

Minister of Health



Ministre de la Santé

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

**Message from the Minister of Health
Launch of 'I'm READY' Program (REACH Nexus Research Group)
Wednesday, June 2nd, 2021**

Across Canada, new HIV infections happen each year and many of those living with HIV remain unaware of their status. Accessing culturally safe and timely HIV testing and treatment is still a challenge for many, and has been made increasingly difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic with many [healthcare providers reporting a decrease in their ability to deliver services for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection \(or STBBI\)](#). Ensuring that everyone in Canada has access to testing and treatment options for infectious diseases like HIV is a top priority for the Government of Canada.

Today, I am pleased to recognize the launch of the 'I'm READY' program – an innovative initiative developed by REACH Nexus Research Group that connects people across Canada to free HIV self-test kits, HIV health resources, peer support and telehealth services, and opportunities to contribute anonymously to HIV research.

Made possible by an investment from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and by Health Canada's historic decision last fall to authorize the first HIV self-test kit in Canada, this innovative program helps contribute to the momentum that has made Canada a world leader in the global fight against HIV.

HIV self-testing kits offer a safe, reliable, anonymous and confidential way for people to determine their infection status, while significantly reducing the stigma and discrimination that too often present barriers to seeking care. Initiatives like the 'I'm READY' program are crucial for getting self-test kits in the hands of people across the country, and connecting them to vital health resources.

I'm also pleased to recognize the valuable role this program has the potential to play in advancing research on HIV and determining the most effective ways of reaching those who are undiagnosed. Through these insights, we can lay the groundwork for earlier diagnoses, treatment and care.

While today's launch marks an important advancement in improving access to HIV testing and reaching the undiagnosed, we know there is still much more work to do. Through the *Pan-Canadian STBBI Framework for Action* and the *Government of Canada Five-Year Action Plan on STBBI*, our government remains committed to reducing the health impacts of these infections by 2030.

I congratulate the REACH Nexus Research Group on today's launch of the 'I'm READY' program, which is sure to have longstanding positive impacts on Canada's response to HIV. The collaboration that led to this milestone shows just what can be accomplished when we work together toward the ambitious global goals we all share: getting to zero new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths, and eliminating HIV-related discrimination.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Hajdu'.

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.