

## When Someone You Know Has HIV or Hepatitis C

Finding out that a loved one has HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C can be very difficult, and you may be wondering what you can do to help your friend. Your loved one will need a lot of support and understanding, and there are many ways that you can offer that support. Here are just a few suggestions that can help you be there for your friend when he needs you.

### Communication

If a loved one tells you she has HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C, you may be concerned about how you can help her. Fortunately, the words of our Elders give us a clear message on how to relate to one another in a good way. When you care for someone, one of the most important skills is being able to communicate with the person in a way that shows respect. People who are dealing with difficult times often want others near them for love and support, and you will be better able to provide this support if you can talk and share.

Don't be afraid to ask your loved one questions about HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C. Your interest can help her feel less self-conscious and less embarrassed. Ask your friend what she needs. Be positive.

*It's always been our way to look after our own. That's how we survived as people. Everything has to live together. When a crisis happens, everything has to work together. — First Nations Elder*

Your friend is dealing with a difficult situation and will need someone to lift her up. If your friend doesn't feel like talking, don't push it.

### Get Educated

Education is a very important part of offering support. You can do some research of your own online, but be sure to pick good websites like the Blood Ties website or Yukon Communicable Disease Control. You can also get a lot of information from your local health clinic or nurses' station.

The more you know about HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, the more you are able to support your loved one. For instance, you may not know that major improvements in HIV treatment mean that, in most cases, HIV is now a manageable long-term condition. If someone is diagnosed early and provided treatment, it is likely

they will enjoy a normal life expectancy. Hepatitis C is often curable.

Education will help you offer acceptance and informed opinions. It can also help you fight your own stigma and biases toward people living with these infections. For example, knowing that day-to-day contact with

*Each of us has our own dignity. We would like to be treated in a way that lets us keep that. I wouldn't want to be treated as though I was an object.  
— Aboriginal Person living with HIV/AIDS*

*There's lots of people with compassion out there, but they just need some help to break through a barrier. It takes time. There is so much work, but you can do it.  
—First Nations Elder*

your friend doesn't put you at risk of exposure to the virus can set your mind at ease and help you overcome any initial uneasiness. You and your friend can still enjoy doing things together like cooking, camping, fishing, talking, laughing, and sharing a meal. If the person who discloses to you is your sexual partner, you can find more information about Safer Sex at your local health centre or nurses' station and keep yourself protected.

## Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma is the disapproval of a person just for being different from others. Discrimination is when we treat people poorly because of their differences. People in your community may fear HIV or Hepatitis C because they do not understand it. They may be uncomfortable around a person living with HIV or Hepatitis C, or may even be afraid to go near someone they suspect has either virus. Elders have taught us about caring for each other and having love motivate how we interact with people. Caring and love is a right for people with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, but fear can often get in the way of caring. Being judgmental about anyone, including people with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, goes against the teachings of our Elders.

It's important that every community has champions who stand up for compassion and understanding for people who are HIV or Hepatitis C positive. Try to offer factual information whenever you can, encourage people to learn more, and know some reliable resources they can use. You can be a champion by your own small actions. It is more effective to offer education than anger, even though people may want to discriminate against your friend, or even against you.

Yukon has laws that protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. It is illegal for a person to lose their job, be banned from public buildings, or refused service because of their health. *If this is happening in your community, you can call Blood Ties Four Directions Centre toll-free at 877-333-2437 or the Yukon Human Rights Commission toll-free at 800-661-0535 to ask for advice and assistance.*

*That's what it is if you break it down to the most important fact: One human being is ill and in need of support, the other is in a position to offer it. That's the most important thing. –First Nations Elder*

## Confidentiality and Gossip

Breaking confidentiality occurs when someone knows the status of an HIV or Hepatitis C positive person and tells other members of the community who were not aware. This can lead to a lot of rumours and gossip.

People might say cruel things based on fact, or things they made up, or a combination of the two. Broken confidentiality and gossip can really hurt a person. Gossip adds a lot of extra stress for people who are HIV or Hepatitis C positive. If someone you love trusts you enough to tell you they are HIV or Hepatitis C positive, make sure you do everything you can to keep their trust and protect their privacy. Never tell anyone about your friend's health unless your friend says it's ok.

*I wonder if people realize the damage that is inflicted by gossip. Gossip affects the person who discloses and their family and friends. If that person who is gossiping came into the person's house and hit them, something would surely be done. Gossip is less obvious. There aren't any bruises, but the pain is very much the same. – An Aboriginal Support Worker*

## Counselling and Therapies

Finding the right support can help protect people living with HIV and Hepatitis C from getting stressed out, becoming depressed, worrying, or using drugs or alcohol to feel better.

It can be hard to bring up the subject of therapy or counseling. You could try saying, "I've noticed you seem really sad [or angry, or whatever emotion you've noticed] recently and I'm worried about you. I know you have a lot to deal with. Have you thought about talking to an Elder or counsellor that you trust?"

An Elder may be a vital support to your friend by offering guidance to help him cope with issues such as grief and anger. The spiritual knowledge, lifetime of experience, and many other gifts that Elders have to share can provide your friend with peace and healing.

Even simple things, like including your friend in plans to go out and have fun, can make a big difference to their mental health. Feeling

isolated can be very hard on people. Encourage your friend to come camping, fishing, hunting – anything you like to do together!

A local health clinic or nurses' station can give you information about counseling services. Just be careful not to reveal the name of the person you are getting the information for, especially if you live in a small community. *Blood Ties* can offer phone support to you or your friend at 877-333-2437. All calls are toll-free and completely confidential.

*I know that I have my Eagle Feather. I have my sage and all my medicines. I know my Elder is there when I need him. Sometimes I forget about those things. But when I feel down, I like to go out with my friends. Going out, whether it's to Bingo or whatever, that's one of the things that I do, I make sure I'm around people that want to have fun. –First Nations Person Living with HIV*

## Taking Care of Yourself

You need to take care of yourself too. It can be hard having a friend who has to deal with a chronic illness. You might feel a lot of fear and stress. You may be very worried about your loved one and their health. It is hard to watch someone we love struggle with something we can't fix.

The emotions that might come up for you are anger, fear, and grief. Take stock of what you are doing to take care of yourself. Self-care is just as important as offering care and understanding to your friend; you can't support him if you are struggling yourself.

In order to maintain your mental health, you can meditate or attend ceremonies and sweats, or use traditional medicine. When you are thinking negatively, try to slow down your thoughts and think about things in a different, more positive way. You can take part in a Talking Circle. A Talking Circle will give you the benefit of having a group of people to listen to your words, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs.

Your local clinic or health centre can give you information about counselling services.

*Right now I am going to counselling and seeing my doctor on a regular basis. I felt I needed to talk to someone, but I can't talk to my family about my brother's Hepatitis C because he hasn't told anyone else yet. I'm also reading anything I can get my hands on about Hepatitis C. –Sister of an HIV positive person*

## ***Resources in Yukon***

### ***Blood Ties Four Directions Centre***

*307 Strickland Street*

*Whitehorse, YT*

*Y1A 2J9*

*Whitehorse: 867-633-2437*

*Toll Free: 877-333-2437*

[www.bloodties.ca](http://www.bloodties.ca)

#### **Blood Ties Offers:**

- Support and counselling
- Therapeutic Counselling (by appointment)
- Naturopathic Care
- Outreach Nurse
- Weekly Activity and Support Groups

### ***Yukon Human Rights Commission***

*101-9010 Quartz Road*

*Whitehorse, YT*

*Y1A 2Z5*

*Whitehorse: 867-667-6226*

*Toll Free: 800-661-0535*

[www.yhrc.yk.ca](http://www.yhrc.yk.ca)

#### **YHRC Offers:**

- Information and assistance for those who feel they experience discrimination

## **Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services**

4071-4<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Whitehorse, YT

Y1A 1H3

Whitehorse: 867-667-2970 (Servicing Whitehorse, Marsh Lake, Carmacks, Carcross, Teslin)

Watson Lake: 867-536-2330 (Servicing Watson Lake, Lower Post)

Dawson City: 867-993-6455 (Servicing Dawson City, Pelly Crossing)

Haines Junction: 867-634-2111 (Servicing Haines Junction, Beaver Creek, Burwash Landing, Destruction Bay)

[www.manyrivers.yk.ca](http://www.manyrivers.yk.ca)

Many Rivers Offers:

- Counselling Services
- Family and Youth Education Services
- Youth Outreach

## **Yukon Communicable Disease Control (YCDC)**

4 Hospital Road

Whitehorse, YT

Y1A 3H8

Whitehorse: 867-667-8323

Toll Free: 800-661-0408

[www.hss.gov.yk.ca/ycdc.php](http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/ycdc.php)

YCDC Offers:

- Confidential HIV Testing and Treatment

- Confidential Hepatitis C Testing and Treatment
- Sexually Transmitted Infections Assessment
- Counselling, Testing, and Treatment
- Emergency Birth Control
- Needle Stick Injuries Treatment

## **Community Health Centres**

Beaver Creek (867) 862-4444

Carcross (867) 821-4444

Carmacks (867) 863-4444

Dawson City (867) 993-4300

Destruction Bay (867) 841-4444

Faro (867) 994-4444

Haines Junction (867) 634-4444

Mayo (867) 996-4444

Old Crow (867) 966-4444

Pelly Crossing (867) 537-4444

Ross River (867) 969-4444

Teslin (867) 390-4444

Watson Lake (867) 536-5255

For more information on STI testing you can visit:

[www.bettertoknow.yk.ca](http://www.bettertoknow.yk.ca)

[www.getatest.ca](http://www.getatest.ca)

[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

Or call the Yukon Sexual Health Info Line at

1-877-YK-STYLE (1-877-957-8953)



## Supporting Someone with HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C



If you have questions about anything you read in this booklet, or you'd like more information about HIV/AIDS and HCV services in Yukon, please contact:

Erin Lockyer  
Rural Partnership Coordinator  
Blood Ties Four Directions Centre  
(867) 633-2437 ext. 23  
partnership@bloodties.ca



You may also contact the Yukon Sexual Health info line for more information about Safer Sex at 1-877-YK-STYLE (1-877-957-8953)

This booklet was produced using "*Constant Care Guide for Two-Spirited People of the First Nations*," developed by Nashine Ginwenimawaziwin.