

## AIDS & ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

### *Here are the Facts!*

A study in all HIV pediatric centres in Canada found that 19% (50/259) of women known to be HIV positive at the time of birth of a child between 1995-97 were Aboriginal.

Vertical transmission (HIV passed on from mother to child during or shortly after birth) accounts for 2.4% cases of HIV infection among Aboriginal females, and 1.4% cases of infection among Aboriginal males.

Many of our children, though not infected, are affected by HIV. Some have positive parents or family members, and are dealing with the disease in this form daily.

Just as residential school abuse affected generations before them, children suffering from abuse today may be at higher risk for HIV infection later in their lives due to emotional and self-esteem problems as a result of the abuse.

### *Why are Children Affected by HIV?*

HIV positive mothers run the risk of passing on HIV to their unborn children. Also, there have been documented cases where HIV positive mothers have passed on the virus to their children through breast feeding, unaware that they had HIV. In a few cases in Toronto in 1997, HIV positive mothers on dis-

ability assistance with negative children who didn't qualify for a milk supplement allowance breast fed out of necessity, which risked passing on the virus to their infants.

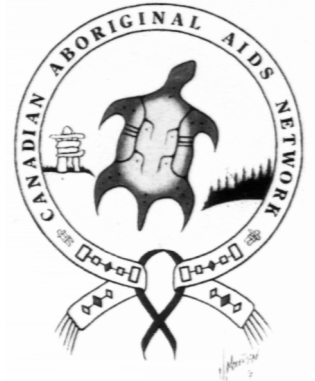
Children are generally the first victims of abuse and neglect in any society. Because they are small, and undeveloped, children have little ability to defend themselves from the abusive or irrational behaviour of adults.

Sexual, emotional, physical and spiritual abuse can lead to any number of developmental problems in children. Abused children may be at higher risk for HIV infection when they reach adulthood.

### *What Can Be Done to Help?*

Education about HIV in schools often does not take into account the cultural and social problems Aboriginal Peoples face. Parents can learn about positive parenting to help protect and teach their children about the dangers of HIV infection.

Service providers and communities can begin child development teachings as early as age five to better understand healthy sexual development.



This fact sheet was prepared by The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network located in Ottawa, Canada. CAAN is a National Coalition of Aboriginal people and organizations that provide leadership, support, and advocacy for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS regardless of where they reside. For more info call CAAN at 1-888-285-2226. Statistics taken from LCDC Epi-Updates.

