince their government to enact legislation implementing a ban, which would allow Niue to declare itself the world’s first tobacco-free country.

HIV drug funding: The international drug financing organization UNITAID is contributing \$50 million to address mother-to-child transmission of HIV. It announced the funding on July 31, 2008, with its partners in the initiative: UNICEF and the World Health Organization. The money will be used to test millions of pregnant women for HIV and to treat thousands of HIV-positive mothers and children. The target countries — Central African Republic, China, Haiti, Lesotho, Myanmar, Nigeria, Swaziland, Uganda, and Zimbabwe — are home to a quarter of the world’s HIV-infected pregnant women.

Patient navigators: Alberta has dedicated \$43 million to a “patient navigator” program to help people suffering from heart disease gain timely access to specialists. The province hired 11 patient navigators, who will help patients find appropriate specialists and ensure they have completed necessary tests. The provincial government hopes to create similar programs for patients with other medical problems. — Wayne Kondro and Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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