

CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks

CAAN Newsletter

Through empowerment, education, and community.

This Issue Includes

Spring: Renewal, Movement, & Change

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Warrior Society & Membership Drive

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SPRING: RENEWAL, MOVEMENT, & CHANGE





This Spring Equinox, we at CAAN Communities, Alliance & Networks welcome and embrace this moment for renewal, movement, and change. April is a period of growth and renewal at CAAN, as we transition into a new cycle with the start of our fiscal year. Our staff reflect on our individual and collective journeys, learned lessons, and successes to plan and prepare for new opportunities and changes that lie ahead. We utilize this period to renew our vision and energy by gathering together, attending ceremony, and meeting to discuss our action planning.

STI AWARENESS MONTH & HARM REDUCTION AWARENESS!


April is STI Awareness Month, a time to promote prevention, testing, treatment, and care while addressing stigma, myths, and misconceptions. Harm reduction plays a key role in ensuring a non-judgmental, accessible and safe space with safer sex and safer drug use equipment supplies available to the community. By integrating culturally safe approaches (e.g., land-based healing, peer-led education, community-led initiatives, resources, etc.), community wellness, empowerment, and ownership can be supported for sexual health change. Check out CAAN’s website at www.caan.ca for resources around STBBI prevention and harm reduction.

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WARRIOR SOCIETIES & MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Leona Quewezance, Visionary Director of Indigenous Practices

Tansi,

How wonderful to be here with you once more, connecting and sharing in this space.

As our 2024-2025 fiscal year comes to an end, it is with great pleasure to share with you that over half of the 21 spots for the Warrior Society Members have been filled, and resumes continue to arrive. We are looking for innovative Indigenous People who have expertise living with HIV and/or AIDS (IPHA), Indigenous People who have lived with or are living with Hepatitis C (IPHC), and Indigenous Voices of Women (VOW).

CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks

WARRIOR SOCIETIES

IPHA IPHC VOW

CALL FOR MEMBERS

Volunteer Requirements:

- Indigenous individual with lived experience of HIV/AIDS, or hepatitis C, or an Indigenous woman on a healing journey.
- Knowledge of current issues that confront Indigenous Women.
- Ability to represent the diversity and collective wisdom of Indigenous people.

Apply at:
WWW.CAAN.CA

Application, cover letter and resume to info@caan.ca

The role of a Warrior is to serve as an advisor to CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks. Their purpose is to holistically address matters related to HIV and AIDS, Hepatitis C, STBBIs, and TB, including mental health, aging, and related co-morbidities.

The first virtual meetings have been scheduled for VOW- on March 25, 2025, IPHA on March 26, 2025, and IPHC on March 27th, 2025, all held at 2:00 P.M. (CST). Our Kehteyaks joined us on our journey as we move forward.

A great thank you goes out to HIV Edmonton, AIDS Committee of North Bay & Area HIV- Hep C-Harm Reduction Services, Kimamow Atoskanow Foundation, All Nations Hope Network, AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan, and Canadian AIDS Society for sending a call out to their members. And of course, to all the people with whom a personal connection was made and personal referrals sent to CAAN through networks, your time and worth do not go unnoticed!

Two new webinars are in the making here at CAAN: CAAN 101 and Basic HIV/AIDS 101. Each webinar is designed to introduce participants to CAAN's mission and work, as well as to enhance knowledge on HIV and AIDS. These will be presented virtually. Stay tuned for upcoming times and dates to be announced.

As we move forward into our new fiscal year, we look forward to increasing our membership, Warrior Societies, and organizational memberships. If you are interested, please visit www.caan.ca, or if you have any questions, please send an email to leonaq@caan.ca.

Building a Strong Membership

Our membership is at the heart of CAAN. We create meaningful change through our voices, experiences, and dedication. Enhancing and strengthening our membership is essential for growth, and we need your support to continue this important work. We want to thank our membership for their contributions throughout the year and look forward to expanding our member portal on the website to enhance member experience!

CAAN COMMUNITIES, ALLIANCES
& NETWORKS

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Support Vital Programs
Be a Voice for Change
Connect and Grow
Cultural Empowerment

JOIN CAAN TODAY!

info@caan.ca to Join Online

Membership is open to those who share our vision of empowering Indigenous communities!

If you are interested in becoming a member of CAAN, please visit www.caan.ca and click on the membership portal for more details.

CATIE & CAAN NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



On February 27, 2025, the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) and CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks committed to a national partnership. It began in a ceremony held in the unceded territory of the Squamish Nation. Elder Jimmy Quatell instructed each organization to have paddles made for the ceremony. As the handshake ceremony unfolded and the paddles were revealed, the moment was breathtaking. CATIE had a paddle handmade from cedar in the shape of a thunderbird. CAAN had a handmade paddle with a turtle painted on it and a feather carved into it.

It was a beautiful ceremony. Each of these paddles will help each organization move forward as both paddles are affiliated with water. Water is very symbolic, water is life.

PARTNERSHIP CEREMONY WITH MANITOBA HARM REDUCTION

In February 2025, CAAN’s okimâw and program staff attended the “Being a Shit Disturber is an Act of Love” Conference held in Treaty No. 1 Territory, the traditional lands of the Anisinabe (Ojibway), Inineu (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota, and is the Birthplace of the Métis Nation and the Heart of the Métis Nation Homeland, now colonially known as Winnipeg MB. The conference was hosted by the Manitoba Harm Reduction Network (MHRN) with insightful, informative speakers who were really working hard to help communities deal with Canada’s overdose crisis.

Sandra Ka Hon Chu with the HIV Legal Network gave an amazing keynote on the history of drug criminalization in Canada, CAAN’s Elder in Residence Albert McLeod sat on a panel with Charlotte Nolan, John Peters and Hailey Bird discussing 2S Elders & Youth and HIV Prep for People Who Use Drugs by Zoe Bordeleau-Cass and Sarah Crawford as well as many other informative presentations.

A beautiful ceremony was witnessed by all who were in attendance. Led by Elder Albert McLeod, CAAN’s okimâw Margaret Kisikaw Piyesis and Executive Director of MHRN Shohan Illsley, where stories were shared about the histories of the two organizations and the two leaders. Beaver pelts were exchanged as a gift from one organization to the other to show solidarity and support for each other’s work.

CAAN’s Strategic plan, Wapiwin Akinê speaks to building long-lasting and meaningful partnerships that help the First Peoples of this land where they are at with what they have from an Indigenous lens. Partnering with MHRN was a no-brainer for CAAN as the work they are doing is not only helping folx, but is helping to change lives!



CALL FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Join Us in Advancing the Health and Wellness of the First Peoples Across Turtle Island!



CAAN, an Indigenous-led, non-profit charitable organization dedicated to the health and wellness of the First Peoples of the land now known as Canada, are seeking passionate and committed individuals to join our Board of Directors.

Rooted in traditional knowledge, cultural strength, and community resilience, we work to uplift Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and healing. Our Vision is to restore and sustain the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness of our Nations through shared truth, storytelling, land-based initiatives, research and community-driven programs.

We are currently welcoming expressions of interest from individuals who:

- Identify as a First person from the land called Canada.
- Bring lived experience, community knowledge, or professional expertise in areas such as Indigenous health, governance, finance, legal affairs, fundraising, policy, or organizational development.
- Committed to advancing Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and wellness.
- Can commit to attending regular board meetings virtually and contribute to committee work.

We especially encourage youth, Elders, Two-Spirit, gender-diverse community members, and people with lived experiences to apply.

Responsibilities of Board Members include:

- Provide strategic direction and governance oversight
- Supporting fundraising
- Championing the mission and values of the organization
- Ensuring accountability to the communities we serve.

This is a **volunteer** position, but the experience is rich with purpose, connection, and the opportunity to make a lasting impact.

To Apply: Please send a brief letter of interest and a resume to info@caan.ca by **July 31, 2025**.

ADVANCING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AT HOME & GLOBALLY

On behalf of CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks, we are proud to share significant updates on our collective work championing the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Under the leadership of Trevor Stratton, Indigenous Leadership Policy Manager, with support from Chris Walker, Senior Policy Analyst, we have been actively advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a cornerstone for transformative change in Canada and beyond.

Our work on UNDRIP has been multifaceted. We have been deeply engaged in consultations surrounding the UNDRIP Act (UNDA) with the HIV Legal network on behalf of Justice Canada. These consultations aim to strengthen legislation and legal frameworks to safeguard Indigenous rights across Canada. By drawing on community expertise, legal scholarship, and policy advocacy, we are ensuring that the voices of Indigenous Peoples are central to the reform process. This work is critical not only for reinforcing existing rights but also for creating a more equitable legal landscape that supports the self-determination and well-being of Indigenous communities across the nation.

Looking ahead, we are also preparing for our collective engagement at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York, taking place from April 21st through May 2nd. This forum is a globally recognized platform where Indigenous Peoples can articulate their shared aspirations and challenges. Our preparations at UNPFII include strengthening our collaborations with allied organizations and groups, strategic planning to uphold UNDRIP, as well as joint efforts to highlight—not just our rights—but also our resilience and continued contribution to global policy. We will be presenting a unified message that emphasizes the importance of Indigenous perspectives in international discussions and decision-making processes—a pivotal step in advancing global Indigenous solidarity and progress.

Additionally, our consultations and advocacy work with the Global Fund have been gaining momentum since October 2024. We are working hand in hand with Global Fund officials as well as the Global Fund Advocacy Network (GFAN) to ensure Indigenous Peoples are meaningfully engaged in strategies designed to end the escalating crises of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), tuberculosis (TB), and malaria globally during these unprecedented turbulent times of political change. Our advocacy underscores that health interventions must be culturally appropriate and responsive to the unique challenges faced by diverse Indigenous rights-holding communities. By actively shaping the Global Fund's policies and initiatives, we are striving to secure targeted and sustainable support that can turn the tide against these global health crises, ensuring that no community is left behind.

These coordinated efforts reflect our unwavering commitment to advancing Indigenous rights, both within Canada and on the international stage. As we build on these initiatives, we remain dedicated to fostering spaces of dialogue, policy innovation, and comprehensive advocacy that resonates with the unique lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples. We look forward to updating our CAAN membership as these initiatives progress, as well as invite you to join us in this crucial journey toward justice and equity for all Indigenous communities.

STAFF UPDATES

Tawnya Crowshoe, Indigenous Health Program Manager

2nd Year GLOWS Indigenous Health Grant Recipients and GLOWS Poster Presentation Accepted at the Global Hepatitis Summit 2025!



We are excited to announce that the GLOWS Indigenous Health Grant poster, titled "*Building Culturally Equitable Pathways to HCV Elimination in Indigenous Communities*", was accepted and showcased at the Global Hepatitis Summit 2025! This poster presentation highlighted the incredible community-driven initiatives from the GLOWS grantees who are making real strides in addressing Hepatitis C (HCV) within Indigenous communities. By weaving together traditional knowledge, land-based practices, and modern healthcare, they are showing the world what is possible when we lead the way in our own health journeys.

We're also excited to update you on the second year's GLOWS Indigenous Health Grant recipients. These eight initiatives are already making strides in addressing HIV and or viral hepatitis, with culturally grounded approaches focused on peer support & navigation, education, holistic care, and capacity building.

2nd Year GLOWS Grant Recipients:

1. **Aakom Kiyii Health Services:** Integrating HCV education and screening into substance use programs with a virtual reality twist.
2. **Carrier Sekani Family Services:** Expanding the CSFS HIV/STBBI Program to increase education, screenings, and community engagement.
3. **Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society (VAHS):** Providing holistic, culturally relevant support for those navigating HIV and viral hepatitis.
4. **2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations:** Co-designing a harm reduction testing initiative blending traditional knowledge with Western health practices.
5. **All Nations Hope Network:** Connecting Indigenous medicines with modern healthcare for holistic healing.
6. **Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy:** Enhancing HIV/STBBI services and frontline worker capacity across Ontario.
7. **Sunshine House Incorporated:** Integrating cultural activities and peer-led education for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.
8. **Sandy Beach Kimamow Atoskanow Foundation:** Increasing access to culturally responsive care in Alberta.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the GLOWS Funding Review Committee, Elder Betty McKenna, and the Indigenous Advisory Circle for their dedication to the thoughtful selection process.

These projects are already making a difference, transforming healthcare in Indigenous communities and empowering individuals and families across Turtle Island. We look forward to their continued success and the impactful changes they will bring!

With gratitude,
Tawnya Crowshoe
Indigenous Health Program Manager
CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks

Patrick Brownlee, Programs Manager



Hello, CAANer's!

I hope you all are having a great start to Spring.

The program team was back at it, busy finishing up deliverables for this fiscal year. With lots on the go from Resource Development with the Keeping our Fires project, to finalizing programs like the revamped Community Readiness Model and the Guiding Our Spirits, Train the Trainer project.

In January Guiding Our Spirits, a Gender-Based Violence Framework Project brought together the CAAN board and leadership team in Winnipeg on Treaty No. 1 territory the traditional Lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), Inineew (Cree), Dakota, and Dene peoples, and is also the National Homeland of the Red River Métis for a 2-day intensive pilot training. During this meeting, critical feedback was given for the finalization of the model. CAAN will be working on these adjustments for launch in the new fiscal year. Keep watch on our website and socials for more details!

In January, the leadership team met virtually to also go through the Community Readiness Model presentation with Riley Desjarlais to help finalize the presentation and have it ready for relaunch in April 2025. Riley has been working to have the project ready for communities, so please reach out to Riley to see if the Community Readiness Model is something that could help your community/Organization.

The Canoe project is underway with Community of Practices Calls scheduled with speakers ranging in various topics from De-escalation and Allyship to examining international Harm Reduction approaches (e.g. Harm reduction approaches in Portugal), to name a few. If you were unable to make the presentation, the recordings are all available on CAAN's YouTube channel at [CAAN Communities, Alliances & Networks - YouTube](#).

The Keeping Our Fires project is finalizing resources and sending them off for layout and print. Watch for these to become available virtually in May 2025.

Riley Desjarlais, Community Readiness Coordinator

CAAN is excited to announce that in the 2025 new fiscal year, we will be delivering virtual training with up to 10 different community-based organizations across Canada, complemented by in-person gatherings designed to foster deeper connection, collaboration, and hands-on learning.



This initiative aims to enhance the capacity of organizations to implement culturally based prevention interventions that address barriers Indigenous people living with HIV, HCV, and other STBBIs face in achieving the 90-90-90 objectives. We are introducing an updated Community Readiness Training Manual for 2025, designed to better support organizations in implementing culturally based prevention interventions. This updated resource reflects the latest insights and best practices.

CAAN aims to strengthen community-led responses across various PHAC regions. Participating organizations will be supported in successfully implementing at least one intervention within their communities.

Objectives:

1. **Capacity Building:** Strengthen the ability of community-based organizations to develop and deliver culturally grounded prevention interventions.
2. **Address Barriers:** Focus interventions on overcoming specific challenges Indigenous people face in accessing testing, treatment, and care for HIV, HCV, and STBBIs.
3. **Implementation Success:** Ensure that a significant portion of the organizations involved successfully implement at least one prevention intervention in their communities.

Approach:

1. **Training and Support:** CAAN will provide tailored training to organizations, helping them integrate culturally appropriate methods into their prevention strategies.
2. **Community Engagement:** Working directly with communities to ensure interventions reflect their cultural contexts, values, and needs.
3. **Collaborative Networks:** Create a network of Indigenous-led organizations to share knowledge, resources, and strategies for effective prevention interventions.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly assess the progress of organizations and provide ongoing support to ensure they meet their intervention goals.



Tash Dingwell, Promising Practices Coordinator for the Keeping Our Fires Project



The Keeping Our Fires Project’s main objective is to work collaboratively with organizations across the land to increase their capacity to provide stigma-free and culturally safe care for Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs), followed by resource creation.

In January, I hosted a gathering with our project participants to discuss their journeys on the project and how they used community collaboration and feedback to develop a resource that reflects their community’s readiness and ways of knowing and doing. Each organization shared the practice and policy changes they implemented, along with the resource they developed in partnership with CAAN that reflects the needs and priorities of their community when it comes to addressing STBBIs. Many participants collaborated with people with lived/living experiences or affected by STBBIs to guide their efforts from start to finish. Other organizations looked into starting more partnerships with other local Indigenous organizations, having medicine bundles or smudge kits available in their common areas, hiring Indigenous nurse practitioners, implementing cultural safety training, incorporating traditional knowledge into holistic care models, and much more. Joining us were Riley Desjarlais and Elder James

Quatell, further contributing to the discussion around keeping our fires going and continuing to utilize the training, knowledge, teachings, and tools shared to continue to strengthen their efforts.

Between late February to late March, I had the opportunity to travel to three PHAC regions to visit some of the organizations that participated in the Keeping Our Fires 2024-2025 fiscal year (Casey House, AIDS Committee of Newfoundland, and AIDS New Brunswick). This fostered continued relationship building and the opportunity to be able to witness the success and accomplishments in person, while actively creating work plans to strengthen their capacity and efforts. Many have expressed how eye-opening the project has been for them and their organization, and the importance of community ownership and collaboration.



We currently have **four** co-created resources in the works and look forward to having them translated into different local languages, distributed, and accessible on CAAN's website. As we wrap up this fiscal year and enter the new one, we are actively looking to form new connections and continue our meaningful work.

Seeking New Project Participants!

Are you passionate about improving health and wellness in Indigenous communities?

Do you want to strengthen your capacity to provide culturally-safe and stigma-free STBBI services?

Do you want to create a resource with CAAN?

The Keeping Our Fires Project is looking for dedicated organizations to join our team! Together, we will work together to utilize best evidence-based practices to take ownership and address Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs).

Contact Promising Practices Coordinator, Tash Dingwell at tashd@caan.ca to learn more and apply.

Kris Kelly, Research Manager



Greetings membership,

We have been in an exciting process of re-visioning the CAAN Research Portfolio. This has been made possible through the energy and heart-work of our Elders in residence, okimâw, Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, our ancestors who journey alongside us, and the Indigenous communities across the lands whom we work on behalf of. Our new Research framework called “Sky Lodge” is a living document, it has travelled through ceremony to CAAN. ‘Sky Lodge’ is an embodiment of Indigenous ancestral science that will guide our Indigenous community-based participatory research alongside Indigenous communities across Turtle Island and beyond. As required by our funding agencies, we have incorporated the necessary requirements into this framework. We are looking forward to sharing ‘Sky Lodge’ with you soon!

Our current research projects include:

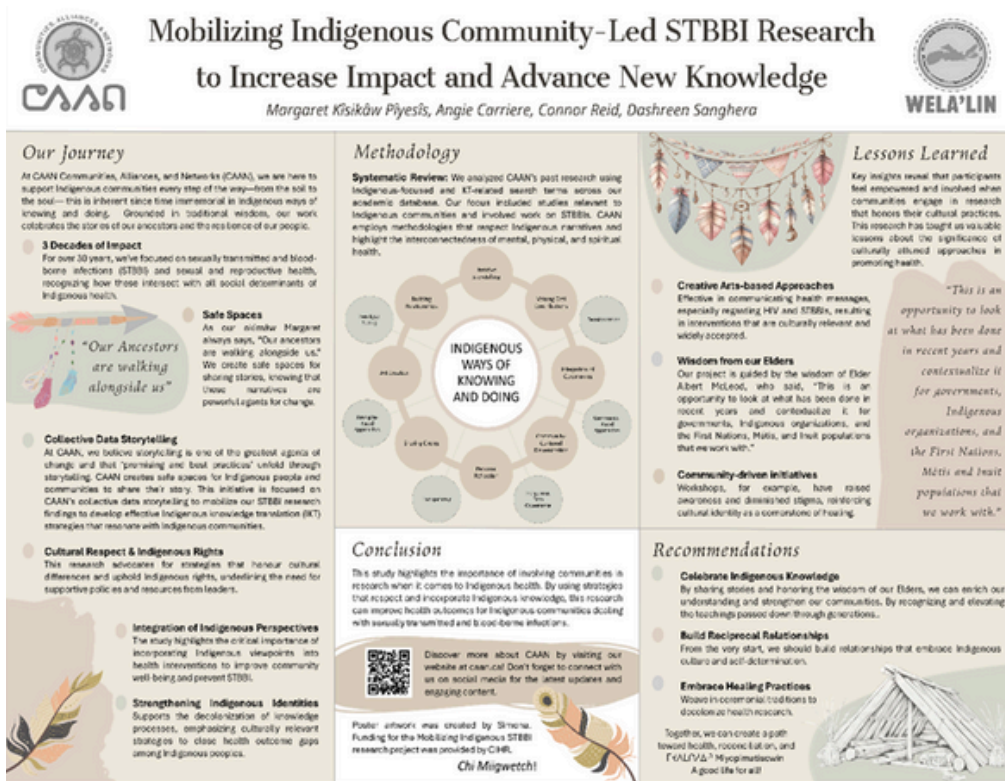
Wahkohtowin (Kinship beyond the immediate family): Community-based models of care to reach and support Indigenous women of reproductive age and pregnant women in Canada for the prevention of syphilis

Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, this project seeks to center Indigenous women in the response to the outbreaks of infectious and congenital syphilis disproportionately impacting Indigenous communities. Using community-based research methodology with land and arts-based methods, Indigenous women will be engaged in the creation of a national action-oriented early intervention and prevention campaign for infectious and congenital syphilis.

Land-based workshops will bring together young Indigenous women of childbearing age, with Knowledge Keepers, Elders and experts in the field, exploring what early intervention and prevention for infectious and congenital syphilis could look like using culturally relevant participatory arts-based methods. These workshops will form a national, multi-pronged, and multi-media action-oriented early intervention and prevention syphilis campaign using the artwork and messaging from the land-based workshops. This campaign will have the potential to reach Indigenous communities across the country via social media as well as posters and infographics distributed through CAAN and the research teams’ Indigenous and STBBI-focused networks. By going beyond the conventional responses to health outbreaks, this project will contribute to the body of Indigenous health scholarship by documenting how [w]holistic and culturally grounded responses can improve Indigenous health outcomes. The research team will work collaboratively across disciplines and expertise to respond to the syphilis outbreak among Indigenous women in non-conventional ways, including through the meaningful engagement of Indigenous women throughout the project and the use of land and arts-based methods to co-create an early intervention and prevention campaign for syphilis aimed at young Indigenous women. Our community consultations are currently underway, and we look forward to sharing more of this important work as it evolves!

Mobilizing Indigenous Community-led STBBI Research to Increase Impact and Advance New Knowledge

We are currently ‘mobilizing STBBI research’ through a project focused on the collective inventory of CAAN’s projects, products, and knowledge translation contributions. We are considering the collection as one data set for analysis to distill the major themes across the various nuanced topics and issues.



Our Mobilizing staff are hard at work sharing the lessons gleaned from this season's work on the mobilizing STBBI project. You can find them travelling across Turtle Island presenting at CAHR and STI World Congress, and preparing for upcoming meetings and more data analysis at our National office in Fort Qu'Appelle!

Nîkânohtakewin (walking ahead and leading): Reengaging and resourcing Indigenous youth in STBBI prevention and early intervention

We know from the research we have undertaken over the last 20 years how systemic influences, including stigma, discrimination, sexism and racism in the healthcare system and Canadian society more broadly, advance the rates of STBBI transmission (Bullard, 2019; Ghania, 2022). Conventional responses to disease outbreaks often fail to mitigate systemic factors, resulting in responses that do not address underlying issues leading to outbreaks, like lack of access to culturally safe care, lack of confidentiality in small communities, lack of access to appropriate care, and so on (Anderman, 2017). Canada's colonial history continues to impact Indigenous youth in these ways, and addressing these impacts must be part of responding to high rates of STBBI among Indigenous youth.

Indigenous youth experience the highest rates of STBBI due to a variety of well-documented contextual and structural issues, like stigma, lack of access to prevention, early intervention, and care, treatment and support that meets youth where they are at and reflects their lived experience (versus traditional fear-based public health messaging) (Aho et al., 2022; Ghania, 2022; Lys et al., 2016). Our project, Nîkânohtakewin, will focus on bringing Indigenous youth together to provide context about their needs, identify points of prevention and early intervention, provide direction (walking ahead and leading) on how they want to be engaged in STBBI research, and identify what research questions they want to be part of answering. We will accomplish this by engaging Indigenous youth with lived and living experience through safe and culturally grounded methods. Our youth consultations are currently being co-developed with Indigenous youth, and we look forward to sharing more with you as this work continues!

Indigenous-led responses to Intersecting Pandemics

This is an ongoing project here at CAAN. We know that Pandemic experiences are not new to Indigenous Peoples of North America; introducing and spreading infectious disease was a strategy

of colonizing nations to claim lands and resources without resistance. CAAN is the leader in responding to HIV and AIDS in Indigenous communities in Canada with a mandate to lead and support research relevant to Indigenous organizations and communities impacted by HIV, Hepatitis C (HCV), tuberculosis (TB) and other co-infections. We witness Indigenous Peoples navigating ongoing and layered syndemics every day. For this reason, CAAN's research mandate is strength-based, culturally safe, and grounded in Indigenous knowledges and solutions. CAAN's research with Indigenous-led front-line service organizations responding to HIV, HCV, and TB lays a foundation to sustain a response to the continually evolving COVID-19 situation and its consequences for intersecting pandemics. This research is working to support identifying, implementing, and sharing culturally safe, Indigenous community-led solutions to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences by addressing the research areas of culturally safe COVID-19 prevention, preparedness, response (and recovery) for Indigenous peoples. Our research is supported by Indigenous-led front-line organizations in Halifax, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Regina, and Red Deer. Given the national scope of this project and direct engagement with front-line service organizations, we believe the lessons learned from this project will generate valuable insight into pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. This project is in the final phase, and we look forward to sharing our report soon!

‘Direct Impact: Understanding Race and Punishment in HIV Criminalization project’

This project is in partnership with Dalhousie University. CAAN staff are working to analyze data and provide written and technical support by ensuring Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, and ancestral science are involved in the process of analyzing, interpreting, and reporting the data. We look forward to sharing this important work with you as it evolves!

Kiana Cress, Research Project Coordinator - Kinship

Enhancing Wahkohtowin (Kinship Beyond the Immediate Family) Research Project.

Aaniin, Kiana n'dizhnikaaaz!

As a recent hire at CAAN, I've been spending my time learning about this research project including its rationale, goals, expected outcomes, and hopes.



I've immersed myself in this work by completing any required training, attending webinars, and reading reports and academic work on this topic. Through weekly meetings, we've identified the next steps of this research journey. The first step consists of starting this research project in a good way, which will be done through ceremonies at the end of March in Regina, SK. CAAN's Elder in Residence and a Traditional Helper will assist us with this required step.

Baamaapii!

Kiana Cress



Connor Reid, Mobilizing STBBI Research Project Coordinator



Research Update: Advancing Indigenous STBBI Health Equity

Although I joined CAAN only four months ago, our research has already made significant strides in elucidating the complex intersections of structural determinants shaping Indigenous health inequities in the context of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs). This work critically engages with the decolonization of STBBI healthcare frameworks, recognizing the necessity of dismantling systemic barriers while fostering Indigenous self-determination in health governance. By prioritizing Indigenous epistemologies, lived experiences, and community-led methodologies, this research endeavors to reconfigure dominant paradigms that have historically marginalized Indigenous health perspectives and contributed to ongoing disparities. Importantly, this initiative aligns with CAAN's overarching commitment to promoting culturally safe care, advocating for Indigenous rights, and supporting community-driven health interventions. We take into account how local contexts, historical legacies, and emerging social factors continually shape healthcare outcomes, ensuring our approach remains responsive to evolving community needs and global developments in STBBI research. Additionally, we strive to maintain transparent and respectful communication channels with Indigenous partners, fostering trust and collaboration at every stage of the project.

Development of a Comprehensive Research Database

A foundational component of this initiative is the creation of a comprehensive research database designed to synthesize and operationalize knowledge across academic, governmental, and community-based sources. This repository functions as an essential tool for evidence-informed advocacy, policy analysis, and strategic intervention planning. By centering Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in tandem, we seek to create an adaptive and responsive resource that aligns with the realities of Indigenous healthcare landscapes, while also promoting an inclusive, multi-perspective approach to data interpretation and use.

The database facilitates an intersectional analysis of STBBI-related disparities, acknowledging the roles of colonial legacies, socioeconomic determinants, and systemic racism in perpetuating health inequities. It also serves as an evolving platform that will be continuously updated with new research, emerging policies, and community-driven health initiatives to ensure its long-term relevance and applicability. Moreover, we are integrating features that enable dynamic mapping of data trends over time, helping stakeholders visualize shifts in infection rates, intervention outcomes, and policy impacts across diverse communities. By incorporating feedback from Indigenous health professionals, we ensure that the database remains grounded in lived realities and adheres to ethical standards regarding data sovereignty, privacy, and culturally appropriate representation.

Critical Policy Analysis: Addressing Systemic Barriers

Beyond database development, our research has involved an extensive critical policy analysis, tracing the historical and contemporary legislative frameworks that continue to shape Indigenous STBBI healthcare access. This process has entailed an examination of colonial-era public health policies, contemporary jurisdictional fragmentation, and structural inadequacies in current policy implementation. We have assessed the impact of federal and provincial legislative frameworks on healthcare delivery, including their implications for Indigenous-governed health programs. Furthermore, we consider how funding models, jurisdictional overlaps, and regional variations in service provision create gaps that disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, often leading to inconsistent or inequitable health outcomes.

Engagement with Indigenous Stakeholders

This research also engages directly with Indigenous stakeholders, including community members, healthcare practitioners, and advocacy organizations. Through a participatory approach, we ensure that our findings are actionable and that policy recommendations are meaningfully aligned with community needs. By embedding Indigenous methodologies within the research process, we affirm the primacy of self-determination and Indigenous-led health governance as essential principles in addressing STBBI-related disparities. In particular, we draw upon participatory action research and Two-Eyed Seeing frameworks that unite diverse ways of knowing, creating spaces where Indigenous epistemologies guide research questions, data interpretation, and outcome measures.

These methods differ from conventional top-down approaches by emphasizing reciprocity, mutual respect, and ongoing dialogue with Indigenous communities. Engagement with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous health practitioners ensures that the research reflects traditional healing practices and cultural safety principles, integrating Indigenous worldviews into contemporary health policy discourses. Additionally, our collaborative efforts with community organizations have provided deeper insights into region-specific health concerns and the effectiveness of existing interventions.

To further amplify these insights, we have incorporated focus groups and storytelling sessions where community members share lived experiences, highlighting both systemic barriers and potential solutions rooted in local cultural practices. By honoring these narratives, we develop policy and programming recommendations that resonate with the diverse realities of Indigenous Peoples across different territories.

Next Steps: Refining and Expanding Research Impact

Over the next few months, our focus will be on refining the database, conducting iterative consultations, and enhancing the accessibility of research findings for policymakers, healthcare providers, and Indigenous leadership. This includes designing user-friendly interfaces for data retrieval, increasing translation accessibility for Indigenous language speakers, and developing targeted reports for decision-makers to support informed policy action. Additionally, we remain mindful of the need to protect data privacy, uphold ethical guidelines, and honor community protocols throughout each step.

To further improve the utility of this research, we plan to host interactive sessions and roundtables aimed at gathering community feedback, integrating their insights into subsequent updates of the database. Ongoing collaboration with Indigenous health networks will be crucial in ensuring that our recommendations drive substantive and sustainable systemic change. Future work will explore the integration of community-based participatory research methodologies that facilitate more robust, reciprocal relationships between Indigenous communities and research institutions. By fostering open dialogues around ethics, knowledge ownership, and data sharing, we can advance models of co-creation that position Indigenous partners at the center of decision-making processes.

As part of our broader roadmap, we are also examining cross-cultural knowledge exchange programs, where community health representatives can share best practices, exchange innovations, and collectively identify areas for collaborative improvement. Over the coming year, we aim to produce a series of policy briefs, peer-reviewed articles, and community toolkits that distill key lessons learned, outline successful interventions, and offer actionable strategies to stakeholders. These resources will

spotlight not only the challenges but also the resilient, community-driven solutions transforming STBBI care and empowering Indigenous Peoples to lead the way in health advocacy.

Call for Collaboration and Engagement

We welcome dialogue and engagement from CAAN members and stakeholders who wish to contribute to this initiative. Your insights and collaboration are invaluable as we work collectively toward advancing Indigenous STBBI health equity. We encourage stakeholders to share feedback, suggest additional resources, and participate in upcoming research forums to help guide the next steps of this project. Our team actively seeks partnerships with organizations that hold complementary expertise or resources, ensuring that this initiative remains dynamic and adaptable to emerging needs and opportunities.

Beyond formal consultation sessions, we invite community members, Elders, and researchers alike to reach out on an ongoing basis to share knowledge, concerns, or innovative ideas. By continuously integrating diverse perspectives and experiences, we cultivate a stronger, more inclusive approach to public health—one that upholds Indigenous sovereignty, safeguards community wellbeing, and honors the deep cultural significance of holistic healing practices.

Conclusion and Contact

Thank you for your continued commitment to this critical work. By working together, we can co-create a more just, responsive, and decolonized approach to Indigenous STBBI healthcare. Should you have questions or wish to collaborate further, please reach out:

We look forward to building on these collective efforts to promote Indigenous wellness, self-determination, and meaningful policy transformation. In the coming months, we hope to witness the tangible impact of these collaborative endeavors, from strengthened community networks to improved policy frameworks that recognize and respect Indigenous voices. Through shared responsibility and a sustained focus on equity, we can shape a future in which Indigenous communities flourish, leading innovative STBBI prevention and care strategies that address the root causes of health inequities.