



Promoting excellence and innovation  
in HIV research and care

## The OHTN Engagement Accord

**A memorandum of understanding between funded researchers and the OHTN to facilitate engagement of the HIV and at risk communities throughout the research process -- from the development of ideas and execution of the research through to transmission of research findings and influencing policy/practice.**

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funds the OHTN to conduct and support research that informs HIV prevention, care and support services in Ontario and provides evidence to enhance policy and practice.

In accordance with [our values](#), OHTN is committed to working with its funded researchers to ensure our research investments have a positive impact on health services and systems, and on the health and well-being of people with or at risk of HIV. Through our Impact-Focused Research Program, we aim to answer questions and solve problems that are highly relevant to one or more of the [populations in Ontario most affected by HIV](#). We strive to:

- build productive research-community-policy relationships
- create a collaborative, supportive environment for innovative research
- encourage evidence-based changes in policy, practice and the health system.

The OHTN, the HIV community and the researchers we support share a commitment to: meaningful engagement of community – drawing on community knowledge and perspective, relevant rigorous research/good science, academic freedom and accountability for the use of public dollars.

Our funded researchers are expected to publish their findings, present at conferences and identify other effective ways to share evidence with people living with or at risk of HIV and individuals responsible for planning/delivering health services (e.g. cafes scientifiques, videos, think tanks). The OHTN has skills and resources to help researchers identify effective knowledge translation strategies while avoiding unintended negative consequences (e.g. minimizing harm to individuals, communities or the health system that can be caused by the way findings are reported in the media).

The OHTN recognizes its researchers as an invaluable resource, and strongly supports and welcomes their ongoing involvement in efforts to encourage evidence-based policy and practice. With the OHTN Research Accord, we set out a vision of how researchers and the OHTN can work more closely together to achieve our common goals. We see the OHTN Research Accord as the basis for a mutually beneficial relationship -- a memorandum of understanding between the OHTN and researchers -- that will enhance research impact, improve the well-being of people at risk and provide better support and care for Ontarians living with HIV.

*The Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) is a network of people and organizations committed to bringing people, providers, systems and knowledge together to solve HIV. We work in meaningful partnership with people living with and affected by HIV, respecting and affirming the principles of the [Ontario Accord](#) – a statement of solidarity with people living with HIV. We work collaboratively with the AIDS Bureau and Ontario's HIV sector to achieve the goals of the new Ontario HIV Strategy.*

## **The OHTN's Commitment to Funded Researchers**

The OHTN agrees to:

### **Ensure Community Engagement and Relevance**

1. Engage people living with and at-risk of HIV in our governance and research decision-making processes.
2. Foster community-based, community-driven research through our funding programs, by supporting mentorship and engagement, and by training people within priority populations in research processes.
3. Broker research that addresses the needs of people living with and at risk of HIV as outlined in [Ontario's HIV/AIDS Strategy](#). Foster collaboration and knowledge user engagement in planning stages, as possible.
4. Strive to ensure that the proportion of funding devoted to research for/with specific populations reflects Ontario HIV epidemiology, while continually working with funding partners to minimize gaps.

### **Ensure Academic Rigour**

5. Use transparent peer-reviewed, community-informed processes to select outstanding research with a high potential to address and solve problems and have a measurable impact, on the populations most affected by HIV, in the short to medium term (i.e., 2-5 years).
6. Use targeted funding programs to build research capacity in priority areas and at-risk communities.
7. Continually evaluate our funding programs to ensure the research we fund meets the bar for excellence and relevance as well as impact.

### **Promote Collaboration and Partnerships**

8. Support collaboration between researchers in priority areas by encouraging dialogue and shared priority setting, and supporting meetings, think tanks and committees.
9. Fund champions (through the Research Chairs program) who will mentor others and provide a focal point for research collaboration.
10. Create data sharing agreements with the Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Science, Public Health Ontario and other agencies and cohort studies, which facilitate vital HIV research and guide improvements in the Prevention, Treatment and Care Cascade in Ontario.
11. Collaborate with CIHR, CANFAR and other HIV research funders to ensure the most effective use of limited resources to support research across all streams, with a particular focus on work that contributes to improvements in Ontario's HIV Prevention, Engagement and Care Cascade and the enhancement of programs and services for populations living with and at risk of HIV.
12. Work to enhance relationships among researchers, people with HIV, community-based agencies, health care providers, government policy makers, and educators – to build a culture of reciprocity and shared learning.
13. Support the capacity of community members and other knowledge users to participate in the research process through OHTN training and education programs.

### **Support Knowledge Sharing and Dissemination**

14. Strive for excellence in communication among all stakeholders, including within the public media. Make OHTN expertise in knowledge translation and dissemination in public forums available to research teams to help put evidence into the hands of people/organizations who will use it.
15. Communicate regularly with funded researchers and teams to understand the context for their work and help manage any challenges – including considering requests for changes in approved research in accordance with OHTN funding policies.
16. Assist in disseminating research findings in ways that promote and protect the interests of people with and at risk of HIV, and the communities where they live, and mitigate any potential harm.

17. Assist researchers in advocating for relevant, evidence-based change, and in presenting politically sensitive or controversial findings in ways that enhance constructive dialogue and respect the needs and contexts of the priority populations and communities we serve.
18. Brief Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care staff about emerging research evidence.

## **The OHTN's Expectations of Funded Researchers**

Funded researchers agree to:

### **Engage the HIV Community**

1. Respect and affirm the principles of the [Ontario Accord](#), a statement of solidarity concerning the greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS. Encourage input and guidance from people living with HIV and from the communities most affected by HIV. Funded research teams will create opportunities and processes to obtain and integrate community feedback, and maintain these opportunities throughout the life of the project, when feasible, and engage in collaborative knowledge sharing processes.
2. Foster a culture of collaboration and mentorship within the investigator's team and within the communities where he/she works. Encourage mutual learning and mentor newer researchers and engaged community members whenever possible.

### **Conduct Rigorous Research**

3. Strive to conduct and complete excellent, innovative and meaningful research in accordance with the funding guidelines and in keeping with the approved funding proposal.
4. Seek appropriate, written ethics approval of any research involving humans, animals, biohazardous agents, or radioactive materials prior to beginning that research. Ethics review must comply with the policies of the sponsoring institution and, when working with Indigenous communities, with the OCAP principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession and other ethical research principles that are specific to Indigenous, and Inuit and Metis communities.

### **Engage in Collaborative Knowledge Sharing Processes**

5. Consider OHTN and its networks as potential partners in knowledge dissemination efforts, and consult with OHTN staff about KTE plans, even in advance of scheduled reporting or after completion of the funding. OHTN welcomes invitations to work with research teams to maximize the benefits of knowledge dissemination for people with or at risk of HIV in Ontario and minimize any harm.
6. Facilitate joint press releases (when deemed beneficial) between OHTN, the researcher's host institution and/or the publishing journal. Notify OHTN of planned publications, as soon as possible once a journal acceptance has been received, with a copy of the draft paper, and any available details about the planned public schedule, or press release plans.
7. Notify OHTN Research Funding Program staff when any paper or publications acknowledging our funding, in whole or in part, has been accepted for publication, and no less than 30 days prior to publication. This will allow OHTN staff to contribute appropriately to knowledge dissemination. All embargos will be respected.
8. Collaborate with the OHTN and other stakeholders whenever possible to transform research findings into more effective HIV prevention and care programs and policies for Ontario. In this era of funding allocated specifically for impact-focused research, the intended outcome is to have a positive impact on all stakeholders and on policy at the community and system levels (i.e. beyond publication in peer reviewed journals).
9. Participate in dialogue and collaboration with the OHTN. Consider roles on review committees and other OHTN bodies as requested, and as an individual's time and commitments allow.

**Be Accountable for Use of Research Funds**

10. Authorize expenditures supporting the research proposal, as approved, in accordance with OHTN regulations outlined in the [OHTN Guidelines for Use of Awarded Funds](#) and the sponsoring institution policies. No one may initiate or authorize expenditures from an OHTN grant account without the grantee's delegated authority.
11. Complete and submit all required progress and financial reporting, including required plain language summaries, in a timely way.
12. Initiate requests for no-costs extensions or approval of other major research program changes 60 days prior to the scheduled conclusion of the grant and at least four (4) weeks prior to implementing changes.
13. Acknowledge the support of the OHTN in all resulting publications with text recognizing that this work was supported by an award/grant from "The Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN)."
14. Abide by the OHTN policy concerning Intellectual Property/Patents as outline in the [OHTN Guidelines for Use of Awarded Funds](#).

We agree that the accountabilities outlined above are acceptable and appropriate and that we will strive to meet these expectations.

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OHTN Manager of Impact Focused Research  
on behalf of the OHTN

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Designated Principal Investigator on behalf of  
the research team

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Date: