

\$350m windfall for HIV haemophiliacs

A staggering \$350 million has been set aside for 61 HIV-infected haemophiliacs' ex-gratia payments and support services – but the recipients of the windfall are wary.

"Generally we feel that the government has taken a positive attitude toward us and has taken quick action," said a spokesman for the Hong-kong Haemophilia Association who did not wish to be named.

"We welcome it because \$350 million is a delightful figure. It's a considerable amount of money but we have to see how this money is going to be apportioned and see how it is spent," he said.

Financial Secretary Hamish Macleod said the grant would cover both the costs of ex-gratia payments and the medical and support services required by infected haemophiliacs.

The plight of the haemophiliacs – 61 got infected before screening of blood was implemented in 1985 – was first highlighted by *The Sunday Standard* last March. Five of them have died.

The grant would also finance AIDS-related education and publicity.

AIDS Foundation chairman, legislator Peggy Lam who took up the haemophiliac issue in November at the Legislative Council and with the

Governor last January, said she was pleased with the amount.

"We can't buy back their lives but at least it shows the government's concern and hard work of the AIDS Foundation and the government reacted positively to our request. It shows a sympathetic government," she said.

Lam expects that the ad hoc group looking into the circumstances of HIV-infected haemophiliacs would be asked to come up with guidelines.

Chairman of the inquiry group, Professor Ng Mun-hon, said the group would draw up recommendations at its final meeting on 15 March.

AIDS Concern's executive administrator, Lisa Ross said: "Clearly there's more money needed to do prevention activities but we want to make sure the needs of the infected haemophiliacs are first being met satisfactorily. We will be dismayed if they end up not doing that."

She also said the government needed to set a time-frame for the ex-gratia payments and for meeting the needs of the infected haemophiliacs.

The Haemophilia Association spokesman said apart from ex-gratia payments, the government could consider setting up follow-up teams of doctors who can give them more medical attention.