

## **Breakout Session: Supporting rural HIV research in a North American context**

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### **Gaps in rural HIV research – what works and what do we need to do?**

Until now, the majority of HIV research has focused on gay men and men who have sex with men in urban contexts. This has left a knowledge gap with respect to other groups, such as rural communities, also affected by HIV. As a result, HIV care and services may not be appropriately tailored to these populations. To change this, relevant data that identifies the needs of rural communities and helps generate solutions is required to engage policy makers and funders in initiating strategies to resolve healthcare inequities.

A key challenge to doing this research is defining what measures of rurality may be most applicable to a given community. Building key relationships with community leaders, such as community Elders, can help identify the most applicable aspects of rurality in a given context, and can help guide research in that specific community. It is also essential that each individual community's needs, culture, and values are considered, and that research is conducted using community partnerships.

### **Potential strategies to close research gaps in rural HIV research may include:**

1. **Securing funder interest:** expanding existing networks to help garner interest and prioritize rural research in the eyes of funders is crucial; NIH, NIAID, and CIHR recognize the knowledge gaps, so it is important to share key conference proceedings with them on the most pressing needs in rural contexts
2. **Stratifying data by rurality:** requesting that the Public Health Agency of Canada stratifies their data by rurality to highlight existing discrepancies between rural and urban health outcomes of people living with HIV may increase interest in rural health research
3. **Internet connection and technologies:** lack of access to digital technologies in rural communities can create barriers to community-researcher partnerships; engaging with organizations such as the First Nations Health Authority (in BC) to help establish internet and telehealth connections in rural communities could be helpful in research efforts