

# OHTN QUARTERLY REPORT: Q2

## July 1 – September 30, 2017

### 1. Improve the health and well-being of populations most affected by HIV

#### *Trans Health and Trans Justice*

This quarter saw the completion of two projects to build the capacity of HIV services to provide relevant, accessible and welcoming services to trans people living with and at risk of HIV (goal 1h of the strategy).

- The OHTN knowledge synthesis team completed a rapid response on [Barriers to accessing health care among transgender individuals](#) requested by the HIV/AIDS Resources and Community Health (ARCH) clinic in Guelph. ARCH provides transgender health care in their community and is developing a workshop to train sexual health and other healthcare providers in providing care to trans people. This rapid response will aid development of the workshop.
- The TRANSforming JUSTICE project was designed to help ensure that the legal needs of trans people in Ontario are being met. Primarily funded by Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), and led by LAO staff lawyer Nicole Nussbaum, herself a trans woman, this project surveyed and interviewed over 200 trans people across the province as well as legal service providers. A portion of this research, specifically around the legal needs of trans people living with HIV, was funded through a OHTN community-based research award to the HIV/AIDS Legal Network of Ontario (HALCO). This funded project is now complete, and the findings of the research will be released in a series of reports over the coming months, around the barriers and facilitators to legal services for trans people, and recommendations for improved services. The second of the four planned reports will focus in part on HIV-related legal issues. These reports will also be used as a foundation for education workshops for legal providers and trans community members.

#### *Supporting the Development and Implementation of Supervised Injection Sites*

Work by OHTN researchers in conjunction with Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, an ASO in London ON, has shown that 86% of 197 people interviewed in that city, who regularly inject drugs, would be willing to use a supervised injection site. The study, [recently published](#) in *Harm Reduction Journal*, also reported that 72% of participants had injected drugs in a public place in the last six months, and that this group were even more willing to use a supervised service. Given the strong interest in these services in London, and the rising number of new HIV infections reported in the area, OHTN is funding the Acting Medical Officer of Health in Middlesex-London to hire a consultant to undertake a community consultation process about the possibility of establishing a supervised injection site in London. With the growing opioid crisis in Ontario, and the current openness of the federal government to approving sites, there are more opportunities to establish these harm reduction services consistent with goal 1.1e of the strategy. A [recent study](#) published by OHTN Applied Research Chair, Lynne Leonard, and her colleagues showed that three quarters of emergency room physicians support the implementation of supervised injection sites, and that 85% would refer patients from the emergency department to such sites if they existed in their communities.

#### **Additional Milestones Goal One**

- Draft reports on approaches to the ongoing monitoring of gay/bi/queer men's health were created and shared with stakeholders; the Investigator's training program concluded.
- Reports and e-presentations from the [Northern Exposures Conference](#) on issues and best practices around HIV services in northern Ontario communities were released.

- Lindsay (Swooping Hawk) Kretschmer, Executive Director of Oahas, joined the OHTN Indigenous Research Initiative Steering Committee.
- OHTN Senior Researcher, Winston Husbands, presented the keynote address at the AGM of the Black Health Alliance (Sept 25); the talk was entitled, “Strengthening Black health and wellbeing: a strategy for life.”
- A literature scan on “peer engagement evaluation methodology and tools” was completed at the request of the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario.
- A prototype tracking system for naloxone distribution was created by OHTN’s IT department at the request of the Ministry.

**Additional Milestones associated with Projects Moving to the Centre for Urban Health Solutions**

- Two e-learning module on “HIV and black masculinity” and “How to Present Online” were released
- A support workers training workshop has been prepared for the Ontario AIDS Network for delivery in Q3 (two days online and two days in-person).
- Governance has been established for the HIV stigma projects, and REB approvals received
- Two Research Lounge events were hosted by OHTN this quarter, fostering discussion in our stakeholder communities about emerging research with an expert in that area of research: Sexual health research among gay/bi/queer men (Nathan Gibson, Mac Stewart); PrEP readiness and accessibility (Michael Fanous).

## 2. Promote sexual health and prevent new HIV, STI and hepatitis C infections

### Goal Two Highlights

#### *Indigenous Learning Pathways to Prevention Launch*

The Indigenous Learning Pathways to Prevention (ILPP) Awards is intended to support Indigenous post-secondary students in developing research projects, programs and services that embody Indigenous ways of knowing to better serve First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities with regard to HIV prevention and sexual health (consistent with goal 2.1b). First piloted in 2015, the ILPP program has been evaluated and revised with input from the Indigenous Research Steering Committee and knowledge from the Wise Funding Practices study. This latest round which [launched Sept 8](#), will first seek expressions of interest from students and host agencies, and will then work with the teams to ensure that the projects develop with clear lines of reporting and responsibility that support the students in building community-based research skills. Complete applications are expected November 10, and will be assessed based on their relevance, feasibility, potential impact, use of Indigenous methods, and their community engagement and commitment. Funding is available for two student projects to begin in the spring of 2018.

### Additional Milestones Goal Two

- Rapid response: “[Methods for effectively communicating HIV risk](#)” published.
- The AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo & Area (ACCKWA) in conjunction with other LGBT services in the area, completed an assessment of the needs of gay, bisexual and trans men who have sex with men in the area with OHTN community-base research funding. ACCKWA gathered data from 147 men about their safer sex strategies, testing behaviour, PrEP use and use of services in the community. This delivery will inform the delivery of prevention services at ACCKWA.

### 3. Diagnose HIV infections early and engage people in timely care

#### *Syphilis Screening Study*

OHTN-funded New Investigator Sharmistha Mishra uses mathematical models to determine the optimal strategies for HIV and STBBI screening, prevention and treatment. Recently, she and her colleagues used information from a syphilis outbreak among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Winnipeg to consider the most effective screening strategy to reduce syphilis transmission. The study compared increasing screening in one of three ways:

- a) Targeted testing every three months to men previously diagnosed with syphilis (with 75% participation)
- b) Targeted testing every three months to the men who reported the most sexual partners
- c) Distributing the increased number of tests uniformly across all men who have sex with men (allowing about 30% of all men to be tested quarterly)

Screening men with a history of syphilis was potentially the most effective strategy, and does not rely on self-reports of behavior. This research is the first modelling study to explore the impact of enhanced screening in individuals with a history of prior infection. It was [published](#) in the journal *Sexually Transmitted Infections* in July and contributes to goal 3.1b to develop testing frequency guidelines for HIV, HCV and other STIs for people at high risk.

#### **Milestones Goal Three**

- PHO has approved the data requests needed for generating priority population-specific cascades for Ontario.
- The OHESI knowledge translation plan has been established with a schedule for sharing information about new diagnoses and cascade measures and a schedule of products to be generated.
- A pilot intervention for increased HIV testing of African, Caribbean and Black women was completed with OHTN support and is now being analyzed.

### 4. Improve health, longevity and quality of life for people living with HIV

#### *HIV Care in Provincial Correctional Institutions*

HIV infection rates are elevated among incarcerated individuals in Canada, and this is also true in Ontario, although detailed analysis of provincial infection rates has not been done in over 10 years. Evidence suggests that incarcerated people in Ontario die of HIV at 8.5 times the rate of people living with HIV in the general population. In the past quarter, OHTN has awarded research funds to Fiona Kouyoumdjian (a physician and researcher from McMaster University) and a team of researchers including community-based representatives of PASAN, as well as OHTN's Director of Applied Epidemiology, Abigail Kroch, and two OHTN-funded New Investigators (Tony Antoniou and Claire Kendall) to investigate care delivery within Ontario correctional institutions. This study will provide updated information about HIV rates among incarcerated individuals in Ontario, look at how individuals are linked to care (upon admission, while in custody and when released) and determine the rates of ART use in Ontario correctional facilities from 2010-2017. This is consistent with goal 4.1j of the strategy to "improve access to consistent HIV and HCV care and other health services for people with HIV in prison."

#### *Breast Cancer Screening*

Evidence gathered from Ontario's administrative health records shows that women living with HIV are less likely to receive regular mammography screening for breast cancer than women in the general population. Barely 50% of eligible women living with HIV had a mammogram in the two-year study period compared to nearly two thirds

of women (63%) in the general population. This research was related to a broader body of work led by OHTN New Investigator Tony Antoniou and funded by OHTN, which focused on the equity of HIV health services delivery to people originally from Africa or the Caribbean. This research, completed in Q2, showed that people originally from Africa or the Caribbean are disproportionately hospitalized for conditions that could be managed in the community such as mental health concerns, diabetes or hypertension. Community members active on the research team felt that these findings relate to a reliance in their communities on specialist care. The [breast cancer research](#) published in August in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* also linked the low rates of mammogram use to a woman's exclusive reliance on specialist care, showing that HIV-positive women who had regular visits to a primary care doctor were more likely to have a mammogram than those who saw only specialists. The breast cancer research did not find any other factor (including ethnicity or country of birth) that influenced mammogram use. This underlines the importance of shared care models connecting primary care physicians and HIV specialists to delivering quality HIV care in Ontario. Further development of such models is goal 4.1c of the strategy.

### *Endgame*

Reports from the [OHTN Endgame conference](#) are now available on the OHTN web site including video interviews with many of the speakers. In addition, two well-received speakers from this conference (Oliver Bacon and David Stuart) presented more extended workshops about their initiatives at the most recent Ontario Clinics Network Education Day. These workshops focused on the program of rapid ART initiation now implemented in San Francisco, and the Dean Street Gay Men's Wellbeing Program to support gay men's sexual and emotional health needs and to build resiliency. These models of high-quality integrated care are helping to inform program development in Ontario (goals 4.1 and 4.2).

### **Additional Milestones Goal Four**

- Rapid response: "[Challenges faced by HIV-positive youth transitioning to adult care and evidence-based practices to address them](#)" published.
- Pharmacist's Education Day was held on Sept 14 facilitating discussion about how pharmacists might improve care for marginalized people living with HIV, as well as overviews of newly funded HCV drugs and expanded coverage and access to PrEP (including the approval of generic PrEP and its funding on the formulary!)
- A new module on HPV co-infection was added to the OCS survey allowing information gathering on the impact of this co-infection on women (such data collection already existed for men).
- A summary of literature on "practices of reporting viral load to public health facilities across high income countries" was created for the AIDS Bureau.
- A summary of literature on "blood donor deferral policies for men who have sex with men across high-income countries" was created for the AIDS Bureau.

### **Additional Milestones associated with Projects Moving to the Centre for Urban Health Solutions**

- OHTN completed the training of peer research associates for the Men's Fertility Study, research to understand and better support the parenting desires of HIV-positive men.
- OHTN is working with partners to integrate material from the HIV Compass project (on improving physician's initial communications with people newly diagnosed with HIV) into knowledge dissemination around new clinical care guidelines.

## 5. Ensure the quality, consistency and effectiveness of all provincially funded HIV programs and services

### *Prenatal Testing Report*

A report on trends in prenatal HIV testing performed at the Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) was requested by the AIDS Bureau and prepared by the Ontario HIV Epidemiology and Surveillance Initiative (OHESI) in Q2, with OHTN support. The report shows that 97.9% of prenatal testing in Ontario in 2016 included the required prenatal HIV test, and that over 97% of prenatal screening has been compliant with the HIV testing requirements since 2012. When HIV serology is not requested, a reminder letter is sent. Between 5-17 new cases of HIV infection have been diagnosed through prenatal testing each year in the five-year period from 2012-2016 (average 10). The report provides detailed statistics for each Ontario public health unit showing that HIV testing compliance is strongest in the northwestern part of the province, with the Northwestern unit, Thunder Bay district and Algoma all reaching or exceeding 99.4% compliance. HIV testing compliance in prenatal screening is lowest in the Niagara Regional Area and in the City of Toronto.

### *UWW/REACH 2.0 Intervention Research Fellows*

The latest cycle of the University without Walls Fellowship program began in Q2, focused on supporting emerging researchers embedded within at-risk communities to conduct intervention research. The seven graduate students accepted into the program (four in Ontario) are seeking to solve a specific HIV programming challenge, working or collaborating with a clinical, public health or community-based partner. The fellowship program provides a stipend to pilot the intervention; mentorship and training in community-based research, implementation science, and presentation of findings; as well as regular dialogue with their peers in a community of practice. [The 2017 Fellows](#) are focusing on issues such as: PrEP uptake among gay and bi men, research capacity in rural and Northern Canada, and improving sexual health among Indigenous youth. This national program will be moving to the Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital next quarter.

### **Additional Milestones Goal Five**

- There were more than 650 views of the provincial cascade report in the first two months since release.
- A new technical platform was purchased for the Ontario Cohort Study.
- Joanne Lindsay was appointed interim chair of the OCS Governance Committee, and Abigail Kroch appointed as OCS Director.
- HIV View was successfully used to provide overview reports to individual ASOs about the service use of their clients and the outcomes for their client populations.

### **Administration/ Organizational Support Milestones**

- An evaluation consultant was hired to assess the OHTN Applied Research Chair Program.
- A Knowledge Translation Day was held for OHTN-funded researchers to encourage collaboration and information sharing and to disseminate information about OHTN's new strategic plan.
- A mid-term review of the Policy and Practice Leadership Awards was completed.
- Funding competitions for community-based research and anoscopy training were adjudicated.
- An IT services catalogue for OHTN was completed and an off-site IT back-up was established.
- HR metrics were identified.

Thirty-four academic papers were published by OHTN funded scientists (including in-house researchers) in Q2. A full list is available on request.