HIV ENDGAME PROGRAM

**Incubator Grants:
Application Guidelines**

LOI Application Deadline: every first Friday of the month (5:00 pm EST)

Results of LOI: within 4 weeks of LOI submission

Full Application Deadline: per LOI Notification Letter

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The OHTN HIV Endgame Program

The OHTN HIV Endgame Program funds groundwork to support the design, implementation, improvement, and scale-up of programs and services that move Ontario closer to reaching the HIV endgame. The program supports data, evidence-sharing, and impact activities that will:

- Meet the needs of populations in Ontario most affected by HIV
- Drive changes in policy and practice across the HIV prevention, engagement, and care cascade
- Lead to more integrated health and social services
- Identify effective ways to address the social determinants of health for communities most affected by HIV
- Contribute to a rapid learning HIV health and social system

The OHTN will invest in projects that will drive change in Ontario HIV health and social systems. More specifically, in 2025, the OHTN will support high-risk, high-reward initiatives through its incubator funding program.

The latest data and evidence show that some issues and gaps still remain in Ontario's efforts to meet 95-95-95 targets established by the World Health Organization:

- We still face challenges reaching the undiagnosed.
- Stigma remains a barrier to HIV testing, access to health and social services, and negatively impacts mental health.
- PrEP scale-up across the province remains a priority, especially in areas where PrEP-to-need ratio is poor.
- Efficient linkage to care, ART adherence, and access to mental health services can be optimized.

In order to address these issues and gaps mentioned above, the OHTN will implement an initiative that aims to promote and strengthen the development of ideas and projects that are solution-focused and meet the OHTN objectives, while maintaining transparency, ensuring equity and minimizing conflict of interest.

Grant Description

The Incubator Program will support projects that are deemed high-risk, high-reward and that will test, evaluate, and scale up innovative interventions and effective programs and services for the population living with and at risk for HIV in Ontario. The purpose of this grant is to support initiatives that will help meet or exceed 95-95-95 targets across the province.

The project must seek to move the needle in one of the seven areas of rapid learning and lead to changes in practice and policy. The project should also aim to enhance a status neutral approach to HIV, with a focus on accessibility, acceptability, and culturally sensitive approaches.

We encourage applications that seek to:
- Drive down the rates of new infections in Ontario.

- Address the current gap in HIV diagnosis by targeting the 11% undiagnosed in Ontario.
- Improve linkage to care by decreasing the time between infection and diagnosis, and between diagnosis and treatment.
- Contribute towards equitable access to treatment and other services and reduce health disparities.
- Improve health outcomes and enhance quality of life for all Ontarians with or at risk of HIV.

Rapid Learning Areas	Populations most affected by HIV
1. Scale-up PrEP prescribing and use in Ontario 2. Enhance HIV prevention with population-focused interventions 3. Expand HIV testing in Ontario 4. Improve linkage, adherence and retention in care in Ontario 5. Promote HIV clinical care standards/enhance care capacity 6. Reduce negative impacts of mental health issues on well-being 7. Integrate HIV and other services to provide wrap-around support and care	- People living with HIV - Men who have sex with men - People who use drugs - African, Caribbean, and Black communities - Indigenous communities - Women* *Women* = Cis and trans women, including African, Caribbean and Black women, women who use drugs, Indigenous women, and other women who face systemic and social inequities, are more likely to be exposed to HIV through a sexual or drug using partner.*

An incubator project is solution-focused and has the potential to disrupt the system or act as an accelerator to close gaps in HIV prevention, treatment, and care. It may employ research, evaluation, or implementation science methods and theory to drive execution and monitor impact and change. The evidence-based project could be considered high-risk (because of its complexity, the environment, interest holders [also referred to as stakeholders] involved, level of uncertainty) and high-reward (because if successful, it will lead to major changes to service delivery, practice and health and well-being of people living and at risk for HIV). An incubator project should be practical, feasible, scalable and involve multiple and diverse interest holders. Its implementation should be fast (no more than three months) and its evaluation timely.

Other Relevant Programs

The OHTN offers other services that might be of relevance or use to potential applicants before or during the implementation of their program of data, evidence-sharing, and impact activities. Please see the list of available services listed under Additional Resources to determine which one is best aligned with your interest and application.

Funds Available

Duration: up to 2 years
Maximum annual funding: $50,000 - $300,000

Payments will be made annually based on satisfactory progress and financial reporting (see reporting requirements)

Eligibility Criteria

The OHTN seeks proposals from outstanding multidisciplinary teams that:

- Have a documented history of working with people living with HIV, clinicians, community-based organizations, policy makers, and researchers in a collaborative and culturally respectful manner
- Have developed a data and evidence-sharing plan that:
    - Meaningfully engages affected communities throughout the project, including decision-making, evidence sharing, and implementation of results
    - Is solution-focused; seeks to develop, implement, and evaluate interventions, programs, services, treatments, or policies to address the issues that are relevant to the populations most affected by HIV in Ontario
    - Will support implementation of a new or improved intervention, program, service, treatment, or policy that will lead to change
    - Will contribute to a rapid learning health and social system for HIV in Ontario
- Have a Nominated Principal Applicant who:
    - Holds a primary appointment at an appropriate host organization in Ontario. Eligible institutions include university faculties and departments, research institutes and hospitals, and HIV agencies
    - Has primary employment and residence in Ontario

As a condition of OHTN funding, applicants and all members of their project team are expected to adhere to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for the Research Involving Humans (Version 2).

Expected Commitments

The Nominated Principal Applicant is expected to:

- Participate in rapid learning and improvement initiatives that emerge from OHTN's collective impact work
- Collaborate closely with the OHTN collective impact team and other OHTN-funded leaders, and be an active member of the broader HIV community in Ontario
- Apply an equity framework through project inception, development, and implementation

How to Apply

Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent for review. It is a **one-page** letter of intent that can be submitted at any time during the year.

If approved, the applicant will be invited to submit a full application. Notifications will be sent within four weeks of the application submission date. The deadline to submit a full application will be indicated in this notification.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to reach out to program staff to confirm eligibility and flag intention to apply to ensure a timely follow up.

Letter of Intent (LOI)

Applicants will complete and submit an LOI application via the OHTN grants portal. The required steps are

described below:

1. Create or log in to your OHTN grants portal account. Please note: Incomplete applications may be saved and returned to at a later date
2. Select the Project Title
3. Complete the Eligibility Questions
4. Complete LOI – Incubator Application Form:
   - Complete Nominated Principal Applicant contact information
   - Complete Amount Requested (see: Funds Available)
   - Complete Duration of Grant (up to 2 years)
5. Upload a brief Project Plan
6. Upload Project Team
7. Upload Applicant CV
8. Upload a completed Disclosure Statement
9. Review and submit your application

Note: All uploads should be in PDF format.

Project Plan

The project plan (max. two pages, excluding references) should contain the following information:
- The purpose and objectives of the project, and how these will close a known gap in one of the seven areas of learning and improvement
- An overview of the current environment and the facilitators or barriers it presents to project implementation and scale up
- A brief description of the intended outcomes, impacts and contributions to a rapid learning HIV health and social system, and relevance to the grant description.
- An overall budget (total amount requested, with estimates of cost breakdown for personnel, supplies and services, equipment, evidence-sharing activities)

Project Team

Describe the relevant experience, education, and expertise of all team members and how the various project partners will contribute to the data, evidence-sharing, and impact activities. Also, describe the involvement of relevant interest holders and why the team is best positioned to the tackle the problem described.

Applicant CV

The Nominated Principal Applicant should include a completed Common CV using the CIHR biosketch, Tri-agency CV, or any other common format (max 5 pages).

Disclosure Statement

The Disclosure Statement Form should be downloaded and completed as instructed. The Disclosure Statement allows applicants to disclose, in advance, any involvement with the OHTN that may be relevant to our conflict of interest policies. Any questions regarding this disclosure statement or our funding policy should be directed to program staff.

End of LOI Stage
Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full application and
notified within four weeks of the LOI submission.

Full Application

1. Log in to your OHTN grants portal account. Please note: Incomplete applications may be saved and returned to at a later date
2. Provide Financial Administrator Information
3. Complete the Incubator Full Application Form:
   - Review Nominated Principal Applicant contact information
   - Complete Co-Principal Applicant(s) contact information
   - Complete Co-Applicant(s) contact information
   - Complete Collaborator(s) – Knowledge User(s) contact information
   - Indicate relevant areas of learning and improvement
   - Complete the Plain Language Summary
4. Upload Project Proposal
5. Upload Timeline
6. Upload Team Description
7. Upload Budget & Budget Justification
8. Upload Nominated Principal Applicant CV
9. Upload Co-Principal Applicant CVs
10. Upload Host Institution Information
11. Upload Appendices
12. Review and submit your application by the deadline

Note: All uploads should be in PDF format.

Financial Administrator Information

Please provide the contact information of the financial administrator at your institution. The financial administrator is the person responsible for the financial management and reporting at the institution with which the Nominated Principal Applicant is affiliated. Once the task is submitted, the financial administrator will receive an email asking them to log in to the grants portal and complete a short form.

Note: You will not be able to submit your application until the financial administrator has submitted this information. To ensure adequate time for their response, please complete this task no later than 2 weeks prior to the application deadline.

Plain Language Summary

Provide a concise summary of the project activities and the anticipated impact on the population most affected by HIV and the HIV epidemic in Ontario. Describe the evidence-sharing approaches that will be implemented to facilitate the desired outcomes and impact. Note: this summary will be posted on the OHTN website if the project is awarded *(maximum 300 words, entered directly into application form).*

Project Proposal (max. 5 pages, excluding references)

The proposal should illustrate a clear rationale for the support being requested and address the following. The order and number of pages are provided as suggested guidelines only.

a. **Project Description** *(3 pages suggested)*
  - Describe the project's relevance to the grant description
  - Describe the proposed data and evidence-sharing activities (objectives, methods, and analyses)
  - Explain how the proposed work will disrupt the system or act as an accelerator, have impact, and contribute to the HIV prevention, engagement, and care cascade
  - Describe complementary or conflicting projects being pursued by others, how this project is positioned within that context, and how it avoids duplication
  - Discuss the ethical implications of the proposed work (including risks to individuals and communities) and how they will be mitigated
  - Where applicable, describe what is needed to achieve effectiveness and sustainability

b. **Areas of Learning and Improvement** *(1 page suggested)*
  - Describe the areas of rapid learning and improvement to be addressed by the project
  - Describe the plan for interest holder engagement. List relevant partners and interest holders that must be engaged to successfully address the areas of learning and improvement

c. **Impacts** *(1 page suggested)*
  - Describe the envisioned short-, or medium-term outcomes of this work, how it will impact one or more of the populations most affected by HIV in Ontario, and the steps required to achieve that impact
  - Include early measures of success or futility
  - Explain how this grant will drive change within the grant period
  - Describe anticipated challenges, limitations, and proposed solutions associated with the project
  - Describe how the findings will contribute to a rapid learning health and social system for HIV in Ontario
  - Describe how you plan to move the results into action at the program, practice and policy levels, including the methods and approaches you intend to use in this project.

Proposals should be no more than 5 pages (not including references), single spaced, minimum 11-point font, with 1" margins. Proposals, including references, must be converted to PDF prior to upload.

Timeline

Create a year-by-year timeline for the proposed activities, including anticipated outcomes and impacts, and relevance to areas of learnings and improvement. A template is available in the online grants portal.

Team Description

a. Describe the relevant experience and education of all team members (Co-Principal Applicants and Co-Applicants, as well as Collaborators and Knowledge Users when they play an integral part in

the operationalization of the project's data and evidence-sharing plan), including team's capacity, efficiency and experience in initiation and completing projects

b. Identify gaps in expertise and plans to fill them

Budget & Budget Justification

Complete the budget template for each year of the grant being requested. Maximum annual funds available and grant duration are listed under Funds Available.

Include a separate narrative that justifies the requested budget using the following guidelines:

- **Personnel**: Provide details on the rates of remuneration requested for staff, including employee benefits. The OHTN will allow a portion of salary support for principal or co-applicants who are independent community members and are not undertaking the work as part of a paid position.
- **Program Costs**: Provide details on the purchase of project materials. The need for these expenditures should be explained. Where a piece of material is approved, its title will be vested with the sponsoring institution. The budget may also include other expenses associated with piloting or scale-up of interventions, including participants' honorarium.
- **Supplies**: Funds for the purchase of supplies are not intended for the purchase of furniture, office equipment or other supplies normally purchased by the institution.
- **Evidence Sharing:** Please itemize all requests for evidence-sharing expenses, including publication costs in open access journals. Please note that this cost should not exceed one open access publication.
- **Other Expenses**: The OHTN will consider requests for computing costs, local travel for data collection, transportation of participants, etc.

The OHTN may approve a grant for a lesser amount than what has been requested. In this case, the applicant(s) may be required to submit a revised budget for the approved amount.

Nominated Principal Applicant CV

The NPA should include a completed Common CV using the CIHR biosketch, Tri-agency CV, or any other common format (max 5 pages each).

Please include: academic credentials, work history, awards, publications, grants, presentations, and a statement highlighting your most significant contributions to the HIV field in Ontario and their relation to the application. Contributions can take the form of:

- Publications and presentations
- Awards, degrees, credentials, etc.
- Innovations in service, care, leadership, etc.
- Knowledge translation, policy development, etc.
- Specialized training, strategic employment positions, etc.

Co-Principal Applicant CVs

Co-Principal Applicants should include a completed Common CV using the CIHR biosketch, Tri-agency CV, or any

other common format (max 5 pages each).

Host Institution Information

Please upload the Host Institution Verification Form and a letter of support from the Department Head or Executive Officer of the institution sponsoring your application.

Appendices

a. If your data and evidence-sharing activities involve the support or collaboration of external organizations or individuals not listed on the grant, please submit letters of support indicating their approval of, role in, and commitment to your proposed data and evidence-sharing plan. Letters from Collaborators or Knowledge Users will help explain and strengthen their role in the application. Letters of support from decision-makers are particularly significant. Please collate prior to uploading.
b. Questionnaires, surveys, or other tools related to the current proposal should be uploaded.
c. Applicants may upload up to three (3) manuscripts (submitted, accepted for publication, or published) that are relevant to the proposal. Manuscripts should be compressed to ensure easy upload.

Please collate all appendices. Note: any attachments exceeding the limits stated above will be removed from the application prior to review at the OHTN's discretion.

Submitting the Proposal

The complete LOI and Full applications must be submitted electronically.

Please be advised that all application materials and information provided to the OHTN, including personal information such as sexual orientation or HIV status, are kept strictly confidential and only forwarded to the members of the OHTN Review Committee and external grant reviewers, as needed. Submitted information may also be referenced in the review of your application. Please omit any personal information from your application that you do not want shared with these parties. Contact program staff if you have any questions.

Note: Please allow a sufficient amount of time to ensure successful electronic submission. File limits have been imposed to ensure your application is accessible to reviewers. All forms and uploads from your Financial Administrator or Host Institution must also be complete and submitted by the deadline. If you experience any difficulty with the online process, please notify program staff at least 24 hours prior to the deadline so that any issues may be resolved.

If your application is approved for funding, you will be asked to submit the additional information below:

Team CVs

All additional team members (Co-Applicants, and Knowledge Users) should include a completed Common CV using the CIHR biosketch, Tri-agency CV, or any other common format (max 5 pages each).

Ethics Documents

Submit collated copies of related ethics board approvals, copies of consent forms to be signed by prospective participants, or other explanatory materials for distribution. Final approved versions should be submitted when available, and annual renewal letters from the relevant REBs should be submitted to the OHTN in a timely manner. Draft forms are encouraged if final approved versions are not yet available.

Signature Page

Download and complete the signature page form. The signature page certifies that the signatory supports the application and will assume the role and responsibilities described in the proposal. All members of the research team are expected to sign this document. Please collate prior to submission.

Evaluation Criteria and Review Process

LOI applications will be reviewed by the OHTN for relevance, evidence of community engagement, and potential impact. Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full application.

Full applications will be reviewed independently by the OHTN Review Committee for relevance, impact, efficiency, context sensitivity, sustainability, and feasibility, and approach. Based on the review, the OHTN's Chief Executive Officer will recommend candidates to the OHTN Board for final funding consideration.

- **Relevance:** The proposal has the potential to drive improvements in Ontario's prevention, treatment and care cascade for one or more priority populations and contributes towards a rapid learning health and social system for HIV in Ontario.
- **Impact-Focus:** The evidence-sharing and impact plan accompanying each proposal: (a) identifies one or more interest holders (e.g. community-based organizations, clinics, local health integrated networks, policymakers) and address equity; (b) describes the outcomes of any evidence-sharing and educational activities (e.g. re-designed services or policies) and how they will contribute to achieving the Endgame strategy; and (c) establishes realistic pathways to achieve impact that are informed by what is known about effective evidence-sharing (e.g. timely feedback of information to improve organizational performance). Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be able to confirm that the plans achieved the desired impacts or that corrective action was taken to address identified concerns. There must be strong evaluation processes/indicators.
- **Efficiency:** The data or evidence used in the proposal is not available from another source. Any data collection or engagement process places a minimal burden on participants (e.g. people living with HIV, ASOs, clinics). The resulting information and insights are available in as close to real-time as possible, and participants receive regular updates about the use and impact of the collected information and insights.
- **Context Sensitivity and Replicability:** The data and evidence-sharing activities or intervention will have a direct impact on the Ontario HIV sector. Rapid learning activities will drive change that benefits Ontario. The applicant must have an interest in and the capacity to implement and scale up any programs or interventions being studied or promoted. The interventions themselves must

be feasible and replicable in the Ontario context (e.g. do not require a level of investment, model of funding, or staffing structure the system cannot support).

- **Good Value for Money and Sustainability:** The benefit or impact of the program or intervention justifies its cost, and the program or intervention is sustainable over time within existing budgets.
- **Feasibility:** The staff, expertise, structures, and budget necessary to deliver the program or intervention are in place. No one else is better positioned to deliver the program or initiative.
- **Approach:** The methodology, measurement, analysis, and ethical considerations are thorough, methodologically rigorous, and will successfully lead to data, evidence-sharing, and impact.

OHTN Engagement Accord

Successful applicants commit to meet the expectation of the OHTN Engagement Accord. They work in a highly collaborative way to actively engage the communities most affected by HIV; ensure rigorous data, evidence-sharing, and impact activities; build partnerships that can drive change; engage in collaborative knowledge-sharing processes; and demonstrate accountability for the use of grant funds.

Reporting Requirements

Continued release of funds is contingent upon timely receipt of satisfactory progress narrative and financial reports. Failure to submit a report of any kind (within three months of the due date) will preclude the grantee from receiving further financial support from the OHTN.

The following reporting requirements will help demonstrate the progress and success of the OHTN Incubator Grants. Report templates are accessible via the online grants portal.

- Annual narrative progress reports (3 pages), including questions about deliverables, challenges and successes, additional funding, community engagement, knowledge dissemination, and capacity-building
- Annual impact reports
- Bi-annual impact progress meetings via teleconference (30 minutes)
- Annual financial reports detailing how funds were spent
- A final narrative report (3 pages)
- A post-final narrative report one year past the end date of the grant to assess progress since the completion of the grant term

The OHTN grantees are expected to be leaders in Ontario and an active part of the broader Ontario HIV community and OHTN network, as outlined in the grant description. They will be resources for scientific information and data for policy makers and media.

Grantees will be accountable to the OHTN and to the people living with HIV who are impacted by their work. Successful candidates are expected to work with a Community Advisory Committee (comprised of people living with HIV and their health care providers) to inform the development of data and evidence-sharing initiatives and future research priorities. As a condition of ongoing funding, the grantee will be expected to demonstrate collaborations with relevant community interest holders, and the OHTN will independently verify these.

OHTN staff will work closely with grantees to: understand the context for their work; assist with managing challenges; help them meet their objectives; and understand and help disseminate findings.

Communication Requirements

1. Significant deviations from the original approved objectives, methodologies, budget, or other major changes must receive written authorization from the OHTN prior to implementation. Failure to notify the OHTN in a timely manner may result in termination of funding.
2. The OHTN expects applicants to publish their work in appropriate formats, including peer-reviewed publications, where appropriate. The OHTN expects to be notified before OHTN-supported research is published, and requests copies of all publications arising from work supported through this grant to assist the OHTN in its evaluation of this program.
3. The OHTN expects the Nominated Principal Applicant to take a leadership role in developing strategies to meet the needs of the priority communities with whom they work. The grantee is expected to collaborate with the OHTN, other OHTN-funded leaders, and community interest holders in developing such strategies.
4. Plain Language Summaries and other materials describing the project will be published on the OHTN website. The OHTN assumes responsibility for disseminating information about project findings contained within submitted reports via the OHTN website. However, OHTN affirms that the results are the intellectual property of the grant recipient and recognizes the need for teams to pursue publication in peer-reviewed publications or other appropriate formats. OHTN staff will work with grant recipients to ensure that its own dissemination efforts do not conflict with their publication plans.
5. Funding recipients are also expected to contribute to the OHTN's monitoring and evaluation activities, including but not limited to: participating in evaluation activities (progress teleconferences, progress and final narrative reports, surveys, interviews, etc.) and workshops, and providing data or reports as required for assessing progress and results.
6. The following acknowledgement must be included in all publications resulting from data, evidence-sharing, and impact activities supported by the OHTN: *This project is supported by a grant from the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN).*

Additional Resources
The Ontario HIV Epidemiology and Surveillance Initiative (OHESI)
OHESI provides access to timely, relevant, and comprehensive information about the epidemiology of HIV in Ontario, and disseminates this information more widely to different groups of interest holders. If you are looking for HIV epidemiologic data specific to Ontario, please visit the OHESI website.

The Ontario Cohort Study (OCS)
OCS data can be used to support data use, evidence production, and development of evidence-sharing and impact activities. OCS is a rich source of clinical, socio-behavioural, and population health data.

Individuals interested in using OCS will have access to:
- Clinical data obtained through participants' clinic records
- Psychosocial and behavioural data collected through an interviewer-administered standardized

    questionnaire
- Serological and viral load test data collected by Public Health Ontario Laboratory

All of the data in the OCS is anonymized and cannot be linked back to the participant.

There are two ways to use OCS data:
- Linking with external databases
- Accessing the OHTN cohort study data

Please consider the information below, should you decide to access the OCS data:
- Before the LOI deadline, contact the study coordinator to submit your request
- Your LOI application should outline your research objectives/questions related to the OCS and affirm that the OCS PI has reviewed them
- Your full application must include a Feasibility Letter provided by the OCS PI
- Please note that between the LOI stage and the full application stage, the OCS will ask you develop an OCS data analysis plan

For more information about the OCS, please visit the OCS website.

Contact Information

For questions regarding this Request for Proposals, please contact:
The OHTN HIV Endgame Program Staff
funding@ohtn.on.ca