



AHA CENTRE

FACT SHEET

Capacity Bridging



Capacity Bridging is a new term being put forward by the AHA Centre 2.0, a project of

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) and takes a concept that many of us are familiar with—**Capacity Building**—and nuances it a little so that it better suits an Indigenous context.

When we talk about capacity building in the context of community-based research (CBR), we are referring to building the capacity (or knowledge and skills) of someone (usually a community person) to a research team. For example, the research team member also happens to be participating in research but who is not academically trained.

In Community Based Research with Indigenous communities, we invite people to our teams for specific reason, for example;

- they are an Aboriginal Person Living with HIV (APHA) who can bring lived experience of being HIV positive.
- they have built academic expertise around our research question(s)

- they have expertise in a research method that we would like to use in our project
- they have a clinical skillset, knowledge and expertise that will help in our project.

This way of thinking—seeing a team member as filling **only one role** on a research team—limits us in terms of what might be possible.

Language is important!

Taking the concept of *Capacity Bridging* and stretching it a little to nuance our understanding of *building* so that it encompasses *bridging* speaks to the power of language. It also challenges us to think about the stories we tell ourselves, about the work that we do and the communities we work with.



We think the term *Capacity Bridging*, once understood, may help to break down research barriers by acknowledging that one person may bring many things to their position on a research team.

Let's take our APHA, for example. This person will bring the lens of their lived experience to the team, but maybe they hold an academic appointment and bring

their academic credentials and prestige to the team. Maybe, before they began their academic career, they worked in a frontline organization and were inspired to go to school and study to become a professor and academic researcher. Maybe the entire time they were in school they worked hard to maintain their relationship with the frontline organization. Maybe our project is a project about families and maybe this person is a parent too. Maybe they are 2 Spirit ... and, well ... you get the picture!



Capacity Bridging is explained further below, which can be found in a conversation between, AHA Centre staff

member, Sherri Pooyak and Janice Duddy, Director of Evaluation and Community Based Research. The whole conversation can be found at:

<https://vimeo.com/224986189>

"Capacity bridging is this idea of reciprocity ... and sharing knowledge between academics, researchers, community-based researchers and community people. What we are really talking about is the idea of coming together. Often times in research it is seen as — we come in, we are researchers, we are experts, we are doing to do some research for you, and then we are going to leave. Really a helicopter approach [to research]. We have evolved from this greatly and now we really consider community input and direction, and we try to really engage community as much and as often as we can. We work hard to do this. Then we realized that the idea of capacity building needs to go one step

more — we are not just building capacity within community or with other

academics, we are learning from each other. So it is about learning together as we go along... really the bridging part is about reciprocity.

We are learning from community —they are experts in their knowledge, just as we are experts in our knowledge and it is about coming together to find this common ground.

There are many ways of talking about this but we have reframed it to fit how we understand it in community-based research working with Indigenous people... We are not just the experts but rather we are looking to community to say, "you understand your world way better than we do but we understand so lets work together to come to a common understanding – let's bridge our two worlds together." We are coming together, to move forward in a respectful way to do research in a good way."

Capacity Bridging, then, is seen to be a more inclusive, less hierarchal concept that recognizes the richness and diversity that exists within and across our Indigenous and Mainstream HIV communities and looks for ways that we can extend our reach to produce more wholistic and meaningful research that serves our communities in a good way.

We would like to acknowledge Visioning Health as the originators of this concept.

Contact Us!

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