



## OHTN Cohort Study (OCS) Quarterly Update

February 2022

### OCS Productivity during COVID

Despite the challenges at the clinics due to the ongoing pandemic, OCS productivity improved substantially in 2021.

- 2,469 questionnaires were administered, an increase of 27% from 2020, and an increase of 19% since 2019.
- There were 4223 participants active at OCS sites at the end of 2021.
- There were 239 new consents: 5.7% of the total cohort.

### Celebrating Black History Month

In recognition of Black History Month and African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) HIV Awareness Day, we acknowledge the contributions of ACB scholars, community members, and participants to the OCS. Since 2017, the OCS has made specific efforts to increase the participation of ACB people in the study and on OCS committees. In this month's quick facts, we share numbers and demographics of ACB people living with HIV in the study. OCS endeavours to generate evidence that can improve the lives of ACB people living with and at risk for HIV.

### Making the OCS More Representative

The Blue Door Clinic, housed at Regent Park Community Health Centre, is a specialty clinic serving people with HIV with precarious or no health insurance coverage, developed as a partnership effort amongst 11 health and HIV/AIDS serving agencies. Dr. Alan Li, the OCS site Principal Investigator, intends to use OCS data to better understand the patient population they serve and monitor the engagement in HIV care and the impact on health outcomes of these particularly marginalized communities over time. OCS recruitment has begun at Blue Door Clinic site and questionnaires are being offered in English and Spanish. To extend our reach with French speakers, we have initiated a pilot at Ottawa General Hospital to use external interpreters to support OCS data collectors to administer the questionnaire in French. We hope to extend our multi-lingual capacity across OCS sites in the next year.

### Respecting Indigenous Sovereignty

The OCS community governance model now includes an OCS Indigenous Data Governance Circle to review proposals and analysis of Indigenous participant data. The Circle met for the first time in January 2022 to address multiple research projects. Sean Hillier (York University) requested approval of an analysis conducted by the OCS team on Indigenous Cultural Service Utilization for submission to AIDS 2022. The Circle endorsed submission of the analysis and approved the dissemination of breakdowns for Indigenous participants for two additional studies.

### Governance Committee Updates

The Governance Committee is pleased to announce that Dane Record has been elected to serve as committee co-chair. Dane is new to the OCS, but has been working in the HIV sector for more than 10 years. He previously worked at AIDS Committee Durham Region and is now the interim executive director at Peterborough AIDS Resource Network. We are grateful for Dane's leadership and support of the study.

### OCS Quick Facts

From 2020-2021, 23% of unique participants who completed an OCS questionnaire were ACB, a total of 677 ACB participants.

#### Characteristics of ACB participants:

- Median Age: 47 years
- 55% Female, 45% Male
- 25% Gay, Bisexual or Other MSM
- 3% People who use injection drugs
- 33% with household income <\$20,000
- Median time living with HIV: 14 years
- 97% report taking anti-retroviral treatment, of whom 99% were virally suppressed (<200 copies/ml)



## Newly Approved OCS Studies

At the January meeting, the Governance committee approved two new OCS studies with external researchers:

As part of the CIHR funded REACH study, Kednapa Thavorn, Sharmistha Misra and colleagues will use OCS/ICES linked data to estimate health system costs of HIV/AIDS in Ontario.

Sergio Rueda and colleagues will use the OCS to advance understanding of employment as a social determinant of health and assess barriers to employment among people living with HIV in Ontario.

Congratulations to the researchers and thank you for engaging with the OCS in this important work.

## OCS Sub-study updates

The OCS has ended recruitment for two sub-studies. The OCS worked collaboratively with José Côté, University of Montreal, to expand recruitment for a study of smoking cessation among people living with HIV. Kelly O'Brien (University of Toronto) and team partnered with the OCS to recruit people living with HIV to the OHTN Endgame-funded TEx (Tele-Coaching Exercise) Study, examining the implementation of a multi-component online exercise program and impact on engagement in physical activity. Recruitment and enrollment are complete, and the intervention was launched in November 2021 with study activity ongoing.

The CHES study (COVID-HIV Evaluation of Serology and Health Services), led by Dr. Ann Burchell, aims to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on people living with HIV in Ontario. This study will investigate the proportion of OCS participants who have COVID-19 antibodies, measure vaccine effectiveness and understand patterns of HIV care engagement, COVID-19 testing and outcomes for people living with HIV. In February, they are launching the study at the OCS St. Michael's Hospital site and will roll-out recruitment to other participating OCS sites over the next couple of months. To learn more about the study, please visit <https://maphealth.ca/covid-hiv-evaluation/>

## OCS Data in Action

The OCS has partnered with the Women and HIV and AIDS Initiative (WHAI) to use questionnaire data in a community consultation process to inform WHAI's Coordinated Collective Impact Initiative (CCII) next steps. WHAI asked the OCS to include new questions related to parental stress as well as provide an analysis of data on gender and race, income, food security, intimate partner violence, incarceration, and ASO usage among women in the OCS. In January 2022, the OCS team presented the analysis from the 2021 questionnaire to WHAI as a part of the data collection and planning process.

With the 2022 Canadian HIV Association for Research conference (CAHR) being held in Ontario and AIDS 2022 being held in Montreal, the OCS team prepared a number of abstracts to highlight Ontario HIV research. We submitted 6 abstracts to CAHR on discrimination, old-age planning, access to ASO services, pre-HIV diagnosis prevention interventions, COVID-19 infection and vaccine uptake, and patient experience. We submitted 4 abstracts to IAS on heterosexual anal sex, loneliness, women's reproductive health and parental stress, and Indigenous cultural service access (with Sean Hillier). We are awaiting the outcomes of these submissions. Two abstracts were accepted for presentation at the International Workshop on HIV and Hep C Observational Databases (IWHOD): OCS technical infrastructure and COVID transitions, and the impacts of COVID and vaccine uptake.

The **Ontario HIV Treatment Network Cohort Study (OCS)** is an ongoing research study that collects clinical, social and behavioural information about people living with HIV (PHA) in Ontario. Participation in the study is voluntary, and all personally identifying information of study participants is removed to ensure confidentiality. The OCS was established to improve our understanding of HIV and inform HIV prevention, care and treatment strategies for people living with HIV and groups at risk of HIV infection. For more information about the OCS, please visit [www.ohtn.cohortstudy.ca](http://www.ohtn.cohortstudy.ca) or email [ocs@ohtn.on.ca](mailto:ocs@ohtn.on.ca).