

## AIDS & ABORIGINAL WOMEN

### *Here are the Facts!*

The proportion of Women among Aboriginal AIDS cases are higher than of Non-Aboriginal AIDS cases. Aboriginal women are more likely to be infected at a younger age than both Aboriginal men and non-Aboriginal populations.

At a BC clinic which cares for the majority of HIV infected pregnant women in the province, 41% (21/51) of the women under care in 1996 were Aboriginal people.

### *Why are Aboriginal Women Susceptible to HIV/AIDS?*

Women are biologically more vulnerable than men to HIV/AIDS infection. Male to female transmission can be 2 to 4 times higher than female to male transmission. In part, this is because semen normally contains a higher concentration of the HIV virus than vaginal fluid.

Young girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection. Their immature cervixes and low vaginal mucus production present less of a barrier to HIV. Also, tears in the vaginal wall can occur more easily with adolescent women.

Women are more likely to be the victims of abusive relationships. This may lead to powerless in sexual

relationships and an inability to negotiate safer sex. Trying to do so may lead to serious consequences like violence or abandonment.

Women are more vulnerable to coerced sex, including rape and other sexual abuse and forced sex work.

In forced or abusive situations men are not likely to wear condoms and women unable to protect themselves.

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

More education and better information among Aboriginal women in Canada is needed to guide prevention and control strategies.

Targeted HIV/AIDS programs for Aboriginal women need to be developed with active Aboriginal involvement at all stages of the process.



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.

