**Gay Men's Health Hub Task Group Recommendation Report**

## Task Group Objectives and Process

The Toronto to Zero Gay Men's Health Hub Task Group convened for 3 meetings between April 2019 and February 2020 to discuss the development of an integrated health hub for 2 Spirit, gay, bisexual, queer, and other trans and cisgender men who have sex with men (2SGBMSM) living in Toronto. This task group sought specifically to:

- Identify challenges and strengths of 2SGBMSM living in Toronto in response to systemic barriers that can make them vulnerable to HIV or that may negatively impact their health while living with HIV;
- Recommend strategies for an integrated health hub for 2SGBMSM to engage and provide culturally relevant services to diverse communities of 2SGBMSM;
- Collaborate with other task groups focused on the delivery of services along the prevention, treatment, and care cascade to discuss specific challenges for the health of 2SGBMSM and how to ensure services are accessible and relevant to the needs of these communities;
- Deliver a report to the Champion Team that identifies this group's membership, key discussions about these issues, and a list of key recommendations to incorporate into Toronto to Zero's Action Plan.

Development of these recommendations was informed by discussion from other groups working towards the development of the health hub project, including sub-groups on mental health, clinical services, and social programming.

As recommendations for a space intended to address the holistic health needs of 2SGBMSM, our recommendations address all 5 of the objectives of Toronto to Zero (Drive Down New Transmissions that Occur in Toronto; Launch Innovative, Accessible Testing Programs; Link and Retain People Living with HIV in Care; Improve the Health and Well-being of People Living with HIV; Stop HIV Stigma).

## Task Group Membership

Co-chairs:

- John McCullagh, Community Member
- John Maxwell, ACT

Representatives of the following organizations/constituencies:

- Aaron Bowerman, PASAN
- Alex St. John, David Kelly Services/Family Services Toronto
- Barry Adam, OHTN
- Chris Leonard, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
- Colin Kovacs, Maple Leaf Medical Clinic
- Dane Griffiths , GMSH
- Daniel Pugh, Sherbourne Health
- David Knox, Maple Leaf Medical Clinic,

- Eugene Nam, Community Member
- Gareth Henry, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
- Garfield Durrant, Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
- Gary Rubin, Church-Wellesley Health
- Gerardo Bettancourt, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples
- Haran Vijayanathan, ASAAP
- Jack Mohr, OHTN
- Jean Bacon, OHTN
- Jeff Reinhart, Sherbourne Health Centre
- Keith McCrady, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations
- Keith Showers, Community Member
- Leo Mitterni, Hassle Free Clinic
- Michel Lussier, Action Positive
- Phillip Banks, GMSH
- Philippe El-Helou, Maple Leaf Medical Clinic
- Quinn Fenton, Toronto Public Health
- Rodney Rousseau, Researcher
- Ron Rosenes, Community Member
- Ryan Kerr, OHTN
- Tim Guimond, St. Michael's Hospital
- Tony Di Pede, Community Member
- Tyler Morden, ACT

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1. Establish a centrally located, easily accessible, safe, welcoming space for all cis and trans guys who are into guys — regardless of age, race, HIV status, ethnicity, language, gender identity, religious beliefs, sexual identity, socio-economic status, immigration status or ability.

A significant proportion of men who have sex with men are not "out" to their health care providers, which means they are not receiving appropriate preventive care or health risk/mental health counselling. A recent Toronto-based study of guys who are into guys at high risk of acquiring HIV showed that "47.6% lack a family physician with whom they felt comfortable discussing sexual health" (Wilton et al 2016). A study of health access of LGBT people conducted in eastern Canada found that, while the greatest concerns of heterosexual people accessing health care are simply the results of medical tests, the greatest concerns of LGBT people in accessing health care are "issues of confidentiality, fear of facing prejudice or ignorance from the medical system and physicians, and the possible consequence of not having their health needs met" (Hoskin et al, 2016). According to a recent survey in Ottawa conducted by Dr Paul MacPherson, physicians are not aware of the unique health needs of guys who are into guys and are not providing consistent, appropriate care. Evaluation of the last major HIV testing campaign in Toronto (2011-2012) found that many men travel a considerable distance to access care they perceive to be gay-friendly, even by-passing clinics closer to home and work (Adam et al., 2014).

Other jurisdictions (e.g. London, UK, San Francisco, New York, Vancouver) have shown that establishing welcoming, sex-positive, non-judgemental, stigma-free, culturally competent spaces for guys who are into guys can lead to a significant increase in STI and HIV testing, engagement in medical care, uptake of PrEP (among men who are HIV-) and viral suppression (among men who are HIV+). They also result in a marked increase in the number of racialized guys who are into guys accessing services and higher levels of satisfaction with those services.

To ensure the space is welcoming to all cis and trans guys who are into guys, it will be critical to ensure that:

- the culture and ethos of the space is sex-positive, non-judgemental and stigma-free
- the men coming to the space see themselves reflected in the people who work and volunteer there – in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, etc.
- the space engages peers and offers peer-to-peer services
- any socio-economic barriers to using services are addressed
- people can be served in various languages.

2. Provide comprehensive, holistic, HIV status-neutral services that empower all cis and trans guys who are into guys and promote their physical, sexual, mental, emotional, community and spiritual/social well-being.

The hub will adopt and learn from the Indigenous approach to holistic health, valuing and promoting all aspects of health and wellbeing. It will empower guys who are into guys by either providing or connecting them to the range of physical, sexual, mental, emotional, community and spiritual/social services they may need. In particular, the hub will:

- Provide **sexual health services**, including couples and relationship counselling and groups (e.g. navigating open and closed relationships)
- Offer **innovative, supportive STI testing** (including rapid HCV and anonymous rapid HIV) and treatment programs, plus walk-in "express testing", that make it fast and easy for guys to get the testing services they need

- Provide **immediate access to PrEP, PEP, rapid HIV treatment as well as counselling, warm referrals and linkage to culturally friendly primary care services** in the community (including ongoing care as needed until men are linked to other services)
- Offer a range of **evidence-based individual and group mental health services** on site, as well as warm referrals and linkage to other mental health and substance-use services in the community
- Provide **harm reduction centred programming and supplies**
- Offer **sober, non-sexual social and cultural programming** that empowers all cis and trans guys who are into guys, builds community, and reduces loneliness and social isolation.
- Connect guys to **community, social and spiritual programs**, such as gay sports leagues and social organizations, and gay-friendly spiritual organizations
- Link guys to **other health and social programs** they may need (e.g. housing services, employment services, adoption services, income supports, insurance and drug benefits).

3. Close the gap in mental health and emotional wellness services for guys who are into guys.

A scan of mental health programs and practitioners that serve gay men in Toronto conducted by the OHTN found that these services are limited and disconnected/fragmented. This evidence reinforces that lack of access to mental health services is contributing to health inequities in guys who are into guys and adversely affecting their health and well-being. The hub will develop a mental health assessment tool that can be offered to all guys who are into guys to help them identify and understand their needs. It will also help them connect with appropriate mental health and substance-use services both at the hub and throughout the community.

4. Establish a Centre for Excellence in gay men's health.

The hub will become a centre of excellence in gay men's health by integrating clinical care, community involvement, education and research – one that builds on the commitment to gay men's health within the community. It will:

- be a teaching site for health care providers, including physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists – training the next generation of providers who will provide gay-friendly care
- provide fulfilling opportunities and training for peers, advocates and volunteers
- be a testing ground for innovative services and other research that will lead to better health and well-being for guys who are into guys
- make effective use of technology (e.g. booking systems, text messaging, apps, kiosk services, management systems, multi-plex testing technology) to deliver friendly, timely, responsive seamless services.