

PER CAPITA BLOOD DONATIONS IN CANADA TRAIL OTHER COUNTRIES

Toronto, October 7, 1999– Canadians donate less blood, per capita, than our peer nations. This is the message delivered by Lynda Cranston, Chief Executive Officer of Canadian Blood Services (CBS), during a luncheon address to the Empire Club in Toronto today. Ms. Cranston pointed out that only 3 per cent of Canadians between the ages of 17 and 61 donate blood compared to over 5 per cent of the populations of Australia, England and Sweden. Per capita blood donations in the United States also surpass Canada. (3.6 per cent).

Ms. Cranston outlined what research conducted by The Strategic Counsel for Canadian Blood Services had revealed about Canadians perceptions of Canada's blood system. The research reveals that Canadians have many misconceptions about the process of giving blood. She noted, "Perhaps one of the most troubling findings from our point of view at CBS, is the belief among only one half (50%) of the population that donating blood is 'completely safe'."

There are also a number of lingering perceptions amongst the Canadian population about the safety of receiving blood. Ms. Cranston pointed out that according to the research only 12 per cent believe that receiving a blood transfusion is 'completely safe' and a further 46 per cent believe that it is 'somewhat safe'. She added, "Part of what appears to be driving this concern is a mistaken belief by almost half (48%) of that population that not all donated blood is tested – when in fact, each and every unit of donated blood is tested for safety."

Cranston told the Empire Club audience that CBS is working hard to regain the confidence of Canadians. CBS is resolutely focussed on the safety of the system and on rebuilding Canadians' confidence in the blood system.

CBS's CEO also pointed out that the research had revealed that some perceptions of the blood system are improving. She noted, "We are encouraged that 65 per cent of Canadians think that the problems of the past have been fixed and 69 per cent say we are managing the system well."

The recent launch by CBS of the largest blood donor recruitment campaign in Canadian history is one of the key initiatives that Ms. Cranston outlined during her address. The campaign, "If you knew... would you?" is aimed at recruiting new donors and welcoming back previous donors by educating them about the need for blood.

Ms. Cranston noted, "Only 3 per cent of adult Canadians donate blood while virtually all Canadians will need blood or blood products in their lifetime. Research has told us that if Canadians knew just how vital their gift of life is...they would donate blood. But we've never really told them the critical importance of their gift – or done so in ways they could truly appreciate its many uses and our critical supply needs. Well, we're starting now."

The blood system is entering a traditional time of high demand for blood with a number of holidays on the horizon, in combination with the challenge presented by the loss of an estimated 3 per cent of the donor base due to the deferral over variant CJD. Reports from blood centres across the country indicate that the advertising campaign may already be having a positive effect with many blood clinics exceeding their quotas during the month of September.

CBS is working to fundamentally change the configuration of the blood system in Canada, however, Lynda Cranston pointed out that, "One thing that will not change is our reliance on volunteer donation as the cornerstone of the system. Without blood donors there is no blood...there is no blood system and the healthcare system as a whole would grind to a halt without it."

Canadian Blood Services is a national, not-for-profit charitable organization whose sole mission is to manage the blood supply in all provinces and territories outside of Quebec. CBS operates 14 blood centres, two plasma collection centres and countless blood donor clinics. For further information, please visit the CBS website at www.bloodservices.ca.

Public opinion research was conducted between August 12 and August 19, 1999 by The Strategic Counsel. The research included telephone interviews with 1000 Canadians and 300 blood donors. The margins of error are 3.1 per cent and 5.8 per cent, respectively.

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