

December 20, 2009

Dr. Nigel Murray

CEO, Fraser Health Region

Surrey, B.C.

Dear Dr. Murray:

The Lower Mainland Purpose Society is the primary service provider to people who are positive for HIV and Hepatitis C located in the Fraser North Region. We were advised on Friday, December 18th by the primary Health funder, the Fraser Health Authority, that the budget for its HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C support program, "Stride with Purpose" is being cut from an annual budget of \$160,000 down to \$68,060 effective February 1, 2010.

This drastic and categorical reduction, without any consultation or discussion, is gravely concerning to the Purpose Society. The Board of Directors considers this action to be extremely ill-advised and fiscally imprudent.

It is fair to say that of all of our programs, "Stride with Purpose", initiated in 1992, serves the most vulnerable, marginalized and under-resourced citizens in the community. Currently, there are 165 clients receiving service on a weekly basis. Many of them are homeless, marginally housed, unemployed, active in their addiction and/or mentally ill. It is also fair to say that this program keeps people alive by providing for their basic needs such as access to showers, laundry, food, access to medical services and comfort.

In addition, our services reduce the number of visits to emergency rooms, emergency response services, policing and incarceration. You have reduced our budget from 3.5 FTEs to 1 staff person who will provide needle exchange services and this will result in increased use and therefore increased costs related to the above services. Visits to emergency rooms will increase. There will be an increase in the use of emergency services, policing and incarceration and all of this will cost significantly more than the \$100,000 you have taken from our budget. In fact, based on our current funding level and client caseload, our cost per client is \$80.00 per month. The cost of one ambulance call is approximately \$100.00.

Current funding allows us to keep people healthier and contribute to their overall health by providing:

- Prevention and Education services that include harm reduction education, an outreach health van that provides a variety of services to people who are on the street and high risk, and education to other service providers about HIV transmission.
  
- Care and Treatment services that include direct support, counselling, advocacy, help with various forms, liaising with health personnel and referral to health personnel or other agencies.

- Research and training services that include providing other professionals with up to date information on HIV/AIDS and providing training opportunities for practicum students.

Currently, these involved and complex life-sustaining programs, which include such basic and necessary amenities as a food bank, shower and laundry facilities, as well as one on one counselling support and advocacy (and by advocacy we mean intense, direct person to person help for people who often encounter difficulty in managing the range of agencies they have to negotiate to get their primary needs met) are provided through a diverse range of flexible, client-centered services.

Obviously, if we can encourage people to make better decisions regarding their health practices and lifestyle choices, the less they will cost the health system over time. Therefore, cutting our funding to one person who will provide needle exchange services only appears not just fiscally imprudent but also short-sighted because, in the long term, this group of clients will end up costing the health system much more as they will be sicker when they arrive at your door.

There are staff of the Fraser Health Region who know what the Stride program provides and the results that are achieved on a daily basis. However, it appears that these staff people were either not asked whether this decision to cut our budget was a wise one or, perhaps, they were ignored. In any event, there was no discussion, consultation with Purpose staff nor was there a visit to actually see the program and its achievements.

In conclusion, you state in your letter of December 18, 2009 that "HP&P is committed to maintaining the highest quality of services to residents living with HIV/AIDS". One has to wonder how you think you are going to achieve your commitment after our direct and engaged services have been disembowelled.

The Purpose Board of Directors requests a meeting with you and the other members of the Fraser Health Board to discuss this situation. It is hoped that you will reconsider this funding cut and reverse your decision.

Sincerely,

David Patterson  
President, Board of Directors  
The Purpose Society