HIV ENDGAME PROGRAM

Game Changer Grants:
Breaking New Ground Application Guidelines

Application Deadline**: January 18, 2027** (11:59 AM EST)

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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 actively support applicants with a demonstrated program of data, evidence-sharing, and impact that explicitly advances a rapidly evolving health and social system for HIV and adheres to the following steps of rapid learning:

- Identifies where we most need to "move the dial" through a rigorous and systematic process of inquiry
- Gathers timely data and informs the design of practice innovations, generates new approaches, and measures outcomes
- Implements evidence-informed approaches and interventions, monitors their implementation, evaluates their impact, and adjusts as required
- Sustains effective local approaches and supports their scale up across the system
- Creates a rapid learning and improvement culture (competencies and capacity) within our sector that fosters training, evaluation, and innovation

Through its strategic planning process and consultations with its interest holders (also referred to as stakeholders), OHTN has identified seven areas of rapid learning and improvement. The OHTN HIV Endgame Program will support data, evidence- sharing, and impact initiatives that will drive change in one or more of these areas of learning.

Rapid Learning Areas

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

Key populations most affected by HIV

- 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.*

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.

Grant Description

The Game Changer Grants (i.e.: Breaking New Ground and Implementation Science) are investigator-driven grants that will build on the innovation and engagement of Ontario's HIV community to generate knowledge, and pilot and scale up game-changing interventions. In this grant category, we are asking applicants to imagine how systems and services in Ontario could work better and propose high-reward opportunities for data, evidence-sharing, and impact. Although this grant is investigator-driven, all data, evidence-sharing, and impact ideas should be rooted in the needs of individuals living with and at risk of HIV and grounded by relationships with the frontline providers who will deliver the envisioned services and interventions.

The **Breaking New Ground Grant** funds innovative, high-reward projects that will break new ground and build evidence and programs to dramatically improve the prevention, treatment, and care cascade in Ontario. This funding stream supports the piloting, evaluation, or scale up of HIV interventions. The project should address a clear care or quality gap in the current HIV care cascade, or health and social system, and work to achieve impact at the front lines of HIV prevention and care.

This funding cycle, the OHTN is accepting applications for projects designed to implement and evaluate interventions that align with strategies outlined in the HIV Action Plan to 2030 of the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS (OACHA). These strategies include approaches specific to key populations affected by HIV, health equity, and development or implementation of evidence-based HIV programs or services. The proposed projects should aim to contribute to one of the following areas:

- Close gaps in HIV prevention, treatment, care, retention, and viral suppression among key populations (including African, Caribbean and Black people and Indigenous peoples) by:
    - Reducing new HIV infections
    - Ensuring timely access, high quality and culturally responsive HIV testing and PrEP delivery
    - Effectively supporting those most at risk of poor linkage to or retention in HIV care
    - Optimizing the health of people living with HIV (e.g. addressing the social determinants of health)
- Mitigate or remove structural barriers and promote equity of access to HIV services by:
    - Enhancing cultural competency to close gaps in access and retention in care
    - Reducing HIV stigma within health and social care settings
- Develop and pilot interventions that will remediate issues that have a negative effect on the health and well-being of people aging with HIV, such as:
    - Interventions that will address comorbidities and other social determinants of health, (e.g. mental health and substance use, frailty, polypharmacy, isolation, loneliness, HIV stigma and discrimination)
- Advance interventions designed to reduce HIV infection (e.g. behavioral interventions such as group-based HIV prevention intervention or interventions to increase PrEP awareness and acceptance), promote HIV testing, and support timely linkage and engagement in HIV care for women who use substances.
- Promote equity, efficiency, and integration of HIV health and social services by:
    - Finding innovative and effective ways to meet the needs of people living with HIV who

also experience other complex issues (e.g. mental health, substance use, unstable housing, violence, poverty, immigration issues, etc.)
    - Developing effective service collaborations and models of care
    - Developing and evaluating holistic approaches to HIV service delivery

During the grant term, grantees are expected to:

- Be an active part of the OHTN network and the broader Ontario HIV community
- Gather new evidence to improve the HIV prevention, engagement, and care cascade in Ontario
- Participate in OHTN initiatives, including policy exchanges, roundtables, collective impact groups, and research and community consultations
- Collaborate with, share information with, and seek feedback from other OHTN-funded innovators and the broader network, especially those communities impacted and affected by the activities proposed
- Build relationships with community members, frontline care providers, and policymakers; establish clear plans for evidence-sharing beyond academia; and be open to participating in learning and improvement processes within the HIV sector

Funds Available

Duration: up to 2 years
Annual funding: between $50,000 - $150,000

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

The OHTN does not fund drug trials.

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.

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 and other OHTN-funded leaders, and be an active member of the broader HIV community in Ontario
- Apply a multidisciplinary approach
- Work with a Community Advisory Committee made up of people living with HIV, clinicians, community-based organizations, policy makers, and researchers to inform the development of project activities and future priorities.

How to Apply

The application deadline is **January 18, 2027, by 11:59 AM (EST).**
The required process is described below:

Application

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. Complete the Eligibility Questions
3. Provide Financial Administrator Information
4. Complete the Game Changer Grant Application Form:
    - Review Nominated Principal Applicant contact information
    - Complete Co-Principal Applicant(s) contact information
    - Complete Co-Investigator(s) contact information
    - Complete Collaborator(s) – Knowledge User(s) contact information
    - Indicate relevant areas of learning and improvement
5. Upload Project Proposal
6. Upload Timeline
7. Upload Team Description
8. Upload Budget & Budget Justification
9. Upload Nominated Principal Applicant CV
10. Upload Co-Principal Applicant CVs
11. Upload Host Institution Information
12. Upload Letters of Support/Collaboration
13. Upload Appendices
14. Upload a completed Disclosure Statement
15. 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.

Project Proposal

(max. 7 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** *(4 pages suggested)*

- Explain how the questions are rooted in the needs of individuals living with and at risk of HIV
- Describe the proposed data and evidence-sharing activities (objectives, methods, and analyses)
- Explain how the proposed work will break new ground, have impact, and contribute to the HIV prevention, engagement, and care cascade and the project's relevance to the grant description
- Describe the plan for interest holder engagement
- Describe complementary or conflicting projects being pursued by others, how this project is positioned within that context, and how it avoids duplication
- Describe anticipated challenges, limitations, and proposed solutions associated with the project
- 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
- Discuss anticipated challenges and proposed solutions
- 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-, medium- and long-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
- Explain how this grant will drive change within the grant period
- Describe how the findings will contribute to a rapid learning health and social system for HIV in Ontario

d. **Evidence-sharing Plan** *(1 page suggested)*

- Describe previous successes in moving results into action at the program, practice, or policy levels
- Discuss methods and approaches to be used in the current proposal

Proposals should be no more than 7 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.
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.
- **Travel to Scientific Meetings/Conferences**: Applicants must indicate travel funds requested to attend scientific meetings and conferences in Ontario only. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the maximum amount that may be granted for travel in any one year will be $2,000. This amount is not transferable between fiscal years of a grant, unless previously approved by OHTN program staff.

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

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).

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.

Letters of Support/Collaboration (maximum 2 letters)

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.

Appendices

a. Questionnaires, surveys, or other tools related to the current proposal should be uploaded.
b. Applicants may upload up to three (3) manuscripts (submitted, accepted for publication, or published) and/or products (e.g., presentations, summaries) that they have developed and demonstrate their abilities and interests related to the application. 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.

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 funding program staff.

Submitting the Proposal

Applications must be submitted by **January 18, 2027, at 11:59 AM (EST).**

No changes can be made to a grant application after the submission deadline.

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, you will be asked to submit the additional information below:

Plain Language Summary

If the project is awarded funding, you will be asked to 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.

Team CVs

All additional team members (Co-Applicants, Collaborators, 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.

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 OHTN 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:

- Contact the study coordinator to submit your request
- Your application should outline your research objectives/questions related to the OCS and affirm that the OCS PI has reviewed them
- Your application must include a Feasibility Letter provided by the OCS PI
- Please note that the OCS will ask you develop an OCS data analysis plan
- Proposals that have been successful in the Endgame review stage will be submitted to the OCS Governance Committee for review
- Successful applications may need Governance Committee approval before funding can be granted

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

Evaluation Criteria and Review Process

Applications will be reviewed independently by the OHTN Review Committee for relevance, impact, efficiency, context sensitivity, sustainability, feasibility, and approach. Based on the review, 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); (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.
- **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:** The data and evidence-sharing activities or intervention will break new

ground or result in findings specific to 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 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 Game Changer Grants. Report templates are accessible via the online grants portal.

- Semi-annual progress meetings with funding program staff
- Initial impact plan at 6 months
- Annual narrative progress reports (3 pages), including questions about deliverables, challenges and successes, additional funding, community engagement, knowledge dissemination, capacity building, and impact
- 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

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. Any 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).*

Contact Information

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