

# The WHAI Network's 2019-2020 Progress

The Women and HIV/AIDS Initiative (WHAI) consists of 17 HIV/AIDS Service Organizations across Ontario. As a network, we build local capacity to respond to the needs of women living with or facing systemic risk for HIV acquisition. Our goals and activities are collectively defined with input from the communities we work with.

WHAI prioritizes work with women disproportionately impacted by HIV, including women living with HIV, African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) women, Indigenous women, Trans women, women who use substances, women who have experienced violence, and women who are or have been incarcerated. Below is a brief summary of our work in 2019 / 2020, which focuses on 5 main collaboratively defined goal areas.

## Community & Emotional Wellness

**Goal:** WHAI will use an anti-oppressive lens to work with community stakeholders and build community capacity for social connectedness, emotional wellness, and positive health outcomes amongst women living with or facing systemic risk for acquiring HIV.

WHAI worked with **856 service providers** and **2,602 women from priority populations** to facilitate **294 gatherings** centred on community and emotional wellness. These included Love Positive Women celebrations, arts-based gatherings, food access and justice workshops, and other gatherings centring priority populations such as ACB women.

Gatherings also integrated discussions about health inequities, stigma and discrimination, HIV testing, sexual health and wellness, gender-based violence, HIV disclosure, and harm reduction.

Through this work, Coordinators engaged priority population of women in organizing leadership summits, advisory committees, ACB women's groups and events, peer support sharing circles and more. Coordinators also facilitated capacity building opportunities with service providers about creating welcoming spaces using the HIV & Stigma: A Toolkit for Creating Welcoming Spaces and the Welcoming Spaces map / poster.

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

**Goal:** Communities in Ontario will be better able to address the correlation between GBV, substance use, HIV risk, and health outcomes among priority populations of women.

WHAI facilitated **44 gatherings** with **521 service providers** from the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector, shelters, health alliances, and child welfare agencies to build capacity regarding the intersections of GBV, substance use, and HIV.

WHAI also works in collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations to support community initiatives that improve the health and well-being of Indigenous women. As a Network, we are continuously building our knowledge and understanding about the intersections of HIV, HIV risk, and finding ways to integrate Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls into our work.

## HIV Disclosure

**Goal:** Women living with HIV in Ontario will have control over how and why their HIV status is disclosed, improving linkages to care and health outcomes.

Coordinators engaged **484 service providers** across Ontario in capacity building about disclosure laws, the impact of criminalization, consent, and fostering engagement in care amongst women living with HIV. Within their local communities, Coordinators worked with medical students and health care workers, Violence Against Women sector and shelter workers, as well as child welfare workers and foster parents.

## Provincial Care Cascade

**Goal:** WHAI will ensure the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of HIV Sector work by strengthening community capacity with a focus on priority populations of women.

In the past year, WHAI collaborated with **108 community stakeholders** across Ontario to increase HIV testing among priority populations of women, as well as access and awareness of PEP and PrEP. This work included bringing testing information and services to community spaces that women already access such as shelters, drop-ins, and community gatherings.

## Women & Harm Reduction

**Goal:** Organizations and communities will have increased capacity to work with women who use substances from a harm reduction and overdose prevention perspective, preventing new HIV, STI and HCV infections, and improving the health and well-being of populations most affected by HIV.

WHAI worked with **100 organizations** to increase women's access to harm reduction and overdose prevention services. This work integrated discussions about HIV, HCV and other STBBI prevention, the ways that harm reduction programming and approaches need to consider women's lived-realities, and strategies for improving harm reduction and overdose prevention access among women. This work included consultations, workshops, conference presentations, participation on VAW committees, and community awareness events. WHAI also released our Women & Harm Reduction: A Capacity Building Toolkit to strengthen the work harm reduction programs do with women who use drugs.