

WHAI Network H2 Progress Report

WHAI Women &
HIV/AIDS
Initiative

**OCTOBER
2021 -
MARCH 2022**

BACKGROUND

The Women and HIV/AIDS Initiative (WHA) consists of 16 HIV/AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) across Ontario. As a network we build community capacity to respond to the needs of women living with or facing systemic risk related to HIV. Our work is collectively created and defined by community members located in the communities that we work with.

WHA prioritizes work with cis and Trans women and Non-Binary Femme people living with HIV or those who face systemic and structural risk factors for HIV in their communities. This includes those who identify as African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB), newcomers, Indigenous, those who use substances/drugs, have experienced violence, and those who have been/are incarcerated.

During this period, WHA's work focused largely on conducting community consultations with women to help develop new Provincial Areas of Focus (now called Provincial Areas of Collaboration) for WHA. Below is a brief summary of WHA work from October 2021 - March 2022.



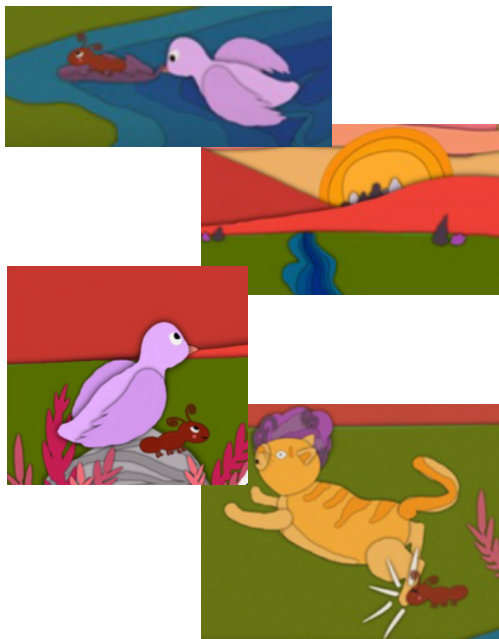
KEY UPDATES!

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

WHAI's focus for much of H2 has been to engage women in community consultations. Similar to the situational analysis conducted in 2016, which resulted in 7 Priority Areas of Focus, these community consultations were designed to explore the strengths, needs and experiences of women living with HIV and facing systemic risk factors for HIV. These consultations were conducted as part of WHAI's planning process for developing the new Provincial Areas of Collaboration for the coming years.

QUESTIONS WERE DEVELOPED TO FOCUS ON:

- Women's experiences of wellness, identifying barriers and supports of wellness
- HIV related care & HIV testing
- PrEP & PEP
- U=U



HOW DID WE ENGAGE WITH WOMEN?

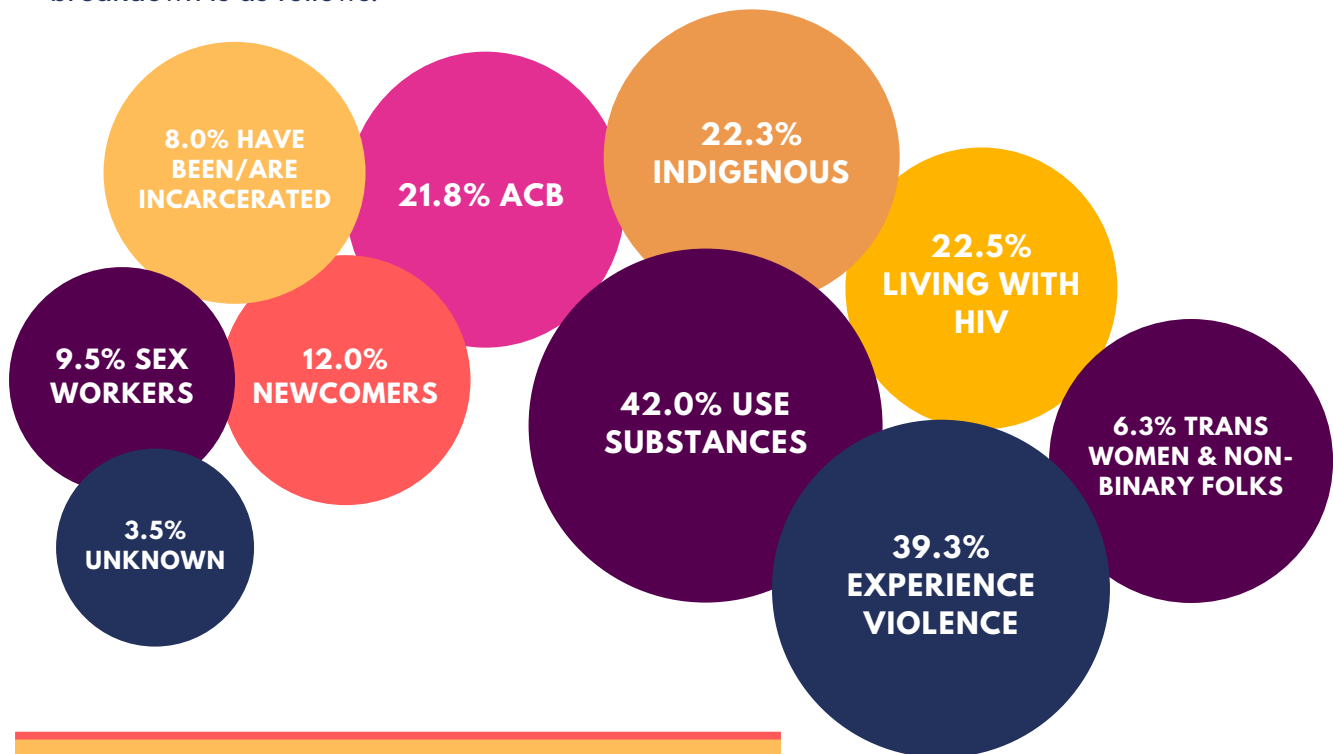
Coordinators used a series of tools to engage women in conversations about wellness throughout their regions. Tools were developed with input from community knowledge holders to ensure they encouraged participation through a range of engagement styles.

- The tools used were:
 - Dove and Ant Fable tool (will include graphics here on report)
 - Brief interaction consultation tools
 - Talking circles & focus groups
 - 1-on-1 discussion tool (survey)

WHO PARTICIPATED?

WHAI Coordinators completed **222 consultations** & engaged with **400 participants!**

WHAI Coordinators engaged with women within our priority populations. The population breakdown is as follows:



WHAT DID WE FIND?

Through the consultations, WHAI Coordinators collected rich stories and narratives of experience from women in their communities.

Through a collaborative and iterative process, the provincial review team pulled these six themes from the experiences shared to draft these Provincial Areas of Collaboration:

1. Holistic Care
2. Safety
3. HIV Education Care & Support
4. Women* Centred Harm Reduction
5. Economic Empowerment
6. Community Connection

NOTE!

It is important to note that participants can identify as belonging to more than one category. However, a full breakdown of participant demographics will be shared in the upcoming final report!



NEXT STEPS

- During Spring - Summer 2022, WHAI Coordinators will be engaging in community consultations with community partners and stakeholders to discuss what has been shared by women in their local communities, the drafted Provincial Areas of Collaboration and how WHAI can support further work to build community capacity to support women living with or at systemic risk of HIV.
- Integrating this consultation process feedback, together we will finalize the proposed Priority Areas of Collaboration in Fall of 2022 that will direct our work for the following 3-5 years.

SHARING RESOURCES & SOCIAL MEDIA

Despite the ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Coordinators continued to work with their communities to ensure opportunities for information sharing, capacity building, and awareness-raising continued in meaningful ways. In particular, PWHAI developed several social media posts and campaigns to highlight significant dates such as World AIDS Day, the 16 Days of Activism, Love Positive Women and Black History Month, and International Women's Day, among many others. Coordinators and their ASOs shared them throughout their networks increasing WHAI's online reach by approximately 20% with each post and share, fostering WHAI work in local communities, in addition to capacity building and raising awareness.

Although in-person gatherings were still very limited, Coordinators found ways to increase resource sharing by distributing over 1200 paper copies of toolkits and pamphlets in addition to sharing these resources online. Among these resources, those most shared included the Women and Harm Reduction Toolkit, PrEP and Women: What you need to know, PEP and Women: What you need to know, WHAI and Memorial Seed Hearts. As things begin to open up, we can anticipate that more resources will be shared as in-person gatherings resume.



CONTINUED 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. Coordinators participated in facilitated sessions with Dr. Rai Reece and Dr. Sarah Switzer to discuss ways to strengthen WHAI's work in community development and community capacity building work from an anti-Black racism lens, addressing the intersections of gender, HIV and structural racism. Coordinators reported that these sessions provided a safe place to have challenging conversations relating to anti-Black racism in the work and reflect on personal biases and experiences, impacting their approach to the work and co-workers. As these gatherings come to an end during the spring/summer, PWHAI will be conducting a formal evaluation to share the work that has taken place and identify the best next steps to continue to strengthen the work across the network.

A Word From Our Coordinators!

"These sessions have offered me validation and affirmation. Having these sessions for me has been an outlet that helped me avoid burnout."

"These gatherings provided a safe space to work through challenging issues relating to anti-Black racism and reflect on personal biases that impact how I do the work."

"It has helped me do a deeper dive into anti-Black racism and rupturing white supremacy and colonial systems and structures, both personally and professionally."

"There was a lot of real and honest conversation. ... it definitely supports folks ability to directly respond to racism"



LOVE POSITIVE WOMEN & BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2022

During this reporting period, WHAI Coordinators engaged in provincial collaboration to plan and host a virtual Love Positive Women & Black History Month event. This event brought together over 60 women from across Ontario to celebrate community love and caring for women living with HIV. This event was created to acknowledge women's strength, interconnectedness, life experiences, and to build relationships and love for oneself and community. Through music, dance, song, and poetry performances and sharing from guest speaker Shirleen Cooper, Artist Member of Visual AIDS in New York City, Coordinators were able to create a wonderful space of strength, positivity, and radical love for participants. We can't wait to see what's in store for Love Positive Women & Black History Month next year!



MOVING FORWARD IN THE WORK

Throughout the WHAI network, Coordinators did a fantastic job of connecting with women in their regions to complete the community consultations during the ongoing pandemic, while continuing to respond to community needs and build community capacity. Despite many challenges, Coordinators were committed to engaging with women and listening to their experiences in order to ensure that WHAI work continues to reflect the needs identified in local communities.

As WHAI Coordinators move into consultations with community stakeholders to finalize our new Provincial Areas of Collaboration, they continue to do incredible work reaching community and service providers in order to build long-term relationships and increase capacity to support women from our priority populations. Together, WHAI is committed to building community capacity to support women and ensure collective models of care for women living with and facing systemic risks related to HIV.