



STATEMENT BY MINISTER PHILPOTT

June 2016

Today, Canada took a step forward in reducing barriers that prevent men who have sex with men from donating blood.

Health Canada approved a proposal from Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec, submitted earlier this year, requesting the ability to revise current policies with regard to blood donation by men who have sex with men (MSM).

Since 2013, Canada has had a 5-year deferral period for MSM donors – meaning they were unable to donate blood if they have had sexual relationships with men during the past five years. The two blood agencies have requested, and Health Canada has approved, a request to reduce this period to one year.

This change brings Canada in line with many other countries – including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland and France. The evidence that we have seen allows us to move in this direction with the utmost confidence that the safety of Canada's blood system will be maintained.

I recognize that this 4-year reduction in the deferral period is not a radical change, and will not change the circumstances for many MSM donors who are currently prevented from donating blood. That being said, I would rather see Canada take a step in the right direction than stand still.

To that end, I am pleased that Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec are reviewing, and will actively consider, changes that ensure blood donation policies are gender-neutral and behaviour-based. I am also pleased that they will continue to review the available research and data, to ensure their policies remain evidence-based.

With these objectives in mind, Health Canada will provide a \$3M contribution to CBS and Héma-Québec to fund behavioural research to ensure non-discriminatory practices; organize an international seminar with health leaders from around the world to discuss blood donor policy; encourage further development of technologies (such as pathogen reduction technologies) by working with industry and academia.

In addition, I am hopeful that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health will decide to undertake an immediate study of the restrictions on MSM blood donation, as proposed by MP Len Webber, to determine how restrictions can be reduced while maintaining a safe blood supply.

I am confident that any remaining barriers to MSM blood donation will be removed – it is only a question of when.