

# HIV and Older Adults

## A Blended Learning Course

Both triumphs and tribulations have contributed to a steady increase in the number of older adults living with HIV in Canada. HIV medications have improved so much over the last 20 years that people living with HIV and few other risk factors can now expect to live almost as long as their HIV-negative peers. However, HIV cases among people age 50 and older represent an increasing proportion of all new diagnoses -- 22% in 2014 (PHAC, 2015) – a trend largely perpetuated by ageism.

It is critical that organizations serving older adults are equipped to welcome people aging with HIV who may experience a greater burden of disease than their HIV-negative peers and thus may require more rehabilitative services and supports, sometimes at earlier ages (Kendall et al., 2014; Justice & Falutz, 2014). According to the *50 Plus* project which surveyed more than 400 people over 50 years old living with HIV, 76% of respondents anticipated difficulties with self-care, 70% with healthcare access, and 66% with stigma/discrimination as they grew older with HIV (Power, Bell & Freemantle, 2010a).

### The Need to Foster Knowledge and Confidence to Serve People Aging with HIV

In 2015, 232 service providers responded to an online needs assessment survey conducted by **Realize**. Less than half of survey participants (43.5%) said that they had personally cared for someone living with HIV despite there being over 1600 people living with HIV accessing home care, long-term care and complex continuing care in Canada (Foebel et al., 2016). 70% of respondents had never received any training on HIV and aging and regardless of work setting (e.g. HIV or aging sector), and self-reported knowledge of HIV and older adults was low to moderate.

### Course Goals

This course will provide information and strategies to help front-line healthcare and community service providers:

- Understand and respond confidently to the health and social needs of clients aging with HIV
- Identify and connect people to relevant local, provincial and national services
- Challenge myths and misconceptions about aging, HIV and sex

### About the Course

HIV and Older Adults is an evidence-based blended learning course which incorporates online self-study and group discussion.



**The self-study modules:** The modules have been designed to appeal to learners with different learning needs. Reading material is supported with case examples, videos, discussion forums and links to additional content. Each of the four core modules includes an assignment which stimulates thinking among learners about how the content covered might be useful in their day-to-day work. Each of the four core modules also ends with a quiz. Both can be used to verify module completion and track participant learning.

**The interactive session:** The purpose of the interactive sessions is three-fold: 1) to raise awareness of local resources for people aging with HIV in the learners' geographic area; 2) to provide support to learners as they reflect on and consider how to integrate their new knowledge and skills in practice; and 3) to give learners the opportunity to hear from an older adult living with HIV about their lived experiences and needs and preferences for care and support.

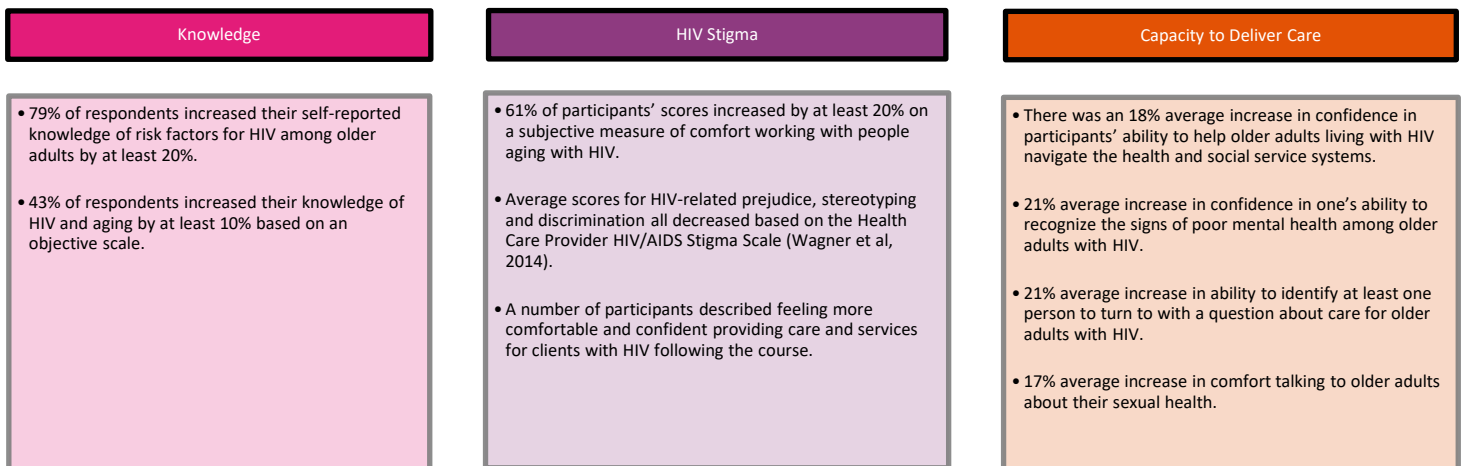
### Who is this course suitable for?

The course was designed to meet the learning needs of a range of practitioners (e.g., nurses, social workers, personal support workers, rehabilitation professionals) working in a variety of settings (e.g., hospital, home care, long term care, community-based organizations). Learners with different levels of experience working with people living with HIV and varied learning styles can be accommodated.

*“Modules were structured so that learners could get into increasingly more detailed information on each topic if one wished to do so.”*

### Course Outcomes – Increased Knowledge and Capacity, Decreased Stigma

In 2016, the blended learning version of the course was piloted with 109 individuals from Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax. 90 registrants completed some or all of the course components. The following changes occurred among learners:



*“The next time I work with an older adult with HIV I feel like I will have much better resources in my toolbox. I will be better prepared to discuss their needs with them.”*

*“I feel better equipped to work with clients affected by this disease, and to spread the information I've gathered to others”.*