



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Health and Environment

Senate Statement

by Senator Lynne A. Woolridge, JP

Junior Minister of Health, Seniors and Environment

"HIV AWARENESS MONTH"

(WEDNESDAY - 18th JUNE 2014)

Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to provide Senators with information on HIV Awareness Month, June 2014.

Madam President, the concept of World AIDS Day, as observed worldwide on December 1st each year since 1988, has expanded in many regions to a year-long effort to promote awareness of the impact of HIV/AIDS. For this reason, in many countries, HIV/AIDS awareness is the focus of an entire month, and in Bermuda, June has been designated as HIV Awareness Month.

Madam President, since the emergence of HIV infection in Bermuda in the early 1980s, it is only in the last three years that there have been less than 10 cases diagnosed annually. The last three years have also

seen declines in the overall number of reported sexually transmitted infections. These trends need to continue.

Madam President, last year, the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit recorded seven new HIV diagnoses, three AIDS diagnoses, and 10 deaths among persons with HIV/AIDS. While the number of deaths may seem high, over half of these persons had been living with HIV for more than 20 years which is a testament to improvements in treatment and the high standard of care available in Bermuda. However, we must not become complacent and we emphasize that although there is no cure for HIV, HIV infection is preventable.

Madam President, HIV Awareness Month is an opportunity to promote the vision of U. N. AIDS which is **“Getting to Zero: Zero New Infections, Zero Discrimination, Zero AIDS-Related Deaths”**.

Given the preventable nature of HIV, and advances in HIV/AIDS care, the Ministry believes that this vision is possible and encourages all persons to get tested, know their status and “Have the Conversation” - talk about HIV/AIDS and other sexual health matters. Throughout the month of June, the Ministry is providing opportunities to discuss HIV in

an open forum, to use social media to show support for the over 300 persons living with or affected by HIV in Bermuda, and to get tested.

Zero New Infections

On Friday June 27th, the Hamilton Health Centre will be observing *HIV Testing Day* and offering free, confidential, rapid HIV screening from 8:30am to 3:30pm. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have recommended that screening for HIV infection should be performed routinely for all persons engaging in sexual behaviours. Indeed, over 90% of those diagnosed with HIV in Bermuda over the past 5 years were infected through sexual contact. On HIV Testing Day, the public is encouraged to get tested and to discuss the importance of HIV testing with their friends, family members, colleagues, health care providers.

Zero Discrimination

People of all ages are encouraged to be bold and visible in their support of Getting to Zero by wearing red and posting photos to social media using #RockRedBDA (hashtag Rock Red B.D.A.) during the month of June.

Additionally, Bermuda's bakeries and cafés have been invited to Rock Red for a Sweeter Life by creating a red-themed delight to be sold during the month of June with part proceeds to the charity STAR (Supportive Therapy for AIDS persons and their Relatives). Participating eateries are Crow Lane Bakery, Sweet Things by Alicia sold at My Sereni-Tea, Roti's Restaurant, Sweet Saak, Tribe Road Kitchen, and Dockyard Pastry Shop.

The funds raised through this initiative will be used by STAR to continue providing support to families affected by HIV/AIDS in Bermuda.

Zero AIDS-related Deaths

From June 24th through June 27th, Ms. Marvelyn Brown will be in Bermuda to share her experience of living with HIV. Marvelyn Brown is the author of *The Naked Truth: Young, Beautiful and HIV-Positive* - the story of how an "everyday girl" contracted HIV from her Prince Charming and how she manages to stay upbeat, inspired, and more positive about life than ever before. [The Naked Truth](#) is both an inspirational memoir and a cautionary tale that every parent, guidance counselor, and young adult should read.

Ms Brown will be the guest speaker at a public forum on June 24th from 5:30pm until 7:30pm at the Bermuda Society of Arts in City Hall. Additional panellists include some of Bermuda's leading professionals in HIV/AIDS patient care and a representative from STAR.

Ms. Brown will also be present for the second hour of '**Not Just Another Book Club**' at the Bermuda National Library on Thursday June 26th from 6pm to 8pm to discuss her book. Copies of the book can be reserved from the library and are also available for purchase at local bookstores (BookMart and the Bermuda Bookstore).

Madam President, as we press toward the vision of Getting to Zero, we encourage the community to support the awareness activities, and to have conversations with their healthcare providers about sexual health so that we continue the progress made in HIV prevention.

Thank you, **Madam President**.