

# Engaging African, Caribbean and Black Communities in Addressing HIV

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this factsheet is to shed light on community mobilization as a way to effectively raise awareness, improve prevention, reduce stigma and address HIV and AIDS amongst African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) communities in Canada.

“While the great diversity of Canada’s ACB population is recognized, it is also recognized that meeting the diverse needs of these populations is a challenge. For example, programming needs to be responsive to the diversity of languages and cultures within Canada’s ACB population.”<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION?

Community mobilization is the practice of engaging communities to determine community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in order to achieve the goal of stimulating representative participation, peaceful change, accountability, and good governance.

## The need for community mobilization in Canadian ACB communities

- While ACB communities comprise just 2.5% of Canada’s population, they account for 13.9% of new HIV infections in Canada in 2014.<sup>2</sup>
- The diversity amongst ACB communities calls for strategies that are tailored to the needs, cultures, languages and understandings of these varied communities.
- ACB communities need positive role models and leaders whom they trust to help build individual and community capacity to learn about HIV and access prevention, treatment and care. Culturally appropriate HIV/AIDS programs that are tailored to the needs of ACB communities are more effective in reaching out to these populations.
- Community engagement is a critical to achieving success at all steps of the HIV care cascade, from testing to long-term care and treatment of ACB people living with HIV across their life span.<sup>3</sup>
- Immigrants, newcomers and refugees who are members of ACB communities may not receive adequate HIV education or have access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services in their country of origin.
- HIV prevention and care needs may not be addressed due to competing challenges and priorities, including socio-economic circumstances, stigma and exclusion.
- Stigma and discrimination based on gender, race and sexual orientation are a significant barrier to HIV prevention in ACB communities and can negatively impact HIV testing rates and the ability of people living with HIV to seek treatment, care and support.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ICAD, WHIWH and ACCHO. (2011). *Towards the Improvement of HIV Prevention Services for African, Caribbean and Black Communities in Canada: A Gap Analysis*. Ottawa: Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)

<sup>2</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. *Summary: Estimates of HIV Incidence, Prevalence and Proportion Undiagnosed in Canada, (2014)*. <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/hiv-aids-estimates-2014-vih-sida-estimations/alt/hiv-aids-estimates-2014-vih-sida-estimations-eng.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> ICAD, ACCHO & WHIWH (2011). *Towards the Improvement of HIV Prevention Services for African, African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO)*. (2013). *Ontario HIV/AIDS Strategy for African, Caribbean and Black Communities 2013-2018*. Toronto: ACCHO.

<sup>4</sup> ICAD, WHIWH and ACCHO. (2011). *Towards the Improvement of HIV Prevention Services for African, Caribbean and Black Communities in Canada: A Gap Analysis*. Ottawa: Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD).

# What does Community mobilization enable?<sup>5</sup>

“As individuals we might all have different conceptions of what HIV is and how to confront it. But responding strategically requires engaging ACB communities to generate greater awareness, breakdown the stigma, and support community-based programs and services. And people who are living with HIV are absolutely crucial to these efforts.”

*Winston Husbands, PhD. Director of Research, ACT OHTN Community Scholar*

- Fosters trust amongst participating community groups and the facilitators
- Establishes a comfortable environment to discuss taboo subjects
- Breaks down the language and cultural barriers present in different ACB communities
- Reduces denial, stigma, and discrimination
- Increased awareness and understanding of HIV
- Fosters acceptance of HIV/AIDS as an important issue for the communities
- Helps to normalize HIV counselling and testing services and encourages people to know their status
- Facilitates ongoing treatment, care and support for individuals living with HIV
- Inclusion of community leaders and faith-based leaders in the growth of the community and the undertaking of reducing HIV infections
- A more prudent view of media’s “hyper-sexualisation” of ACB people and its impacts on social and individuals identities<sup>6</sup>

## Examples of Community Mobilization

### #1 African, Caribbean and Black Women Taking Control over HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health Initiative

The initiative is a three year project that is part of a larger HIV Program running at Women’s Health In Women’s Hands (WHIWH) which focuses primarily on treatment, support and care for women living with HIV (WLWH). This project targets ACB women over 16 years old in Toronto and aims to enhance the existing “Care Cascade” by including HIV education, testing, diagnosis and linkage to primary healthcare. It does this by fostering faith-based networks in ACB communities, and by building skills and leadership (through workshop training) among service providers to affect change that will reduce risk factors for HIV/AIDS infection among ACB women. Part of the project is to have trained Community Health Ambassadors deliver workshops in their communities. The Community Health Ambassador’s role is to increase the knowledge in our communities about HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health. For more information on the project, see: <http://www.whiwh.com/community-services-programs>. “It’s built my confidence...and I did realize that within the community, there is still a lot of stigma going on, which is why I definitely want to continue with this. People are still afraid of talking about HIV. During the afro festival, when you approach people

and try to give them condoms they say no, and there’s still a lot that has to be done, but personally I feel like I reached out to many people outside and even some family members, and just among my friends who were born and raised here and had no idea about how someone could get the virus.” - WHIWH Community Health Ambassador

### #2 “Brothers Chats”

“Brothers Chat” is part of The African Communities Project and is operational since 2010. It is one of HIV Community Link Calgary’s (HIVCL) population specific projects. The program engages members in many different groups of the African community. “Brothers Chat” is a program where informal discussions take place in barbershops amongst clients, barbers and two members of the HIVCL. The members of HIV Community Link Calgary visit the barbershops and give HIV 101 training in an informal manner and share information on transmission, testing, harm reduction and stigma while men are having their hair cut. For more information on the project, see: <http://www.hivcl.org/support-services/outreach-education/right-to-know/>.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation. (2015). HIV/AIDS Community Mobilization. Retrieved 12 2, 2015, from World Health Organisation: <http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/toolkit/components/community/en/>

<sup>6</sup> African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO). (2012). Proceedings and Evaluation Report: 3rd Ontario African, Caribbean and Black Think Tank. Toronto: ACCHO and SanPatten.

# Step by step process

With community mobilization, the role of the implementing agency shifts from a more traditional one of teacher/advvisor/leader to that of facilitator. When facilitating community engagement, facilitators should keep in mind this step-by-step process:



## CULTURALLY AWARE APPROACH <sup>7</sup>

Culturally aware approaches emphasize capacity building in addressing social and structural determinants of health and the need to engage the local community in HIV programming.



Inclusive Practice: "A culturally based approach that acknowledges differences within and between cultural groups, as well as the intersection of identities that creates individual experiences and needs. Inclusive practice emphasizes the importance of self-determination, social justice, and capacity building in addressing determinants of health disparities."<sup>8</sup>

*In order to guarantee that the efforts are appropriate, accessible and do not reproduce stigma, it is invaluable that ACB communities be involved in all stages of developing and implementing HIV prevention program aimed towards the ACB community.*

<sup>7,8</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. (Oct 16 2015). CATIE Forum. Breakout session: Exploring models of culturally competent HIV and hepatitis C services in the full continuum of prevention and care. "Situating the discussion: what is known about the prevention of sexually transmitted and blood borne infections among immigrant and newcomer communities".

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Black, African and Caribbean Network (CHABAC) is a national network of organizations, individuals and other stakeholders who are dedicated to responding to issues related to HIV and AIDS in Canada's African, Caribbean and Black communities.

This fact sheet was developed by:



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