

# INTERVENTIONS ALONG THE HIV ENGAGEMENT CASCADE FOR AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN & BLACK COMMUNITIES

## INTRODUCTION

The HIV Engagement Cascade—also referred to as the HIV Treatment Cascade, or the HIV care continuum—is a system to monitor the number of individuals living with HIV who are actually receiving medical care and the treatment they need. It was developed to recognize the various steps necessary to engage an individual who needs HIV care, all the way from getting tested for HIV to being able to suppress the virus through treatment.

Each step in the Cascade is important for improving the health of people living with HIV (PHAs) and preventing new HIV transmissions. Let us take a look at examples of interventions specifically targeted to African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) communities along each step of the Cascade.<sup>1</sup> We hope that examining each step of the Cascade in detail will get us thinking as service providers about how we might be able to better engage people in each step. For the purposes of this fact sheet, we divide interventions into the four broad categories of programs:

1. Community engagement, awareness and prevention
2. Testing promotion and support
3. Treatment adherence, care and support
4. Health promotion and leadership for PHAs

<sup>1</sup> As much as possible, we sought examples from across Canada. However, since Ontario is the only province with dedicated funding (through the AIDS Bureau, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care) for HIV programming with ACB communities, the majority of examples of interventions come from Ontario-based organizations.

This is the second of two fact sheets focused on the HIV Engagement Cascade. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide examples of interventions in Canada focused on African, Caribbean and Black communities, all along the different parts of the Cascade.

The first fact sheet provides an introduction to the Cascade and its components, how it relates to the UNAIDS 90-90-90 Goal, and some key principles in addressing the gaps in the Cascade.

## INFO SHEET #2 OF 2 | CHABAC, SPRING 2017

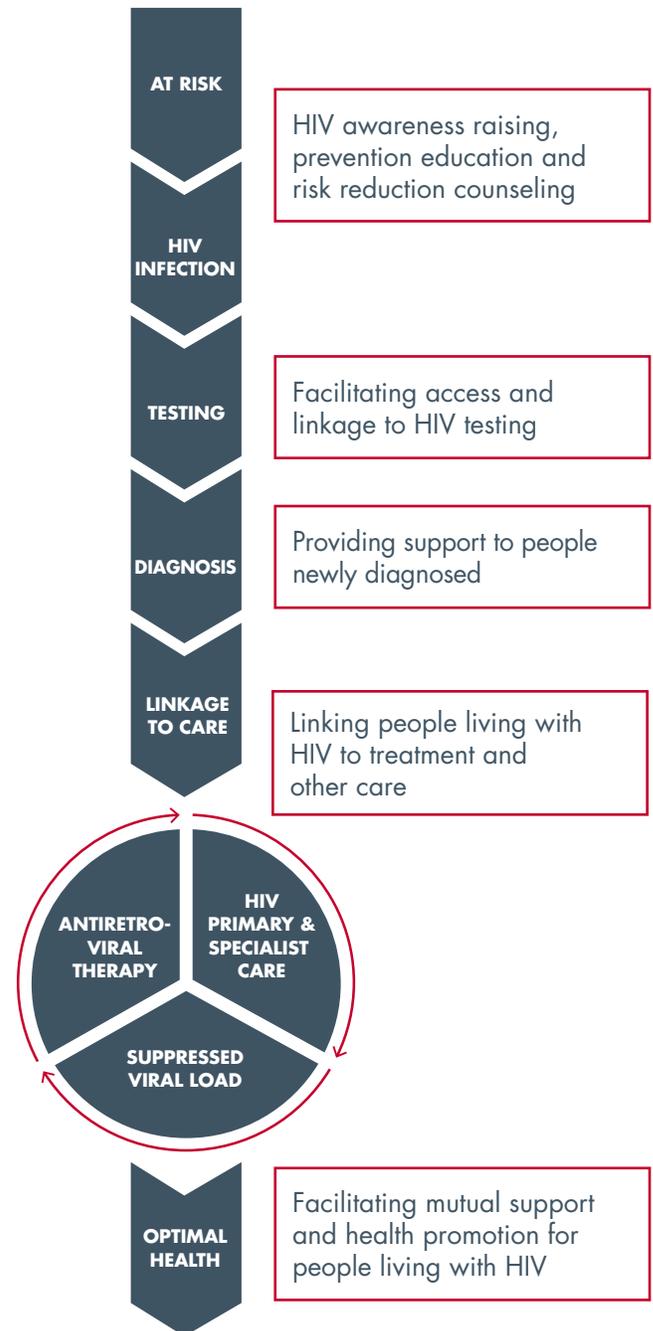


Figure adapted from: HIV/AIDS Strategy to 2026: Focusing Our Efforts. Changing the Course of the HIV Prevention, Engagement and Care C(1)

## WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ACB-FOCUSED INTERVENTIONS RELATED TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, HIV AWARENESS RAISING AND PREVENTION?

Prevention is a shared responsibility and all people, regardless of their HIV status, have an important role to play. Prevention interventions are important first steps in the Cascade that reinforce later steps such as HIV testing, treatment, care and support. In the early parts of the Cascade, we want to ensure that individuals recognize that they may be at risk of HIV, and have information about how to prevent HIV in ways that fit with their lives. They should know that HIV is an important health issue in Canada among ACB communities and that HIV is preventable. At this part of the Cascade, interventions focus on building HIV

awareness and dismantling stigma and discrimination within ACB communities. Common methods are awareness raising events and social marketing, workshops, presentations and outreach opportunities to connect with ACB community members, often in partnership with other community groups like faith and spiritual centers, immigrant or refugee settlement agencies and community or cultural centers.

The following are a few examples of interventions being used in Canada to promote HIV awareness and prevent HIV among ACB people:

EXAMPLE INTERVENTION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	FOR MORE INFORMATION
<b>BrAIDing with a Social Twist</b>	Greater Toronto Area	BrAIDing with a Social Twist is a free hairdressing and health promotion program for young women in North West Toronto. It teaches ACB youth aged 18–29 about braiding techniques, hair care, healthy relationships, sexual health and HIV/AIDS.	Braids For AIDS <a href="http://braidsforaids.com">braidsforaids.com</a>
<b>IT TAKES COURAGE</b>	Ontario	This initiative seeks to address HIV-related stigma in and with faith and spiritual communities. Key components of the strategy include a video, website and other resources for faith and spiritual leaders as well as front line workers.	ACCHO <a href="http://ittakescouragenow.com">ittakescouragenow.com</a>
<b>African Communities Program</b>	Calgary	This program seeks to raise awareness, reduce risk, promote healthy decision making, tackle stigma and break down barriers to testing in Calgary’s African communities. Education outreach reaches clients and staff of immigrant-serving agencies, African businesses, churches or mosques, and community gathering places.	HIV Community Link <a href="http://hivcl.org">hivcl.org</a>
<b>Harm Reduction Program</b>	Toronto	This program focuses on reducing harms associated with substance use in ACB communities. It delivers workshops on substance use, distributes harm reduction tools, holds Harm Reduction Drop-in discussion sessions for ACB substance users, and hosts special events in the community to raise awareness.	Black CAP <a href="http://blackcap.ca">blackcap.ca</a>
<b>3MV</b>	Toronto	Many Men, Many Voices (3MV) is a 3-day retreat workshop for young Black men in Toronto ages 16–29 who identify as gay, bisexual and/or transgender. The program aims to build community and enhance self-esteem related to racial and sexual identity, and address factors that may contribute to HIV and STI risk.	
<b>ACB Women Taking Control over HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health</b>	Toronto	This initiative recruits, trains and supports ACB women as community health ambassadors to mobilize, engage and deliver HIV education among women in their communities. The project has a team of 18 community health ambassadors working with various formal and informal networks of ACB women and community organizations that serve them across the Greater Toronto Area.	WHIWH <a href="http://whiwh.com">whiwh.com</a>
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Edmonton	This program has worked extensively in ACB communities in and around Edmonton for several years. Stigma and discrimination continue to be the major barriers for ACB individuals and communities to access testing, treatment, care and support. Highlighted activities include: High Tea for women, Grand marshalls at the Walk for Life, Moms and Tots groups, Women’s Conversation Café, and capacity building workshops for healthcare and social service providers.	HIV Edmonton <a href="http://www.hivedmonton.com">www.hivedmonton.com</a>

## WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ACB-FOCUSED INTERVENTIONS RELATED TO TESTING PROMOTION AND SUPPORT?

Reducing the number of people who are unaware of their HIV status requires increased uptake and frequency of HIV testing. Increasing the frequency and rates of HIV testing will help diagnose people sooner after they have acquired HIV. To ensure that ACB people living with HIV know their HIV status, targeted programs are needed to let them know where and how to access different types of testing, encourage them to access testing that is barrier-free and convenient, and support them through a positive diagnosis, with effective pre- and post-test counseling. Programs targeting improved testing often include campaigns to improve awareness of HIV risk

and encourage people to get tested regularly, improving access to more acceptable types of HIV testing (e.g., point-of-care rapid testing), making the offer of HIV testing a routine part of healthcare to increase HIV test uptake, integrating HIV testing with testing for other STIs, and enhanced partner notification services to better identify and diagnose people who may have been exposed to HIV.

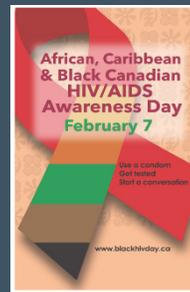
These are some of the interventions being used in Canada to promote HIV testing among ACB people and diagnose ACB people earlier:

EXAMPLE INTERVENTION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	FOR MORE INFORMATION
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**African, Caribbean and Black Canadian HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**

National

Launched in 2015, every February 7<sup>th</sup>, this event seeks to raise awareness that the risk of HIV infection among ACB Canadians is higher than among other Canadians, and promotes the message: "Start a conversation. Know your health options. End the stigma."



CHABAC  
[icad-cisd.com/chabac](http://icad-cisd.com/chabac)

**Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program**

Southern Ontario

This outreach program links Caribbean men to HIV testing during peak seasons of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, using outreach workers who are themselves newcomers and heterosexual Black men.

AIDS Committee of Windsor  
[aidswindsor.org](http://aidswindsor.org)  
Positive Living Niagara  
[positivelivingniagara.com](http://positivelivingniagara.com)  
Regional HIV/AIDS Connection out of London  
[hivaidsconnection.ca](http://hivaidsconnection.ca)  
AIDS Committee of Durham Region  
[aidsdurham.com](http://aidsdurham.com)

**Project M**

Toronto

This prevention project specifically targets girls of Muslim faith (mostly of African or Caribbean heritage), aged 14–29. The goal is to provide HIV prevention education in a faith-aligned, gender-targeted and linguistically mindful method.

Africans in Partnership Against AIDS  
[apaa.ca](http://apaa.ca)

**ACB Women Know Your Status Project**

Toronto

This is a community-based pilot intervention/program that takes HIV testing out of clinics and brings it into community settings. It aims to increase uptake of HIV testing among ACB women in Toronto through the engagement of community organizations, women leaders and their social networks and events based-testing during outreach.

WHIWH  
[whiwh.com](http://whiwh.com)

## WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ACB-FOCUSED INTERVENTIONS RELATED TO TREATMENT ADHERENCE, CARE AND SUPPORT?

Linking people who receive a positive diagnosis to accessible and culturally appropriate care and support services is important to ensure that people living with HIV enter the next stages of the Treatment Cascade. Once linked to care, a person needs to be supported and monitored and receive counselling to determine when they are ready and eligible to start treatment. Research shows that delays in linkage to medical care after HIV diagnosis are associated with faster disease progression. Once a person decides to start treatment, remaining in care is important so a person can be supported in adhering to their medications and receive ongoing viral load monitoring to ensure that their treatment is working.

Interventions that improve linkage to care incorporate methods such as referral systems that link people diagnosed with HIV into care, case management, and peer navigator programs. Appropriate care and support for people living with HIV may include a wide range of services in addition to medical care, such as mental health, harm reduction and addiction services, adherence support, affordable housing and prevention counselling.

These are some of the interventions being used in Canada to promote HIV treatment among ACB people living with HIV:

EXAMPLE INTERVENTION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	FOR MORE INFORMATION
<b>Clinic 554</b>	Fredericton	This family practice includes a physician—Dr. Adrian Edgar—who provides HIV clinical care for new Canadians, and is committed to principles of patient-driven healthcare (respect, inclusiveness, patient empowerment, caring, safety, harm-reduction, sex-positive, gender-celebratory care, anti-racist and feminist practices, and full-scope reproductive care).	<a href="http://clinic554.ca">Clinic 554 clinic554.ca</a>
<b>Afro-Canadian Positive Network of BC (ACPNET-BC)</b>	British Columbia	ACPNET offers appropriate cultural one-on-one adherence support, provided in the member’s specific language, as well as a buddy program where current members pair with a newcomer member and provide care and support related to HIV issues.	Facebook: Afro-Canadian Positive Network of BC Twitter: @acpnetbc
<b>ETSN (Ethno-racial Treatment Support Network) Peer Treatment Counselor Training</b>	Toronto	Learning and Helping Out: Peer Treatment & Counseling Training for Culturally Diverse Communities is an intensive training course facilitated by treatment experts, HIV-positive peers and health service providers about the health and treatment issues related to HIV (e.g., understanding and monitoring lab results, starting or changing HIV therapy, side effects, making sense of HIV research information, communication skills with health care providers, peer counseling, and presentation and facilitation skills).	<a href="http://hivimmigration.ca">Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment hivimmigration.ca</a>
<b>HIV Edmonton Intensive Support &amp; Outreach Navigation Program—Start Date April 1, 2017</b>	Edmonton	This program seeks to increase the capacity of ACB individuals and communities affected by HIV and AIDS to access testing, care and support. Activities include the provision of one-on-one support through an intensive case management approach for 12–15 multibarriered and/or highly vulnerable ACB individuals living with HIV per year; flexible support and outreach to assist ACB individuals aged 30–40 years with varying needs; and facilitation of a variety of health promotion activities.	<a href="http://hivedmonton.com">hivedmonton.com</a>

## WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ACB-FOCUSED INTERVENTIONS RELATED TO HEALTH PROMOTION AND LEADERSHIP FOR PHAS?

Finally, to achieve and maintain optimal health and a high quality of life, people living with HIV need to be supported to live life to the fullest (including social inclusion and sexual well-being), and remove the underlying reasons that they may drop out of care or find it difficult to adhere to treatment. Research shows that a combination of medical care and additional types of care and support improve the health outcomes of people living with HIV and curb subsequent HIV transmission. Programs that offer psychosocial supports, such as housing and food security programs, can reduce structural barriers to engagement in HIV care and treatment. Programs

that support people living with HIV can help them to live healthy sexual lives and incorporate prevention as part of their overall health and well-being. It is critical that human rights are respected and that people are empowered through information to make decisions about testing and treatment that are right for them. This includes information about the legal requirement to disclose prior to some sexual activities.

These are some of the interventions being used in Canada to promote the health and leadership of ACB people living with HIV:

EXAMPLE INTERVENTION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	FOR MORE INFORMATION
<b>African-Caribbean and Black Canadian support group</b>	Ottawa	This monthly support group for people of African-Caribbean descent living with HIV provides a confidential space where peers can come together to share and learn from each other, prepare and share a homemade meal, and hear from knowledgeable guest speakers to discuss relevant topics. On-site child care is also provided.	AIDS Committee of Ottawa <a href="http://aco-cso.ca/support">aco-cso.ca/support</a>
<b>Newcomer's Sexual Health Promotion Project</b>	Toronto	This program is for newcomers living with HIV who face access barriers and difficulty obtaining medical, employment, housing supports. This peer-based program promotes healthy sexuality, provides links and referrals to related services, provides information about immigration polices and health care coverage, and provides information about HIV disclosure and criminalization.	Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment <a href="http://hivimmigration.ca">hivimmigration.ca</a>
<b>African and Caribbean Community Development Program</b>	Waterloo Region	This program offers culturally and linguistically appropriate support services to ACB newcomers living with HIV, helping to address immigration and settlement needs, provide employment/education credential guidance, and providing social connection for newcomers who are feeling isolated in activities such as: ACB Men's Mentorship program, community gardens, and monthly Cooking Circle.	ACCKWA <a href="http://acckwa.com">acckwa.com</a>
<b>Knowledge into Action (KiA) Women's Group</b>	Winnipeg	African women living with HIV share their experiences of living with HIV, immigration and settlement, and issues of stigma and resilience. Shared projects include gardening, knitting, community-based research, and collaboration with local indigenous women living with HIV.	Sexuality Education Resource Centre MB <a href="http://www.serc.mb.ca/research/african-immigrant-women-and-hiv-perspectives-care-and-support">http://www.serc.mb.ca/research/african-immigrant-women-and-hiv-perspectives-care-and-support</a>

## CONCLUSION

The HIV Engagement Cascade provides a helpful conceptual framework and monitoring tool for how well the array of services are covering the essential steps towards optimal health for people living with HIV. We know that ACB people face unique challenges with respect to HIV prevention, care and treatment relating to their social, political and cultural locations within Canadian society. We need to identify gaps in the HIV Engagement Cascade, to ensure that people at risk of or living with HIV achieve optimal health. Fragmented, stand-alone HIV-related programs and services need to be linked to one another—as well as to other non-HIV related services needed by ACB people—to ensure that people living with and at risk for HIV have access to services that can support their care. Public health authorities, healthcare providers and frontline service providers all have a role to play in making services more accessible and providing people with ongoing care. Patching the leaks in the Cascade may require new interventions and new partnerships and/or the re-conceptualization of how services are integrated and linked with other services.

Key questions to ask yourself and your organization are:(2)

- How can your organization better engage ACB people living with HIV in the Engagement Cascade?
- What additional services could your organization provide to improve engagement in one or more steps of the Cascade? Can you learn from what other agencies have done? Would it work in your region?
- How can your services be adapted to better meet the needs of ACB communities?
- What initiatives or partnerships could you develop to connect people living with HIV to your services? What initiatives or partnerships could you develop to connect your clients with other relevant services in your community?
- How can you evaluate whether your clients are entering the next step of the Cascade?

## REFERENCES:

1. Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS (OACHA). HIV/AIDS Strategy to 2026: Focusing Our Efforts—Changing the Course of the HIV Prevention, Engagement and Care Cascade in Ontario. 2016.
2. CATIE. The HIV Treatment Cascade—patching the leaks to improve HIV prevention, 2013 [Internet]. Available from: <http://www.catie.ca/en/pif/spring-2013/hiv-treatment-cascade-patching-leaks-improve-hiv-prevention>