



# “A Study Comparing Aboriginal Two Spirit Men Who Utilize AIDS Service Organizations Compared to Those Who Do Not”

A Research Study Conducted by Two-Spirited\* People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations

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Final Report

Principal Investigator: Mr. Art Zoccole  
Co-Investigator: Dr. Ted Myers  
Research Co-ordinator: Ms. Linda Day

\*This study will use the term “Two-Spirit”

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### **Research Advisory Co-ordinating Committee**

Mr. Trevor Stratton, Community Representative; Ms. LaVerne Monette, Co-ordinator of the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy; Mr. Art Zoccole, Executive Director of Two Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations; Dr. Ted Myers, HIV/AIDS Social and Behavioural Unit, Epidemiology, University of Toronto and Ms. Linda Day, Research Co-ordinator.

**2 Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor – 43 Elm Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5T 3W5**

**www.2spirits.com  
info@2spirits.com**

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**Key words:** HIV/AIDS, Aboriginal, Two-Spirit, community based AIDS service organization.

## **Background**

During the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic it appeared that the epidemic was contained mostly within the Aboriginal, male, Two Spirited population (homosexual/bisexual), as much of it did in the general Canadian population. The exact number of Aboriginal people, who were infected then, and even now, is unknown, as all provinces do not uniformly collect ethnicity information. Available data indicates that prior to 1989, over 80% of Aboriginal AIDS cases were Two-spirited men, it was well over 60% in the 1989 – 1993 time period and that number is increasing.<sup>i</sup>

In general, the socio-economic and health status of Aboriginal population in Canada is more disadvantaged than their Canadian counterparts. Aboriginals are more likely to be unemployed, living in unstable housing or homeless, living below the poverty line, underemployed, in receipt of income assistance and often experience well-being and physical health problems, significantly more than the rest of the population.

There is increasing evidence that suggests that social factors may play a pivotal role in susceptibility to HIV infection and sero-conversion to AIDS. Several studies have linked depression and poverty to increased participation in high-risk sexual activities associated with sexually transmitted infections.

Despite these social disadvantages, Aboriginal people appear to have larger social support networks than non-Aboriginals, although in one particular study, this difference was not considered to be statistically significant.<sup>ii</sup> However, there are indications that informal and formal social support networks are an integral part of the Aboriginal culture.

At present, there is an enormous gap in the literature that specifically addresses the health service needs and utilization of services for Aboriginal Two Spirit men. In an attempt to address this significant gap in the literature, this study will take a closer look at the service utilization of Aboriginal Two Spirit men in three locations in Ontario, Canada.

The original concept for this study was based on reports, non-Aboriginal studies and other discussion papers that attempted to examine the needs of Aboriginal Two Spirit men. It was determined that this information is required in order to document highlight the needs and inform policy or program development to fill the gaps in service and support. As such, it is a community-based research project at inception and followed the principles of Ownership, Control Access and Possession (OCAP) throughout. Several appendices to this document as well as text in the methods section will provide further insight into how these principles were upheld throughout. The research project was also guided with advice and feedback from a member of *2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations Aboriginal People living with HIV/AIDS (APHA) Committee*. The main research questions addressed in the study are:

- 1) Do Aboriginal Two Spirit Men utilize Aboriginal AIDS Service Organizations? Why or Why Not?

- 2) Do Aboriginal Two Spirit Men seek utilize non-Aboriginal AIDS Service Organizations? Why or Why Not?

## **Methods**

### **Research Setting**

This research study was conducted in partnership with the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy and Two Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations in Toronto, Ontario. Staff members of the Ontario HIV/AIDS Strategy (herein after referred to as the staff) are located in various part of Ontario and are outreach workers and advocates for Aboriginal people in those locations. They were instrumental in the success of this study by assisting the research co-ordinator with recruitment of participants, taking care of logistical details for the implementation of the survey, and follow-up that may have been required upon completion of the study. In this regard, the research setting was in the following locations: Toronto, Thunder Bay and Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. Initially and at the outset of the study, a fourth location in Southwestern Ontario was considered, however, upon closer examination and after several attempts at recruitment, that location was deemed not suitable for this purpose as it was not possible to conduct the study there.

### **Objectives**

The purpose of this community-based research study was to investigate and compare behaviours of four groups of Aboriginal Two Spirit Men in different geographical areas of mostly Southern Ontario. Initially, the study design was proposed as a two year community-based research project to interview thirty (30) Two Spirit men who seek support from Aboriginal AIDS service organizations and thirty (30) Two Spirit men who do not seek support from Aboriginal AIDS service organizations.

However, upon further enquiry and feedback, the study design was modified to compare four groups of Aboriginal Two Spirit men who do and do not utilize AIDS service organizations (n=60), but the study will still compare age, sexuality, socio-economics, employment, income and education across these four groups of men. The research will seek information about the use of particular services amongst these four groups, behaviours associated with the use of those services and if there are specific reasons why the respondents use one service compared to another service, and if so, why.

## **Study Design and Procedures**

This study was designed as a one-time cross-sectional survey of sixty Aboriginal men 18 years of age or older, who consider themselves to be Two Spirit (definitions included in appendix A, living in the location for the past 12 months. The data was collected between February 2005 and July 2005. The study was voluntary, anonymous and participants were re-imbursed \$25 for their time and input. Participants received an information letter outlining the details of the study including risks and benefits and signed a consent form.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed; in order to ensure confidentiality, the participants were given a pseudonym. Under the OCAP principles of community based research, all data resulting from this study including tapes, signed consent forms, notes, receipts, and all other documentation, remains the sole property of the organization (Two-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations). All data will be contained in a locked, secure cabinet and destroyed after seven years. All study participants were advised that they may receive a copy of the final report from this study, and each requested that they would like a copy of the final report findings.

### **Recruitment**

Aboriginal Two Spirit men may be considered a difficult target group for research study recruitment; therefore, a variety of methods were developed to address the potential challenge of participant recruitment. These included the dissemination of an outreach flyer<sup>1</sup> that contained the contact information, purpose of the study, remuneration and was sent to a wide variety of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies<sup>2</sup>.

The recruitment flyer indicated that Aboriginal Two Spirit men interested in this study, and who fit the study criteria were asked to either send an e-mail to the study co-ordinator, the staff, or telephone a toll free number for more information and to determine study eligibility. Upon determination of study eligibility based on the agreed criterion, further arrangements were made for the research co-ordinator to conduct the interview directly with the respondent. In the majority of the completed interviews, logistical arrangements were made via the staff who worked with the co-ordinator to arrange interview times and locations. Although this method proved to be very time consuming, it helped to develop trust and ensure potential participants that confidentiality would be ensured.

### **Questionnaires**

Four questionnaires were developed for the following four groups of Aboriginal Two Spirit Men:

- Those who utilize the services of an Aboriginal AIDS service organization.
- Those who utilize services of a non-Aboriginal AIDS service organization.
- Those who do not utilize the services of an Aboriginal or a non-Aboriginal AIDS service organization;
- Those who utilize both the services of an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal AIDS service organization.

The finalized questionnaires used in the study are attached as appendix B.

All four questionnaires were developed in consultation with the Research Co-ordinating Committee, and after several drafts were circulated, the revised questionnaire was pre-tested with three Two Spirit men in Toronto. Results of the pre-test were provided to the Research Co-ordinating Committee before the final study questionnaires were developed for implementation in the study.

### Measurements Based on the Questions

- *Users of AIDS Service Organizations:* Participants were asked if they use an AIDS service organization, during the past 12 months.
- *Users of other services, including cultural (Aboriginal) based services:* Participants were asked if they used another service, during the past 12 months, and if so, was it an Aboriginal or a non-Aboriginal service?
- *Socio-Demographics:* Participants were asked about their sexual identity, age, gender, education, living situation, income, HIV testing, HIV status, how and length of time since diagnosis.

### Analysis

The analysis used in this study were both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide information about the types of as well as descriptive. Statistical Software for Social Sciences 14 (SPSS 14) was used for the quantitative descriptive analysis in this study and NVivo software was utilized to categorize the qualitative, narrative feedback from respondents.

## Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of All Respondents in Study (N= 46).**

*This table utilizes SPSS 14 to show categories of age, gender, education, income, living situation, location, sexual identity, Aboriginal identity, employment, HIV status related to all respondents.*

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Age 18-24	4	8.7	8.7	8.7
	Age 25-31	9	19.6	19.6	28.3
	Age 32-38	13	28.3	28.3	56.5
	Age 39-45	10	21.7	21.7	78.3
	Age 46-52	3	6.5	6.5	84.8
	Age 53-59	6	13.0	13.0	97.8
	Age 67 and over	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

**Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	41	89.1	89.1	89.1
	Transgendered	5	10.9	10.9	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

**Education**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than grade 9	2	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Some High school	14	30.4	30.4	34.8
	High school graduate	6	13.0	13.0	47.8
	Some College	10	21.7	21.7	69.6
	College Degree	3	6.5	6.5	76.1
	Some University	7	15.2	15.2	91.3
	University Graduate	4	8.7	8.7	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

**Income Level**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than \$10,00 - \$20,000 per year	24	52.2	52.2	52.2
	Between \$10,000 - \$20,000 per year	14	30.4	30.4	82.6
	Between \$21,000 - \$30,000 per year	3	6.5	6.5	89.1
	Between \$31,000 - \$40,000 per year	3	6.5	6.5	95.7
	Between \$41,000 - \$50,000 per year	1	2.2	2.2	97.8
	Between \$51,000 - \$60,000 per year	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	



### Who Do I Live With

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No one, I live alone	19	41.3	41.3	41.3
	I live with my same sex partner	10	21.7	21.7	63.0
	I live with my child or children	1	2.2	2.2	65.2
	I live with my mother, father, grandparent, or other family	4	8.7	8.7	73.9
	I live with one or more friends or other adults	7	15.2	15.2	89.1
	I live with people in a group home	1	2.2	2.2	91.3
	I live with people in a shelter	2	4.3	4.3	95.7
	Other	2	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

### Location

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Toronto	36	78.3	78.3	78.3
	London	1	2.2	2.2	80.4
	Sudbury	3	6.5	6.5	87.0
	Thunder Bay	5	10.9	10.9	97.8
	Other	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

### Sexuality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Gay	16	34.8	34.8	34.8
	Bisexual	9	19.6	19.6	54.3
	Straight	1	2.2	2.2	56.5
	Two - Spirited	14	30.4	30.4	87.0
	Transgendered	4	8.7	8.7	95.7
	Other	2	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

**Ancestry**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ojibway, Lakota	1	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Algonquin	1	2.2	2.2	4.3
	Cree	13	28.3	28.3	32.6
	Delaware	2	4.3	4.3	37.0
	Mohawk	4	8.7	8.7	45.7
	Ojibway	18	39.1	39.1	84.8
	Ojibway, Cree	1	2.2	2.2	87.0
	Ojibway, Pottawatami	1	2.2	2.2	89.1
	Okanagan	1	2.2	2.2	91.3
	Plains Cree	1	2.2	2.2	93.5
	Saulteaux	1	2.2	2.2	95.7
	Swampy Cree	1	2.2	2.2	97.8
	Woodlands Cree	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	46	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Those who Use Both, Neither, Aboriginal only, or Non-Aboriginal only AIDS services organizations**

**Cross tabulation of Income Level by Type of Service Use**

			Service Use				Total
			Both	Neither	Aboriginal only	Non-Aboriginal only	
Income Level	Less than \$10,000 Per year	Count	13	6	5	0	24
		% within serv_use	59.1%	40.0%	62.5%	.0%	52.2%
	Between \$10,000 - \$20,000 per year	Count	7	3	3	1	14
		% within serv_use	31.8%	20.0%	37.5%	100.0%	30.4%
	Between \$21,000 - \$30,000 per year	Count	0	3	0	0	3
		% within serv_use	.0%	20.0%	.0%	.0%	6.5%
	Between \$31,000 - \$40,000 per year	Count	2	1	0	0	3
		% within serv_use	9.1%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	6.5%
	Between \$41,000 - \$50,000 per year	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% within serv_use	.0%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	2.2%
	Between \$51,000 - \$60,000 per year	Count	0	1	0	0	1
		% within serv_use	.0%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	2.2%
Total		Count	22	15	8	1	46
		% within serv_use	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Qualitative analysis of the preliminary results indicates that many of the Aboriginal respondents preferred to use an Aboriginal AIDS service only, compared to a non-Aboriginal service. Most often it appeared that in spite of HIV status or whether or not the individual had received an HIV test, they usually preferred to use the service of an Aboriginal service provider, citing reasons around social support as one of the primary reasons for doing so. More often, Aboriginal Two Spirit men felt connected with the Aboriginal AIDS service provider for cultural reasons as well, which provides a connection to their Aboriginal communities while they are far from home.

## **Discussion and Implications**

This research study describes the characteristics of four groups of Aboriginal Two Spirit men over the age of 18 who resided in Toronto, Sudbury and Thunder Bay, Ontario in 2005. A total of 46 Aboriginal Two Spirit men participated in the study. These results indicate that of the four groups, the men who are HIV negative will utilize the Aboriginal AIDS service organization for social support or testing and cultural reasons; men who are HIV positive also utilize the support of an Aboriginal AIDS service organization, when available, for the same reasons.

This is an exploratory study that requires much more research to fully determine and understand the reasons why the participants make the choices they do, but also can help service providers -- both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers -- enhance their current programming for prevention and wellness as well as potential treatment, advocacy and support options that are culturally relevant for the Aboriginal client.

### **Limitations of the Research**

First, the sample size of 46 of the intended sample size of 60 (fifteen) respondents from each category of service users) was less than what was originally anticipated. There were fewer respondents from one of the areas that had been chosen as one of the data collection sites. It is recommended that if possible, a larger sample size be sought. There are limitations to all research but for the most part, it should be noted that since the respondents to this research were from various parts of Canada, but who lived in Ontario, it can be generalized to the rest of the Aboriginal population.

### **Conclusion**

This exploratory study indicated that Aboriginal Two Spirit men are more likely to choose to utilize the services of an Aboriginal AIDS service organization, over the use of a non-Aboriginal AIDS service organization when they have the option to do so. Respondents have cited a variety of reasons for making these choices. More research is needed to explore what types of services Aboriginal Two Spirit men require to prevent illness and maintain good overall health status. However, this study concludes that Aboriginal AIDS service organizations can play an important role in providing health services and social support for Aboriginal Two Spirit men.

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