



This Progress Report highlights the work carried out by the WHAI Network during the Oct 1, 2022 –March 31, 2023 reporting period.

## **PWHA – Capacity Building, Communication, and Backbone Support**

The WHAI network is made up of 17 Coordinators located at 16 sites across Ontario. Over the past several years, the network has seen a great deal of Coordinator turnover, and this reporting period was no exception. Of the 15 Coordinators who submitted a report (the WHAI position was vacant at two sites at the time of submission, those reports were submitted by management):

- 60% (n=9) had been in their position for less than a year,
- 20% (n=3) had been in their position for 1 to 2 years,
- 6.7% (n=1) had been in their position for 3 to 5 years, and
- only 13.3% (n=2) had been in their position for more than 5 years.

Given this rate of turnover, and the importance of keeping knowledge up-to-date for WHAI work, orientation is an important component of the provincial office's work. Thirteen (76%) of Coordinators indicated that they regularly review the reading and training lists that the provincial office, PWHA, provides to Coordinators as part of orientation. One Coordinator indicated that additional meetings and direction from PWHA would have been helpful during the first few months in the Coordinator position.



*"I deeply appreciate WHAI systematic, timely and frequent communications to relevant Program Coordinators, Program Directors and Executive Directors to ensure all parties involved are timely informed and abreast on the relevant events, upcoming dates of recognition, reporting periods and meetings (in accordance with who needs to attend each meeting). I also found their follow up emails after any meetings and or report published (and shared) with a summary of what was discussed and what are the key findings of any report very helpful. WHAI continues to ensure all members and organizations involved are in the decision-making process in a participatory manner. WHAI always is eager to listen from the team on their challenges, successes and needs of the communities; and they try to provide feedback and support accordingly. I always look forward to hearing of all the great work that each organization and coordinator brings to the work that they do." (Executive Director, Ontario ASO)*



*"Over the first few months, I found myself not knowing where to start with all of the information and while the orientation meeting was helpful, additional meetings focusing on certain items would have been greatly beneficial."*



*The google hub, weekly emails, and overall communication from PWHAI are all helpful as backbone supports to the WHAI team*

PWHAI aims to support the network through ongoing communication, developing tools and resources to support WHAI work, bringing Coordinators together to create connections and share experiences and knowledge, and through capacity building activities. The majority of Coordinators (81%, n=13) indicated that WHAI's **Google Hub** (where network resources are available) was quite or extremely helpful, although one Coordinator shared challenges with the Hub. The

majority of Coordinators (94%, n=15) also indicated that PWHAI's **weekly emails**, which share information about capacity building opportunities, relevant WHAI resources, or collective provincial work, were quite or extremely helpful, and 94% of Coordinators (n=15) indicated the **overall communication** from PWHAI was quite or extremely helpful.

Coordinators also offered positive feedback on the monthly Coordinator meetings, highlighting their organization, usefulness, and structure. Several Coordinators highlighted the value of connecting with their peers in small groups, and one Coordinator suggested more opportunities for small group discussion. One Coordinator suggested a brief (5-minute) mid-point meeting break, and another indicated that they liked when there were some optional meetings, which can be helpful as there is often much ground to cover.

*“I must commend the exceptional effort put into the meetings...The meticulous and innovative designs of the presentations, coupled with the supportive and empathetic atmosphere, continue to be a source of admiration for me, even as we delve into challenging aspects of our work.”*

*“I’ve really appreciated the small groups lately, with the opportunity to chat with other coordinators.”*

*“I find the meetings very engaging but we often run out of time because we usually have a lot to share with one another. These meetings have been instrumental in guiding my work and KTE with other WHAI-linked coordinators. They are also a welcoming space where we get to lean on each other when the work gets tough and spaces where we get to celebrate together.”*

Of the capacity building activities PWHAI organized during the reporting period, presentations/workshops on the criminalization of **HIV non-disclosure, PrEP/PEP/PIP, U=U & women** were most frequently cited as particularly helpful. Additionally identified were presentations on WHAI's **Collective Impact Style Guide** and WHAI's **Evaluation of their Anti-Black Racism work**. Coordinators also had positive feedback on the **San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training** (core training and From Bystander to Ally), with many sharing impacts like increased knowledge and understanding, and working to create meaningful partnerships with Indigenous organizations.

**“This training was extremely helpful. I learnt so much, and it prompted me to continue to foster relationships with Indigenous service providers and women in community. I have used a lot of the things I learned in trainings to inform my HIV Basics presentation and other HIV/AIDS/HCV capacity building activities with service providers. I am also able to bring these learnings to other communities and have open dialogue about Indigenous Cultural Safety and how important it is all the time.”**

**“I've been better able to advocate for events for ACB women since attending these sessions led by Rai.”**

**“We are currently in the process of re-assembling an anti-oppression committee within our organization in order to promote continuous conversations and learning around how we participate in perpetuating racism, and how we can work to dismantle racist frameworks that exist within the medical complex.”**

### **Anti-Black Racism Facilitated Sessions**

Coordinators provided a lot of detail on how they have integrated their learnings from the anti-Black racism facilitated sessions. This has included building and working in partnership with Indigenous and Black-led organizations and stakeholders, continuous learning of anti-racism and anti-oppression both individually and within their organizations, developing culturally appropriate programming for Black, Brown, Asian, and Indigenous women with lived experience, and integrating an anti-racism lens into all of their WHAI work. Several coordinators identified working to centre the voices of Black, Brown, Asian, and Indigenous women, including working with an advisory committee or working group of women with lived experience to guide WHAI work.

**“It is important for me to be connected with a diverse pool of organizations that are serving their own communities for example; the Black Wellness Fair was purposeful in garnering community connections with Black organizations that are already doing the work.”**



*“In engaging in capacity building initiatives in which I have the opportunity to speak to providers about HIV I have included sections on intersectionality to ensure providers are considering the various identities that impact service use and one’s “risk” to HIV.”*

*“I regularly meet with our Women’s Peer Advisory Council which is made up of predominately women of colour. They assist me and the agency in guiding our work in ways that are informed by lived experience. It is our hope that the peer council will take on more facilitation roles in future programming.”*



*“The executive director would like to add that they appreciate WHAI’s leadership on ABR work and knowing that WHAI workers get a good foundation there, and that it’s a model for the rest of the sector.”*

## Resource Distribution & Social Media

Resource development and distribution is an important part of WHAI work. During the reporting period, WHAI Coordinators distributed 2,039 paper resources with the most commonly distributed being:

- *PEP and Women: What You Need to Know* (696 copies)
- *PrEP and Women: What You Need to Know* (660 copies) and
- *PrEP tote bags, stickers, and/or magnets* (393 items).

In terms of online resources, the majority of Coordinators shared the links to:

- *Women and HIV in Ontario: An Introductory Toolkit* (2022)
- *PrEP and Women: What you Need to Know*
- *PEP and Women: What You Need to Know*
- *Women, HIV, and Stigma: A Toolkit for Creating Welcoming Spaces* and
- *Love Positive Women Implementation Guide*.

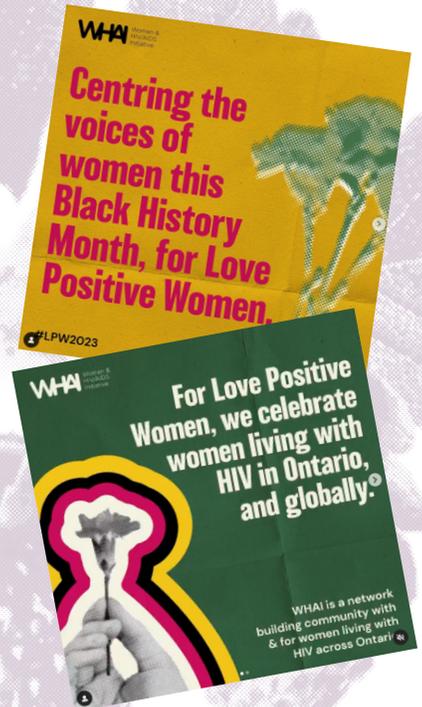
In terms of which resources have been particularly helpful, the **PEP** and **PrEP pamphlets** were highlighted by most Coordinators as useful. Coordinators also mentioned the different WHAI **toolkits** as helpful, either in developing their own presentation material and knowledge, or sharing as part of a workshop or presentation.



*“The PrEP and PEP for women has been extremely helpful in engaging women in their options for HIV prevention strategies. It is a great resource for understanding why it is useful as well as initiating conversations about these tools in outreach situations.”*

*“The comprehensive resources provided by WHAI have been helpful in supporting folks universally; no one resource has been more helpful than the other. It seems the preference is for folks to receive paper copies of resources as opposed to online/digital when reaching out to folks through our community engagement activities.”*

Coordinators had a lot of positive feedback about WHAI's social media posts. All sites shared WHAI's **Love Positive Women** and **Black History Month** posts, 13 sites sharing WHAI's **Black History Month** posts, and 12 sites sharing WHAI's **16 days of Activism** posts. Three sites shared posts with community partners to share on their social media accounts in an effort to extend their research and foster local dialogue about the content, however it is possible that posts are shared through social media connections. Twelve Coordinators indicated that WHAI's **Love Positive Women** and **Black History Month** posts were the most engaging (the U=U post specifically was highlighted) and 2 Coordinators found that WHAI's **16 days of Activism** posts were most engaging.



*“We have connections through Facebook to other service providers, so this is a continuing link that is often shared and reposted.”*

*“I have found the social media posts created by WHAI exhibit a high level of creativity and quality, and I frequently draw inspiration from those posts to enhance the visual appeal of our own posts. This approach also ensures that our social media presence maintains a consistent and cohesive aesthetic.”*



## Priority Areas for Collaboration

During this reporting period, WHAI Coordinators worked to finalize the Community Consultation process by analyzing community feedback, identifying next steps and actions, and writing and sharing their final reports. In addition to this work, 14 sites also started working on WHAI's Priority Areas for Collaboration, which included:

- Community Connection (11 sites)
- Women Centered Harm Reduction (9 sites)
- HIV Education, Prevention, Care and Support (8 sites)
- Wholistic Care (5 sites)
- Safety (4 sites)
- Economic Autonomy (2 sites).



Most Coordinators described the links between what they heard in their consultations and the WHAI work they had prioritized during the reporting period. Community Connection was highlighted as important for supporting and engaging women and was often carried out in



partnership with other ASO workers or partner organizations. Several sites also carried out Love Positive Women events as part of their Community Connection activities. Harm reduction activities included helping with naloxone training, adding women-specific resources and supplies as part of harm reduction kits, and creating specific times or programs for women who use substances to access supports or come together. Finally, sites that focused on HIV Education, Prevention, Care and Support described a range of activities that included HIV 101 workshops, raising awareness about PEP, PrEP and U=U, and supporting HIV testing initiatives, including self-testing. In talking about all of their work, Coordinators highlighted the intersectional nature of WHAI’s Priority Areas and the underlying factors that influence women’s risk for HIV and were thoughtful in terms of the organizations and priority populations they were connecting with.

We asked Coordinators which Priority Areas for Collaboration, in addition to HIV Education, Prevention, Care and Support, they would focus on during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. Community Connection, Women Centered Harm Reduction, and Wholistic Care were most frequently selected by Coordinators for the year ahead.

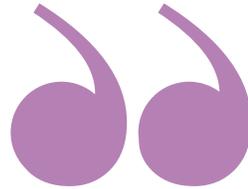
- Community Connection (15 sites)
- Women Centred Harm Reduction (15 sites)
- Wholistic Care (13 sites)
- Safety (10 sites)
- Economic Autonomy (8 sites)



*“I have worked with a caseworker in our support program to work on program planning and the*

*development of a poz women’s group...our “The Wellness Circle” in which we will engage women in various art-based activities that allow them to talk about health and wellness while also providing a safe space to destress and relax.”*

*“...to ensure capacity within allied organizations that work directly with women who are at risk to HIV... I have been able to reach out to 12 VAW*



*organizations via email or phone. Currently I am looking forward to working with the Safety Network which is a shelter for women who have experienced domestic violence by delivering ongoing workshops with staff to give HIV education as well as scheduling drop-in days for myself to meet with women who would like to ask questions about HIV, get access to self-test kits, condoms and provide education and support. Lastly, with the help of the executive director I have been able to connect with the Sex Trade Drop-In Circle to attend on a monthly basis to give out HIV education and resources to those who attend the program.”*

## Gatherings

During the reporting period, WHAI Coordinators collaborated on two provincial gatherings:

- Contextualizing HIV Prevention for women facing systemic risk in Ontario (with CATIE) with approximately 75 people in attendance from women and community organizations across Ontario; and
- Harm Reduction in Ontario: Building our Collective Capacity (with Ontario Harm Reduction Network) with approximately 60 people in attendance from harm reduction programs across Ontario.

The collaboration with CATIE included presentations from 5 WHAI Coordinators, and the collaboration with Ontario Harm Reduction Network included presentations from 3 WHAI Coordinators. Both were amazing opportunities to bring together WHAI Coordinator wisdom and a range of community realities from across Ontario.

In addition to the above collaborations, WHAI Coordinators carried out 82 gatherings with 1498 participants (576 service providers and 922 WHAI Priority Populations with lived experience) in this reporting period. Many Coordinators held gatherings as part of Love Positive Women and Black History Month. These events were often carried out in partnership with allied organizations who work with women living with HIV, ACB women, and other WHAI priority populations. The importance of Community Connection was also highlighted in WHAI Coordinators' gatherings as



***“Hair, Mind, Body & Soul was a good example of this, as it was an event that was specifically tailored to ACB women. Self-care has become mainstream with its radical roots in the Black communities erased. The event was meant to go back to the roots of self-care and provide examples of different types of self-care for ACB women.”***

many sites facilitated peer-based support groups for women living with and at risk for HIV. These included ongoing and time-limited groups that brought women together and emphasized self-care, capacity-building, relationship-building and information sharing. Several sites also described workshops related to HIV (HIV 101, HIV testing, PEP & PrEP). Lastly, some sites were engaged in carrying out larger events. For example, one Coordinator worked with a local business owner to develop and carry out a health and wellness event for refugees and asylum seekers, as there has been a rapid influx in their region. Approximately 200 refugees and asylum seekers participated in the event.

Gatherings were carried out through internal and external partnerships. Coordinators described consulting priority populations to guide and develop any gatherings or programming intended for them. Overall, Coordinators highlighted the importance of partnerships and relationship building in order to connect with and engage priority populations in meaningful ways.



***“The Love Positive Women events were Community Development and Collective Impact...the valentine-making workshop and beading workshops fostered spaces for collaboration, education and relationship-building.”***



## Looking Forward to 2023-2024

In the coming months, WHAI will focus our work in a few key areas, building on the work carried out in this reporting period. This includes:

- Building off feedback about the language of gender and gender inclusivity, we need to continue to consider and ensure we are positioning and framing our collective work in a way that honours and reflects the experiences of 2-Spirited and Non-Binary femme people along with Trans women.
- Use the findings of the provincial and local **Collective Action and Community Change** reports to guide our work while also monitoring for emergent trends to help ensure our work is rooted in community need and strengths.
- Base our work on collaborative approaches between regions across Ontario, and collective work, sharing our skills and resources for local implementation of WHAI work.

Further to these areas of work, Coordinators had a number of recommendations for future capacity building activities to support them in their Community Development work including partnership and relationship building, how to engage allied health care workers in WHAI work, conflict resolution, and community engagement. Coordinators also requested supports related cross-cultural communication, using trauma informed language, and workshop/group facilitation. In addition to capacity building opportunities PWHAI could provide, several Coordinators highlighted the value of learning from one another and requested opportunities to share locally developed tools and resources. Of the new Priority Areas for Collaboration, four Coordinators suggested providing some capacity

building related to **Economic Autonomy**, including opportunities to brainstorm ideas within the network. Similarly, Coordinators recommended spending time as a network to discuss **Safety** and **Wholistic Care** what sorts of activities could fall within these Priority Area. Lastly, two Coordinators requested some capacity building related to **Women Centred Harm Reduction**.

Coordinators also had specific recommendations to move WHAI's anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism work forward. This included sharing information related to the health disparities experienced by Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities, and focusing on topics such as the intersection of anti-Black racism with queer identities, lateral violence, decolonizing mental health care, and addressing racism in our everyday work/workplaces. In terms of capacity building for white Coordinators specifically, Coordinators recommended topics including white fragility and guilt, understanding and challenging white privilege and microaggressions, and allyship and solidarity. For Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous, and other racialized Coordinators, recommendations focused on lateral violence, healing from racial trauma, and addressing anti-Black racism within communities of colour.

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Overall, despite a significant amount of change during this period, WHAI made significant accomplishments and built strong, meaningful relationships with communities across Ontario to continue to grow our collective work. The Initiative has made invaluable recommendations to strengthen our WHAI work as we move forward.

*Thank you for reading!*