



# Black PRAISE

Black Pastors Raising Awareness and Insight  
of HIV Stigma through Engagement

**This fact sheet outlines the process of implementing Black PRAISE<sup>1</sup> among Black congregations in Ontario, and how it affected the congregants who participated.**

## Introduction

Black PRAISE is an intervention or program to reduce HIV-related stigma among African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) church congregations, and build their knowledge about HIV.

A team of mainly ACB researchers and health and social service professionals developed Black PRAISE in collaboration with pastors, policy makers, health and social service providers and community advocates.

The researchers and collaborators tested Black PRAISE among six churches in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Ottawa to determine if it worked, and interviewed church members to determine how the intervention affected them.

## Why did we develop Black PRAISE?

HIV disproportionately affects ACB communities in Canada. In 2015 and 2016 combined, Black people accounted for 23% of new HIV

diagnoses in Ontario, though they comprised only 5% of the province's population.<sup>2</sup> This general pattern is roughly similar among ACB people on the national level.<sup>3</sup>

## The impact of stigma

HIV-related stigma refers to discriminatory attitudes, beliefs and behaviours directed at people living with HIV or communities affected by HIV. It can affect their employment prospects and access to healthcare and social services. Stigma may also lead to an erosion of relationships with friends and family members.

HIV stigma makes people reluctant to engage in HIV prevention discussions and activities (like engaging in safer sex or getting tested for HIV). Therefore, stigma may contribute to poor health among people who are living with HIV, and may also drive HIV transmission.

The Black PRAISE intervention sought to address three aspects of HIV-related stigma:

- Inappropriate fear of transmission (due to lack of knowledge about HIV, and

misconceptions about HIV transmission and testing)

- Negative judgments or beliefs about people living with HIV (e.g., blaming and shaming);
- Compound stigmatization (where HIV-related stigma combines with other pre-existing forms of stigma or discrimination such as racism and homophobia).

## The Tools

The intervention included three types of tools or resources:

- A booklet on HIV was distributed among the congregations, which provided information on HIV testing, treatment, prevention, and the social determinants of health. It also provided basic statistics to illustrate how HIV affects ACB communities
- A sermon on compassion and social justice that the pastors delivered to their congregations
- A video featuring ACB people talking about their experiences with stigma, the impact of stigma on the ACB community, and how the church can reduce stigma.

The pastors and key people from their congregations delivered the intervention to their congregations over a 6-week period, beginning with distribution of the booklet and ending with screening the video. The intervention items were delivered to the congregation on an agreed schedule at or after the main Saturday or Sunday services.

The congregations also participated in a series of surveys before and after the intervention to determine if the intervention was successful (i.e., to find out whether participants became more knowledgeable about HIV and reduced their level of stigma against people who are living with HIV).

The team also interviewed one pastor and two

congregants from each church to find out what the intervention meant to them.

## What difference did Black PRAISE make?

Black PRAISE was effective at building HIV knowledge and reducing HIV-related stigma among ACB congregations.<sup>4</sup>

In one-on-one interviews, congregants described a deeper sense of empathy, compassion and responsibility for people who are living with HIV. They also reported that the educational tools helped validate accurate knowledge and corrected long-held misperceptions about HIV transmission.

### Here are some of their comments:

***// The world needs to be more educated on HIV/AIDS and about Black PRAISE. Since I have come across you all, I have been educated a lot.***

-[Congregant]

***...the church is a primal place for a lot of African, Caribbean and Black people to gather...so it was very smart to target individuals in a church setting.***

-[Congregant]

***... I now have a responsibility to the community of people living with HIV/AIDS that I didn't feel before. For that I thank the creators and deliverers of this process.***

-[Pastor]

***The community needs to be more proactive and empathize with people who have HIV/AIDS. It does not matter how it was transmitted. No one deserves to be stricken with this disease or any disease as a matter of fact... //***

-[Congregant]

## Conclusion

The post-intervention comments show a significant willingness and enthusiasm by both faith leaders and congregants to learn and engage in programs that can help reduce HIV-related stigma. Black PRAISE's success is a step forward in mobilizing ACB communities to strengthen HIV prevention and improve the health and wellbeing of those living with HIV.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Pastors Raising Awareness and Insight of Stigma through Engagement

<sup>2</sup>Ontario Community HIV and AIDS Reporting Tool (OCHART), View from the Front Lines. (2017). *Annual summary and Analysis of data provided by community-based HIV/AIDS Services in Ontario*. Toronto, ON.

<sup>3</sup>Bourgeois AC, Edmunds M, Awan A, Jonah L, Varsaneux O, Siu W. (2017). *HIV in Canada—Surveillance Report*, 2016. Can Commun Dis Rep. 43(12): 248-56. <https://doi.org/10.14745/ccdr.v43i12a01>.

<sup>4</sup>Husbands, W., Kerr, J., Tharao, W., Calzavara, L., Greenspan, N., Muchenje-Marisa, M., Browne, O., Arnold, K., Luyombya, H., & Nakamwa, J. (2019). *Black PRAISE: Black Churches Respond to HIV-Related Stigma in Ontario, Canada*. Toronto, ON: Ontario HIV Treatment Network.

### Acknowledgements

Tracey Sobers and Elaine McNinch wrote the text for this fact sheet. Special thanks to the pastors and their congregations, collaborators, and survey assistants. Graphic design by Frantz Brent-Harris. Black PRAISE was funded by grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canadian HIV Trials Network, neither of whom are responsible for the content of this fact sheet.

March 2019.

