

LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE WITH HIV

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED HIV ORGANIZATIONS

BACKGROUND

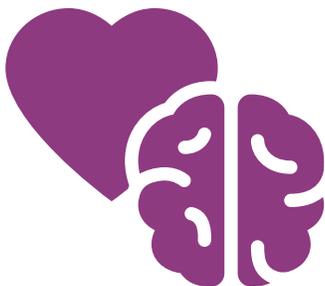
Over the past 25 years, for people living with HIV who have access to combined antiretroviral therapy (cART), HIV has evolved from a progressive condition with a high fatality rate into a manageable chronic condition that many will live with into older age. Today, with early diagnosis and prompt treatment, people living with HIV can expect to live as long as the general population¹. Additionally, the number of people newly diagnosed with HIV annually in Canada increased 25.3% between 2014 and 2018². Longer life spans and greater numbers of new HIV diagnoses mean there is a growing number of people living with HIV (PLWHIV) across Canada.

For people living with HIV, the shift from deadly infection to long-term condition requires a corresponding shift in focus from basic medical management to improving health and wellbeing. Community-based HIV organizations are an important source of support and provide a sense of community and belonging. There has recently been increasing conversation about what else is needed to support people living with HIV in their journey towards, and beyond, viral load suppression. Where do quality of life, wellness and wellbeing fit within treatment goals related viral suppression? What role do community-based HIV organizations play?

Realize has taken a leadership role in investigating what optimal health and wellbeing mean to people living with HIV. Our goal is to better understand the supports and circumstances that contribute to optimal health and wellbeing for people living with HIV as well as the issues, barriers, and gaps that interfere with attaining it. This process has included: consensus-building activities with researchers, and health professionals; holding community consultations with people living with HIV; and co-hosting a series of meetings with subject matter experts and people living with HIV to conceptualize optimal health and wellbeing for this population. Through this comprehensive process, we learned that community-based HIV organizations are integral in the lives of people living with HIV. Despite the indisputable role of community-based HIV organizations, some issues and corresponding recommendations emerged as to how these organizations could better contribute to optimizing health and well-being for people living with HIV:

1

People living with HIV are experts on the programs and services they need to optimize their health and wellbeing.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Continue to meaningfully involve people living with HIV in decisions about programming related to HIV, health and wellbeing

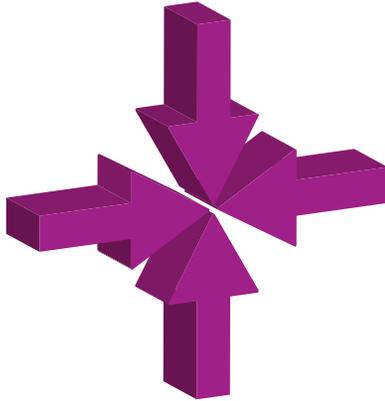
2 Older adults and long-term survivors (including youth) have unique needs that aren't always met by current programs



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Work with older adults and long-term survivors to ensure that programming meets their needs
- ✓ Actively engage with older adults and long-term survivors to ensure they feel welcome and are participating in offered programming

3 People living with HIV have multiple intersecting needs that are best met if services are integrated and comprehensive



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Take an intersectional approach to wellbeing, acknowledging that each person embodies multiple social/personal identities, and these intersect to impact their health and wellbeing
- ✓ Take direct action to combat racism and other forms of stigma and discrimination to ensure inclusive and equitable spaces and services

OVERALL GOAL: IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED HIV ORGANIZATIONS

The communities of people living with HIV are diverse with intersecting needs. Community-based HIV organizations are integral to the wellbeing of many people living with HIV and, as such, should strive to provide programs and services that are relevant, desired, and meet unaddressed needs.

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