

No funding for AIDS groups in federal budget

FEDERAL POLITICS / Liberals prop up minority Tory government

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After a year of deep funding cuts, AIDS service organizations found no relief in yesterday's federal budget.

"The 2008 budget is all about numbers and securing votes, with little focus on helping people," says Monique Doolittle-Romas, executive director of the Canadian AIDS Society.

With a [\\$1-million cut](#) to Ontario groups announced last year, it appears that AIDS groups are the latest victims of the Harper government's shifting priorities. This year's budget makes no mention of Canadian AIDS initiatives.

In no rush to face an election, the Liberals announced that they would support the budget, as they continue to prop up the minority Conservative government.

Doolittle-Romas calls on the government to live up to its commitments.

"We've seen no reassurance to date that the \$84.4-million promised to community-based AIDS organizations in 2004... will be maintained, which could leave thousands of Canadians living with HIV/AIDS without the services and programs they so desperately need," she says.

Although the country's economy remains uncertain, the Tories are using that fact as an excuse to justify inaction on major issues facing the nation, says the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

"The Conservatives have the audacity to claim they are prudent fiscal managers but for the first time in more than a decade, this country is facing a potential deficit because of their \$190 billion tax cut bonanza," says CCPA senior economist Armine Yalnizyan.

Still, AIDS service groups vow to fight for adequate funding.

"We're not backing down," says Gail Flintoff, the Canadian AIDS Society chair. "While the Finance Minister chooses to cut spending and show prudence while forecasting tough times ahead, for us and people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, they're already here."



RUNNING WITH SCISSORS. The Harper government's AIDS funding plan came under attack at protests for World AIDS Day in Toronto (above) and Ottawa. (Nicola Betts photo)