

ICAD IS CLOSING ITS DOORS RAISING CONCERNS OVER THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS AND COALITIONS FIGHTING HIV AND ADJACENT HEALTH ISSUES

After 30 years of bringing together a diverse and dynamic membership and allied partners to address HIV-related issues in Canada and globally, **ICAD is preparing to close its doors in March 2022**. On this **World AIDS Day**, we are sounding the alarm for other civil society networks that are fighting off such a situation where it is no longer financially feasible to carry on and play their ever-important roles of convening, advocating and supporting our communities.

ICAD's experience speaks to and is a stark example of the structural factors that are placing civil society space and community organizations at tremendous risk. These are not new pressures, but they have become increasingly fortified and remain in a state of constant evolution.

Limitations and restrictions on civil society manifest in different ways across countries and regions. Whether it's increased qualifications and demands for NGO registration, repressive legal frameworks, extensive and repetitive administrative audits, restricting access to diverse funding sources, or the de-funding of organizations for their mandates, for what they say and who they represent --- we are witnessing a closing space for civil society engagement globally. In ICAD's case, these pressures include but are not limited to the ongoing shifting and narrowing of funding priorities and eligibility criteria coupled with the tightening of what funders will fund, and what they won't.

Networks are a critical part of a healthy and vibrant civil society; however, in order to survive they are often obligated to compete with their members for project-based funding. This is not sustainable and does not allow networks to serve their unique functions bringing organizations and advocates together to exchange ideas, to strengthen capacity and to present common perspectives. We can't reach our collective end goal if we work in isolation from one another – we will only reinforce the silos that we continue to work across and try to break down.

Civil society advocacy is critical for advancing local, country and global dialogue, demanding action, transparency, and accountability. Advocacy is core to our mandate as civil society. Importantly, funding for civil society and community organizations to deliver community based services seldomly includes important funding for complementary non-service delivery efforts to breakdown root structural, legal or policy barriers - barriers that might block the effective delivery of services, or bar access to services for those that need them the most.

Civil society leaders are accountable to their constituencies, as are governments. We will organize and advocate for what we know works – we know what works because we are ourselves members of communities accessing the services and/or because we are working closely in partnership with them.

Today, we're at a critical juncture in the HIV response. The success of any pandemic response, including Covid-19, depends on strong community and civil society organizations and networks - a community and civil society that may be invited to the table, but increasingly can no longer afford to be there.

The HIV movement has led the way demanding critical space for the voices and leadership of community and allied civil society. On one hand we're hearing how the history of the HIV movement can inform and guide

the world in its pandemic preparedness and response, however on the other hand, we are essentially watching the starving of civil society in many sectors, including HIV.

If you are as concerned as we are about the shrinking space for civil society, for the shrivelling of the HIV response at home and globally ... then we need to talk openly about it with our partners and join forces – we are only stronger together. We must be active, vocal, demanding and loud with our politicians at all levels; and, we must demand more of the agencies and partners that fund our efforts in order to really leave no one behind.

For more information, please contact:

Robin Montgomery (she/elle)

Executive Director

Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)

rmontgomery@icad-cisd.com

Tel: 613-233-7440 ext 113

www.icad-cisd.com

Board Member, Developed Country NGO Delegation,
Chair of the Implementer Group to the
Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria