

The Essentials of Knowledge Translation: A Fact Sheet

THE CANADIAN ABORIGINAL AIDS NETWORK (CAAN)

OVERVIEW

The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network is a national, not-for-profit organization:

- Established in 1997
- Represents over 200 member organizations and individuals
- Governed by a National thirteen member Board of Directors
- A four member Executive Board of Directors
- Provides a National forum for members to express needs and concerns
- Ensures access to HIV/AIDS-related services through advocacy
- Provides relevant, accurate and up-to-date HIV/AIDS information

MISSION STATEMENT

As a key national voice of a collection of individuals, organizations and provincial/territorial associations, CAAN provides leadership, support and advocacy for Aboriginal people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. CAAN faces the challenges created by HIV/AIDS in a spirit of wholeness and healing that promotes empowerment, inclusion, and honours the cultural traditions, uniqueness and diversity of all First Nations, Inuit and Métis people regardless of where they reside.

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Defining Knowledge Translation

Knowledge Translation (KT) is a fundamental principle of Community-based Research. In essence, the knowledge gained from research is ‘translated’ back to the community involved and also for a larger audience. When research knowledge is given back to the community in meaningful ways it can then be used to promote action, influence policy and support activities that will improve lives. KT is a broad term that captures the elements of knowledge transfer, knowledge brokerage and knowledge uptake. In short, KT encourages and supports community members to ‘take up’ or use research findings and new knowledge in ‘evidence-based’ policies, service delivery plans and in practice. Ultimately the goal of KT is to influence political and social change by closing the gap between ‘what is known’ and ‘what is currently done’ in practice settings.

The Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) are a key funding agency for Community-based HIV/AIDS research in Canada. The CIHR has referred to knowledge translation as “*the key linkage between health science research and improved health outcomes*”.(Smylie, 2003, p139) In addition, the Institutes have described Knowledge Translation as “*the process of supporting the **uptake** of health research in a manner that **improves** the health and health care of Canadians through improved understandings, processes, services, products or systems*”. (CIHR, 2004)

Research Transfer

Research transfer is a part of Knowledge Translation. This is the connection between the processes of research and the processes of decision-making in policy and practice, as they relate to behaviour at population, community and individual levels. Research transfer operates in two directions: research-based knowledge can influence decisions, and the problems of the decision-maker and/or consumer can guide the researcher (i.e. a struggle following a policy). Research Transfer makes sure research is used to inform policy, practice and service delivery. CAAN’s strategic research policies emphasize that research transfer has the greatest chance of success if:

- Aboriginal stakeholders, such as Aboriginal communities and APHAs, are involved in planning, conducting and distributing information about research projects;
- The research focuses on research outcomes that are meaningful to Aboriginal stakeholders; and
- The research targets change at a population, community and/or individual level.

Knowledge Brokerage

Another element of KT is Knowledge Brokerage. The concept of Knowledge Brokerage is connecting people with people, people with information and people with people who have skill-sets to help solve problems such as Aboriginal health issues related to HIV/AIDS. There is a critical need for capacity exchange or capacity development for conducting research in Aboriginal communities. CAAN focuses on finding and providing information, advice and expertise to core partner and stakeholder Aboriginal organizations looking for solutions to problems they experience in addressing Aboriginal HIV/AIDS issues. This links people with

people, people with information, and people with skill-sets to provide culturally acceptable solutions and interventions.

Knowledge Uptake

There are many methods or strategies for encouraging Knowledge Uptake, a final element of KT. For example, targeting the involvement of people in key positions in stakeholder groups from the beginning of a project and detailed planning to share the end results of research projects are useful techniques. As an organization, CAAN believes that ongoing and effective communication, collaboration and partnerships are central to successful knowledge translation of research findings into policy and practice regarding HIV/AIDS and Aboriginal peoples.

It is important to budget money and time in a research proposal to develop materials for distribution, prepare presentations and host events to support uptake of new research knowledge. CAAN uses a variety of methods to encourage Knowledge Uptake. These methods range from translating research information into new materials to building research capacity in the Aboriginal community to respond to HIV/AIDS. Examples from CAAN's experience include:

- Community Advisory Committees for Research Projects;
- Including Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal academics on research teams;
- Writing articles in the CAAN newsletter;
- Developing a Community-Based Research Journal;
- Submitting articles to peer-reviewed journals;
- AGM/Skills-Building Workshops about research and research project findings;
- Research results dissemination workshops (i.e., Community Solutions, Oct 2005);
- Participating in conferences by submitting poster and oral presentations;
- Production of manuals/resources for community use; and
- Evidence-based prevention messaging.
- Program and project evaluation;

KT in Action

It has been said that knowledge is power. This is the foundation of Knowledge Translation. Research is conducted to learn something new or understand something from a different perspective. In community-based research the research process is designed so that the research findings produce new knowledge that is relevant and useful to the community where the research has happened.

As stated above the ultimate goal of KT is to influence political and social change. Research can draw attention to an issue that has been ignored. Research can profile and pass on people's stories. Research can validate that a program is working well and it can show where a program should improve, change or end if it is not working. Using creative methods to 'translate' new research knowledge helps to make sure that a broad range of people can learn about the research, understand the findings and take action.

Conclusion

Research does not change things, but it does help to define them, making it useful to know when and when not to take further action. Knowledge Translation is about the exchange of knowledge, building capacity through research skills and resources and sharing research results on an individual, organisational and community level. It is a process that is designed to make research knowledge more meaningful by ‘translating’ research findings and evidence in a way that is useful for the community at large. When knowledge translation is successful, research knowledge is given back to the community resulting in actions that influence policy and lead to political and social change that will ultimately improve lives.

Notes:

A number of sources were consulted in preparing this Fact Sheet. The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) acknowledges the contribution of the following sources:

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