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# Immigrant Rules Called Lax

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*Bill Kaufman, Calgary Sun, March 21, 2008*

Ottawa needs to tighten up on admission of HIV-carrying immigrants who are a drag on the country's already strained medical system, a leading taxpayers' advocate said yesterday.

The Sun revealed yesterday that between 2002 and 2006, federal immigration officials only refused 126 of 2,567 applicants who'd tested positive for the virus that causes AIDS .

A more moral and practical approach would be ensuring foreign aid combats the disease, said John Williamson, national director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

"Canada could show its compassion best by using foreign aid money by delivering medicine overseas," said Williamson. The country's immigration policy, he said, should be to ensure a supply of productive new residents, "not as a back door to our health-care system."

A Calgary-based HIV economics study states the monthly cost of treating such patients in 2003 was more than \$1,100.

Federal officials say medical costs and the public health risk posed by the immigrants aren't considered excessive.

Prominent immigration lawyer Edward Corrigan said many of the HIV applicants can claim refugee status due to the severe stigma of having HIV in their home countries, such as Africa.

He applauded immigration officials for allowing so many applicants into Canada, saying he's surprised by the numbers.

“I’m pleased Canada’s compassionate enough to accept people—if we send these people back, it’s a death sentence,” said Corrigan, adding the issue of medical costs can’t be dismissed.

“But we are a wealthy country and the numbers of these people aren’t huge. . . . I don’t think we’d want to send back mothers with children in tow—it’s not their fault.”

But Calgary immigration lawyer Gary Hansen said HIV-positive newcomers are too easily granted entry when others aren’t.

“There’s a lot of people who have been refused permission for considerably less,” he said.

“I’ve known of people with cancer who’ve had to wait for five years after they’re cancer-free.”