

# 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations

**Decolonizing HIV/AIDS and STBBI Care: Integrating Indigenous Sacred Medicines and Land based Ceremonies to Eliminate Barriers among 2-Spirited, Indigenous Queer, and Transgender Communities in Ontario to end AIDS by 2030**

McCrary, K., Jackson, R., Hart, T., Skov, B., Waters, L. B., Dopler, S., Moreau, A., & Acharya, S.

## Background:

Indigenous peoples in Canada bear a disproportionate burden of HIV, and the HIV incidence among Indigenous peoples in Canada has increased dramatically in the past 5 years in Northern Ontario. This study investigates challenges faced by 2-Spirited, Indigenous queer and transgender (2SIQT) communities in Ontario concerning the accessibility of HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted and Bloodborne Infection (STBBI) services. This study also study explores the role of Indigenous sacred medicines and ceremonies in dismantling barriers to accessing HIV services in Ontario.

## Description

The study involved 50 community members from Ottawa, Thunder Bay, and Toronto, using a combination of in-person and virtual Sharing Circles for data collection. Facilitated by a 2-Spirited Elder, Sharing Circles focused on identifying barriers, proposing solutions, and examining the impact of colonial language and culture on stigma and discrimination.

## Lessons learned

Participants highlighted numerous obstacles faced by 2-Spirited, Indigenous queer, non-binary, and transgender communities in Ontario regarding access to essential HIV/STBBI services. Rooted in historical factors, traditional Christian attitudes, Eurocentric values, and discrimination against 2-Spirited individuals and their cultural roles, barriers also included logistical challenges in rural communities. Intergenerational trauma and misconceptions stemming from colonialism significantly shaped community attitudes toward health and wellness. Participants reported that the introduction of land-based ceremonies and Indigenous sacred medicines, a community-centric approach, social sensitization programs, and education campaigns using a decolonial perspective would all support to create an enabling environment to access HIV/AIDS and STBBI related prevention and support services.

## Conclusions

This study illuminates the impact of Eurocentric teachings on stigma and discrimination against 2-Spirited, Indigenous queer, non-binary, and transgender individuals. By integrating Indigenous land-based education, teachings, ceremonies, and sacred medicines into existing HIV/AIDS education frameworks, the research advocates for land-based ceremonies, teachings, and Indigenous culture to reduce stigma and discriminations towards 2-Spirited and queer community as well as to promote HIV related services. This strategy will dismantle anti-Indigenous and HIV-related stigma and discrimination, facilitate culturally supported discussions, and contribute to the overarching goal of ending AIDS by 2030 by empowering this multiply marginalized community to access testing and treatment services.

