

# Collective Action Community Change: A province wide consultation

## AUTHORS:

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## ABOUT

The Women and HIV/AIDS Initiative (WHA) is a community-based response to HIV and AIDS among cis and Trans Women, 2-Spirit and Non-Binary people in Ontario. Through a network of 17 Coordinators located in 16 AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) throughout Ontario, WHAI aims to:

-  Reduce HIV risk for **women** disproportionately affected by HIV
-  Enhance local community capacity to address HIV
-  Build safer environments to support **women's** HIV-related needs

Our work is informed by the experiences of those who face structural discrimination and exclusion, HIV risk, and whose health outcomes are impacted by living with HIV. We are also committed to amplifying the voices of the communities we work with. Particularly, cis and Trans women, 2-Spirit and Non-Binary people who are living with HIV, African, Caribbean and Black (ACB), Indigenous, or newcomers, who use drugs or substances, have experiences with violence and/or have been/incarcerated. Within these communities, our work includes those who are pregnant or parenting, living with different abilities, and span from young adults to seniors.

The term '**women**' is written in colour on this poster to prioritize and centre communities of **women** who face disproportionate structural risk factors related to HIV, and to serve as a reminder that gender is not binary. Thoughtfulness towards inclusivity for Trans, 2-Spirit, and Non-Binary people in WHAI work is of critical importance. Identities are capitalized throughout as well, with the exception of "cis." This is to remind us of the privilege and space afforded cis people, and to support the amplification of identities outside gender-binary constructions.

### How we work:

We draw on a community development approach which means that:

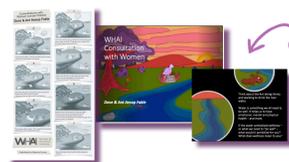
- The work is defined by the community
- The work is collaborative between community organizations, groups, workers and those with lived and living experience
- The work is ongoing
- The goal is to collaboratively build community capacity to address shared health concerns

## CONSULTATION PROCESS:

In 2021 WHAI began the process of province-wide consultations with cis and Trans women, 2-Spirit and Non-Binary people to focus its work. In keeping with the principles of collective action and community development, the consultation process was thoughtfully designed to be participatory, inclusive and creative, amplifying the wisdom and leadership of **women** who face intersecting and structural barriers to sexual health. The focus was specifically on **women** living with HIV, who identify as African, Caribbean, Black (ACB), Indigenous, newcomers, who use drugs or substances, who have experienced violence and/or incarceration, and/or who sex work.

The consultation process was planned in collaboration with the WHAI Network and community partners within a **decolonial, anti-racist, participatory and trauma-informed lens**. A set of four (4) knowledge gathering tools were developed that included:

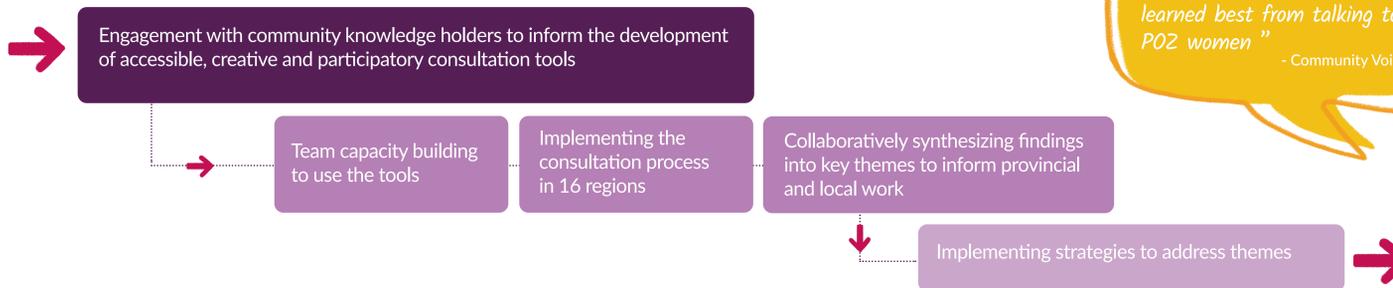
1. Story telling Tool
2. One-on-one Discussion Guide
3. Focus Group and/or Talking Circle Discussion
4. Brief Interaction Tool



Story telling tool was based on the Aesop fable of the 'Ant and Dove'

All tools could be adapted amidst COVID-19 related public health restrictions and catered to a range of facilitation and engagement styles, ensuring **women** had meaningful, accessible options for participation. WHAI Coordinators implemented these tools and the stories they gathered were carefully reviewed to inform a second phase of consultations with community organizations and networks. This included Coordinators sharing what was learned from **women** and gathering stories and experiences from community partners. An additional discussion guide was developed to support Coordinators to facilitate these consultations.

### Process:



"These consultations are so valuable in building partnerships, relationships and connections with community partners and women."  
- Reflection from WHAI Coordinator

"Talking to women in community and hearing about their lives... Seeing healthy POZ women. I learned best from talking to POZ women"  
- Community Voice

## PARTICIPANTS:

A key result of WHAI's comprehensive community consultation process was the depth and diversity of participants we were able to engage from our priority populations and from service organizations.

**501** people from WHAI's priority populations were engaged with particularly strong representation from **women** who use drugs / substances, those who have experienced violence, **women** living with HIV, ACB **women**, and Indigenous **women**



## FINDINGS and NEXT STEPS:

Findings from the consultation were synthesized into **seven (7)** underlying intersectional factors that impact **women's** health and have implications for WHAI's work:

- Institutional Violence
- Poverty & Structural Inequality
- Housing Insecurity including Homelessness, Precarious Housing and Unsafe Housing
- Stigma & Discrimination
- Gender Based Violence / Intimate Partner Violence
- Gender Identity-Based Discrimination against Trans, 2-Spirit and Non-Binary people
- Anti-Black, Brown, Asian & Indigenous Racism

**Six (6)** key Priority Areas for Collaboration were then developed informed by the voices of our communities and partners to guide the work moving forward.



WHA is committed to these Priority Areas for Collaboration and to strategies both provincially and locally that:

- Amplifies the voices of people with lived experiences as leaders in community change work
- Works towards our network objectives
- Advances Ontario's HIV response

Scan here for more about WHAI:

