

# H1 2022- 2023 PROGRESS REPORT



The Women & HIV/AIDS Initiative (WHAI) consists of 16 AIDS Service Organizations across Ontario, and 17 regional coordinator positions.

WHAI's network aims to build community capacity to address the needs of women\* living with or facing systemic risk related to HIV through community capacity building. WHAI works with cis and Trans women, Non- Binary and 2-Spirit femme people who are living with HIV or face structural risk factors including those who are African, Caribbean and Black (ACB), newcomers, Indigenous, who use drugs or substances, have experienced violence or have been / are incarcerated.

This report will focus on the progress of WHAI's entire network from April to September 2022 and will include information provided by Coordinators from 16 network ASO's, their Executive Directors and/or Managers, as well as the Provincial WHAI (PWHAI) team.

## The Network



### Network Communication

WHAI works as a provincial network, with regular communication through Initiative meetings and capacity building, a shared cloud resource system, and weekly Initiative emails. These backbone supports serve to ensure Coordinators can share ideas and resources, collaborate on projects, be aware of relevant learning opportunities, and support each other in the work across Ontario. During this reporting period, WHAI held 11 Network meetings for WHAI Coordinators, Executive Directors and Managers.

### Network Turnover & Orientation

Due to high turnover during this reporting period, the PWHAI team focused efforts on Initiative backbone supports. 11 Sites had staffing changes and therefore substantial work was needed to onboard and orient new staff while also supporting the continuity of the Initiative's work throughout these changes. At the same time, the Capacity Building Lead providing this support was also new to the role, which meant even more time and attention.

### Women\*

As a network, WHAI established the use of an asterisk after women (women\*) as an ongoing reminder that our work extends beyond cis women, to be inclusive of Trans women, 2-Spirited and Non-Binary femme people.

Over the past years, we have had regular dialogue about how to best ensure we are honouring and being inclusive of femme genders and the intersections with HIV risk and health outcomes for those living with HIV. During this reporting period, we embarked on focussed consultation with our WHAI team about this.

While most cis-gendered Coordinators appreciated the use of the asterisk and the efforts taken to acknowledge the variety of identities WHAI works with, Non-Binary Coordinators expressed the desire to adjust the use of the asterisk to be more inclusive. Moving forward, the initiative will work with partners to ensure the language we use honours gender identities and reflects the needs of these communities.



# Community Consultations



**101** Additional 101 Women\* participated

**501** Women\* participated in total

**317** Staff from community organizations/networks participated

**161** Community partner organizations/networks participated

During this reporting period the WHAI network focused on consultations with community partners (organizations and networks) and extending the reach of consultations with women to ensure the voices of those most impacted were included and centred. The provincial team, with input and guidance from a team of community knowledge holders and consultants, began to synthesize and analyze the information gathered to inform our Provincial Areas for Collaboration for the coming years, which we are in final stages of completion.

A total of 53 additional consultations with women were held, reaching a total of 101 additional women. 135 consultations with community partners were held, reaching 317 service providers from 161 organizations and networks around Ontario. Community partners represented a variety of sectors including but not limited to:

- Immigration and Settlement Services
- African, Caribbean and Black serving organizations
- Organizations working with Indigenous Women
- Violence Against Women networks and organizations
- Healthcare
- Housing & Housing Support providers
- Harm Reduction Teams
- Community-Based Supports
- Mental Health or Counselling Services



Consultations with community partners aligned largely with what women shared. In the coming months, we will be working to finalize our Provincial Areas for Collaboration that will guide WHAI work moving forward.

## Anti-Black Racism Work



During this reporting period, WHAI continued to engage in work to strengthen our anti-Black, Brown, Asian and Indigenous racism work. After completing a year of facilitated capacity building dialogues with Drs. Rai Reece and Sarah Switzer, WHAI embarked on a process of review and evaluation to both document the work done and identify next steps to continue to strengthen the work within our network and local communities. This process was undertaken with leadership from Vijaya Chikermane and Lori Chambers from 7.10 Stories. A series of key informant interviews and an online survey were conducted, and will be key in identifying our path forward. These will be shared through a final report to be released in H2.

This work continues to be a foundational element to WHAI's capacity building across Ontario given the deep intersection of interpersonal and structural racism with HIV risk and gender. Curating a space for difficult and supportive conversations to challenge underlying realities of racism, and build capacity to interrupt and rupture these systems will continue to be a pivotal part of WHAI work.

# Local Community Capacity Building & Gatherings



WHA! is committed to building community capacity in localities across Ontario. PWHAI implements a variety of capacity building efforts with Coordinators so they may build community capacity in their regions. This includes creating resources internally and externally to aid and supplement coordinator efforts, hosting knowledge exchange and translation sessions, developing tools to make WHAI work more accessible, creating social media campaigns to raise awareness, hosting information and community events on our website and developing resources for community engagement and dialogue.

Along with capacity building efforts, community gatherings are an important part of WHAI work both provincially and locally, and strengthen community capacity and collaboration. They include educational and capacity building workshops, spaces for women to share information with each other, and community planning initiatives. While COVID and other respiratory infections continue to impact communities' ability to gather in person, WHAI continued to host virtual, in-person (when possible), and occasionally hybrid gatherings, across Ontario.

The following list includes some of the key topics of WHAI's community capacity building work during this reporting period:

- Anti-Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous Racism
- Arts-Based Activities
- Community Connection
- Community Leadership
- Various Important Days of Awareness
- Diversity and Inclusion
- HIV Prevention Technologies (PrEP, PEP, PIP)
- Harm Reduction for Women
- Health and Wellness
- HIV 101
- Sex Worker Community Organizing
- HIV Testing and Self-Testing
- HIV Treatment
- Housing & Homelessness
- GIPA / MEPA
- Intersections of identities
- Sexual Health
- Trans Inclusion
- HIV Myth Busting
- U=U



## Social Media

PWHAI develops social media posts for the network to share on their local social media accounts and raise awareness about a range of gender-focussed realities. Posts that were used the most, according to Coordinators, were International Overdose Awareness Day (75% of Coordinators), International Harm Reduction Day (56.3%), Prisoner Justice Day (56.3%), community consultation posts (50%) & U=U (50%).

Coordinators found posts about Harm Reduction or Days of Awareness had the most engagement. Other posts about community consultations and reproductive justice also engaged a fairly large audience. Requests were made for further social media training, accessibility for a range of social media platforms to extend reach, and overall expansion of WHAI's coordinated social media efforts. Some recommendations to inform Next Steps for WHAI social media are:

- Highlighting community members, workers, researchers, people at the forefront of HIV movements, etc.
- More human connection and less generic posts
- More IG live conversations for people to view on their own time
- Sharing of posts earlier with more time to coordinate with social media at local ASO's
- Creation of text to fit within word-limits on different platforms (i.e. Twitter)
- Creation of a WHAI social media mailing list
- Sending WHAI messaging that allow for the incorporation of ASO's branding
- More frequent posting
- More posting about stigma and strategies to addressing it



# Resource Distribution

WHAI has seen a decrease in the number of digital copies of resources distributed in the community, and an increase in the number of paper copies, which makes sense as COVID restrictions loosen. PrEP and Women: What You Need to Know & PEP and Women: What You Need to Know were distributed the most, while Supporting Mothers in Ways That Work: A Resource Toolkit for Service Providers Living with HIV was distributed the least of all the resources, indicating need for awareness raising and capacity building amongst our team with this resource.

Coordinators found a variety of WHAI's Toolkits effective for building community capacity. Coordinators felt that WHAI's Tote Bags and USB's allowed them to distribute more resources to partner organizations, while bridging dialogue about HIV prevention and care. When doing outreach in the community, an effective method of engaging in conversation was the use of hygiene and sexual health supplies, stickers and magnets with key WHAI messages, and fanny packs. Coordinators noted that compact, easy to distribute, and concise information and tools were most helpful in their work (I.e. pamphlets, postcards).

In the coming reporting period, WHAI will work to foster the creation and distribution of accessible resources that support community capacity building related to WHAI goals.

## Next Steps

WHAI has demonstrated strong work during this reporting period that will continue to grow as WHAI moves into the next reporting period. Given the notable network turnover, the upcoming period will focus on building team connections, fostering the foundational elements of WHAI work including community development, capacity building and collective impact frameworks, and linking Coordinators to helpful educational opportunities to build HIV-specific education and awareness for their local community work. WHAI will focus work on finalizing our community consultation findings, education about HIV prevention technologies and the HIV care cascade.

The provincial team will continue to facilitate and provide space for collaboration, resource development, social media linked to our work, and other awareness raising initiatives. We will work to ensure the voices of community partners and women are at the centre of our newly established Provincial Areas for Collaboration and work to build local and provincial community capacity.

WHAI Coordinators will continue to collaborate with community partners and women from our priority populations who participated in community consultations, ensuring community engagement and following the principles and values that we weave throughout all aspects of our work. WHAI will finalize and distribute the final version of the Provincial Areas for Collaboration and the ABR Evaluation report.

Throughout this period, Coordinators showed dedication, strength, and perseverance. Completing consultations with women and community partners, building new network and community relationships, while balancing day-to-day work was key to the success of our collaborative work and will continue to be an asset moving forward.



## Uptake in Print Resources Distributed

**965**

\*Copies Distributed

**PrEP & Women: What You Need to Know**

**800**

\*Copies Distributed

**PEP & Women: What You Need to Know**

