



HIV-Positive Canadian Delegates Barred Entry to the U.S.

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Up to 60 HIV-positive Canadians were barred May 22 from entering the United States. They had planned to attend the North American Housing and HIV/AIDS Research Summit in Washington, DC, but are being forced to undergo a rigorous new approval process just days before the conference, scheduled for June 2 to 5. While former President George W. Bush removed the decades-old HIV entry ban from U.S. policy nearly a year ago, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has yet to lift it officially.

Advocacy groups including the National AIDS Housing Coalition (NAHC), the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and New York City-based Housing Works are calling on President Barack Obama to push HHS to lift the ban.

The United States remains one of only 14 countries worldwide that continue to bar entry to HIV-positive people.

While HSS officials said that participants would be granted a “designated event HIV waiver” for the summit, the Ottawa Embassy informed the OHTN on May 22 that the 60 delegates scheduled to attend would have to comply with a new visa process. Requirements include a face-to-face interview at a specific Ottawa U.S. consulate, a photo, a \$131 money order from a specific Canadian bank, an agreement not to extend the visit for any reason, completion of a comprehensive health form and a pledge that the applicant has valid health coverage.

“Not only are these requirements an affront to people living with HIV in Canada, they were impossible to meet,” Sean B. Rourke, MD, scientific and executive director of OHTN said in a statement. “There was no way to physically get people to the Ottawa Embassy on such short notice,” he said. “Furthermore, requiring people to give their name, a photo and confidential health information to the U.S. government is a violation of their privacy and inconsistent with our commitment to protect personal health information. It shows a lack of sensitivity to the very real stigma and discrimination that people living with HIV/AIDS face every day of their lives.”