



cocktails scientifique

HIV research in the prairies mixer

FINAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

**Cocktails Scientifique
HIV Research in the Prairies**

Final Report

June 2009

Report prepared by
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Acknowledgments

As members of the organizing committee, we would like to thank the presenters and participants of the event, our animator, *Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco* and the funders, GILEAD and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

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Introduction and Background

The *Cocktails Scientifique* gathering was a follow up to a meeting in June 2008 with care providers from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwestern Ontario.¹ In that occasion participants focused on HIV related clinical practices, reviewed current challenges in the clinical field and discussed research gaps. The meeting also brought to their attention the need to involve other disciplines in further discussions. The *Cocktails Scientifique* gathering was designed to address the gaps in communication across the different disciplines, sectors and provinces.

The event was organized in partnership between the Manitoba HIV Program (Nine Circles Community Health Centre and Health Sciences Centre), the University of Manitoba and the Prairie HIV Community Based Research Program.

Members of the Committee engaged in regular exchanges to organize the event. During that time, the group identified potential key participants, speakers and an animator, communicated with the main funder, and developed materials and the agenda for the event. The animator of the event provided valuable suggestions in the development of the agenda and flow of the meeting.

Purpose of the Event

The gathering was meant to bring together university and community organizations for a discussion on HIV research in the Prairies. The objectives of the event were:

- To learn about the current state of HIV research in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta
- To discuss gaps and opportunities for future research and action
- To strengthen communication and build partnerships across the region.

The Program

Held concomitant to the annual Canadian Association of HIV Research (CAHR) conference in Vancouver, the two-hour event was designed around short presentations followed by small group conversation.

The event was opened by a presentation on a look at the HIV epidemic in the prairies. Dr. Marissa Becker highlighted the fact that the picture for Manitoba is different than the one for Canada. Based on the analysis of data from people living with HIV who were recently diagnosed and accessing care, she indicated that about a quarter of these people were Aboriginal, forty percent women, with heterosexual activity being the main driver of the transmission, and about a quarter of people presenting with CD4 <200 (with overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in this situation). Dr. Becker demonstrated that the situation is not different for the other Prairie provinces. Saskatchewan and Alberta have seen an increased in number of diagnosis and people in care.

¹ The Prairie HIV Advisory Board meeting took place in Winnipeg late June 2008.

Following this introduction, Dr. John Wylie, Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba, was invited to discuss *Barriers and Challenges in HIV Research in the prairies*. Dr. Wylie based his presentation on his area of expertise, Epidemiology, and, partially, the information from the *Compendium*. He indicated that most of the research in epidemiology and social sciences fell into the following categories: **social epidemiology, prevention, capacity-building** activities and **services**. The research has focused mostly on people living with HIV/AIDS, Aboriginal people, women and immigrants.

In the field of **Social Epidemiology** promising was the fact that social network analysis studies were conducted across provinces. In the social sciences, the focus has been on the social context of HIV, sexual violence, stigma and migration. However, among the gaps were: the lack of understanding on rural populations, sex workers, immigrants, youth and people involved in corrections. He spoke on the need to understand more about the issues for a particular population in Manitoba, i.e., solvent users.

In **prevention**, research focused on harm reduction, testing and education, with gaps on use of new point of care testing options in non-clinical venues, cost-effectiveness or interventions and new access or contact point such as the Internet.

Capacity-building is a key area in community-based research. Many research projects and activities in the prairies concerned research capacity-building. Yet, Dr. Wylie pointed out some gaps in this area such as issues regarding community readiness in rural areas, increased involvement of population members, and capacity-building for quantitative social epidemiology methods.

The last area identified was on **services and care**. Researchers have focused on access and social support, culturally competent care, motherhood, mental health, housing, mapping for service delivery and labour force engagement. Some of the gaps identified were better understanding on services for specific populations (e.g., women, immigrants, people living with HIV, Aboriginal, IDU, youth, LGBTT, sex workers, inmates), and need for program evaluation. Dr. Wylie brought to the attention of participants the need to attend to the impact of privacy laws.

Dr. Wylie mentioned the need for better linkages across disciplines (basic, clinical and social sciences) to look at some key issues like understanding the reasons behind groups of people with fewer high risk behaviours and greater vulnerability to HIV (e.g., Aboriginal people), poorer responses to hepatitis C treatment among certain sectors of the population, physiological and genetic differences in immune systems.

Daven Seebarran, Wood Buffalo HIV/AIDS Society (WBHAS), Fort McMurray, Alberta, addressed the *Gaps in knowledge translation – from research to practice*. Mr. Seebarran focussed on the experiences on using research in his region. He also delved into issues trying to further the engagement of community organizations in HIV research. This point was largely illustrated through WBHAS' experience in seeking funding for research. Partnership development (i.e., engagement of compatible academic partners), proposal development, understanding of funders' strict guidelines and processes, development to curriculum vitae were raised as many of the points of contention in the research fund seeking process for community-based organizations.

Dr. Keith Fowke, Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba, addressed emerging issues and possibilities for partnerships. He departed from an overview of basic science research that is being done in the prairies. In this regard, Dr. Fowke introduced the key researchers in the different provinces and their areas of work. His presentation showcased a wide range of research interests and work across the prairies from researchers working on T cell responses to lung infections and finding ways to kill organisms responsible for life-threatening infections in people living with HIV/AIDS (Dr. Mody in Calgary), the effect on gut function and CD4 cell in the gut (Dr. Van Marle in Calgary), the effect of HIV on neurological conditions (i.e., Ower in Edmonton), viral/host protein interactions and antiviral factors (i.e., Smiley in Edmonton), HIV/HCV co-infection (i.e., Agrawal in Edmonton), HIV subtype analysis and computer modeling of recombination (Dr. Cai in Edmonton), in utero DNA immunization to prevent vertical transmission (Dr. Griebel in Saskatoon). Dr. Fowke highlighted the research activities in Manitoba, as a large centre for basic research in HIV/AIDS. Much of such activity is realized through the *Resistance and Susceptibility to Infections Research Group*, where the following issues are addressed: natural resistance to infection, mucosal immunology (Dr. Plummer in Wpg), T Cells and HIV infection (Dr. Ball in Wpg), HIV viral genetics and host genetics (Dr. Luo in Wpg), viral/host protein interactions and antiviral factors (Dr. Yao in Wpg), T cell defects in HIV infection, HIV resistance and disease progression, elite controllers (Dr. Fowke). Dr. Fowke highlighted an emerging interdisciplinary training program with focus on HIV and global health. In Winnipeg, the International Centre for Infectious Diseases is also involved in the HIV field (e.g., HIV/AIDS in Ukraine, HIV vaccine).

Dr. Fowke indicated a need to link clinical, social and basic sciences programs within and across provinces. As an example of linkage of clinical and basic science researchers he mentioned the elite controller study in MB and SK. He also highlighted the need to focus on Aboriginal at risk populations and look at possible unique disease progression patterns among this population. Another example of unique opportunity is to understand the effect of solvent use/'sniffing' on the immune system, as this is an issue that is being looked at from an epidemiological perspective in Wpg. Other emerging opportunities can be found through the Prairie Infectious Immunology Network (PIIN), in MB and SK, has met and is interested in expanding to Alberta, and northern U.S. as well as to incorporate other disciplines (clinical, epi and social).

The Research Compendium

In parallel and in part due to the event the Prairie HIV Community-Based Research Program took the lead in the development of a compendium of HIV research in the prairies. A student in Saskatchewan assisted in searching information.

Researchers and community organizations were contacted to ensure completeness and accuracy of the information. Copies of this publication were distributed at the meeting. The Compendium is available at the website of the Program. The information has also been included to an online database of research has been developed to ease the search of information and to facilitate updating. The information is available at www.prairiecbr.com.

The Participants

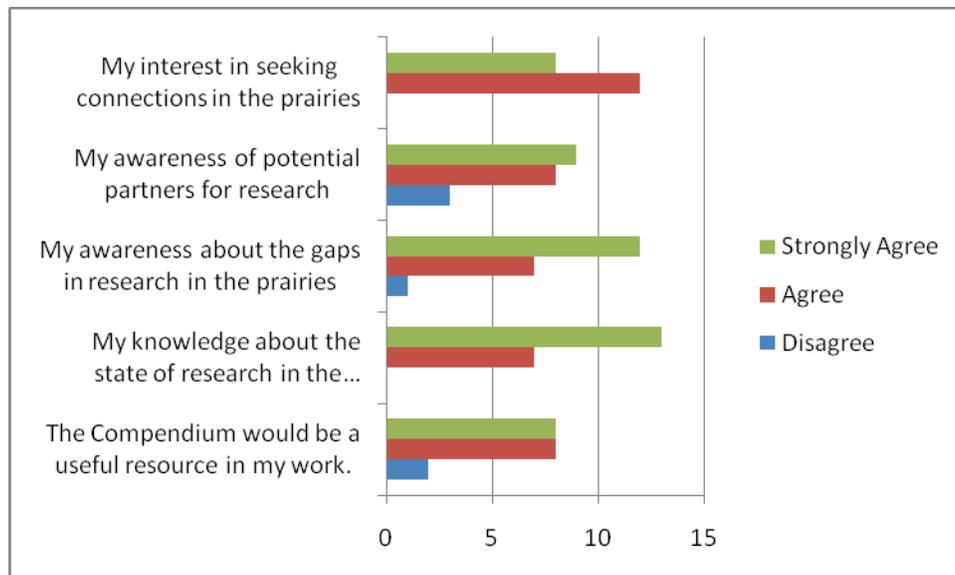
A cross section of researchers and practitioners from the three prairie provinces were invited to the event. Many indicated their interest in the event; however, were not able to attend. Excluding members of the organizing committee, twenty-five participants attended the event. There was a larger representation from Manitoba. Yet, at the event participants represented a wide range of sectors and disciplines from all three provinces. There were nine (9) representatives from community organizations, ten (10) academic researchers, two (2) government researchers, and four (4) funders (industry/private and public). The community representatives were practitioners in the clinical and prevention areas. The academics represented all the discipline streams from the Public Health and Epidemiology, Social, Clinical and Basic Sciences, including researchers and students.

A large proportion of the participants (i.e., 80 percent) returned the evaluation questionnaire.

Event Evaluation

Outcomes

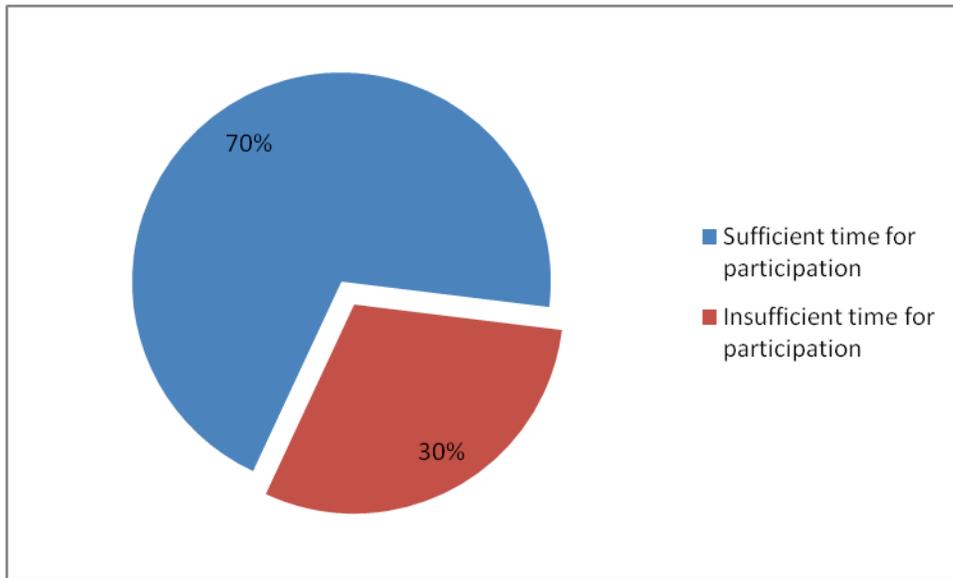
The meeting increased participants' interest in seeking connections in the prairies (60 percent agreed, and 40 percent strongly agreed). For the most part, the meeting also increased participants' awareness of potential partners for research (40 percent agreed, 45 percent strongly agreed). Sixty percent of respondents strongly agreed on the fact that the meeting increased their awareness about the gaps in research in the prairies. Most of the rest agreed on this matter, with only one participant disagreeing. Respondents indicated that the meeting increased their knowledge on the state of the HIV research in the Prairies (65 percent strongly agreed and 35 percent agreed). Eighty percent of respondents felt that the Compendium would be useful in their work (40 percent strongly agreed and the same number agreed).



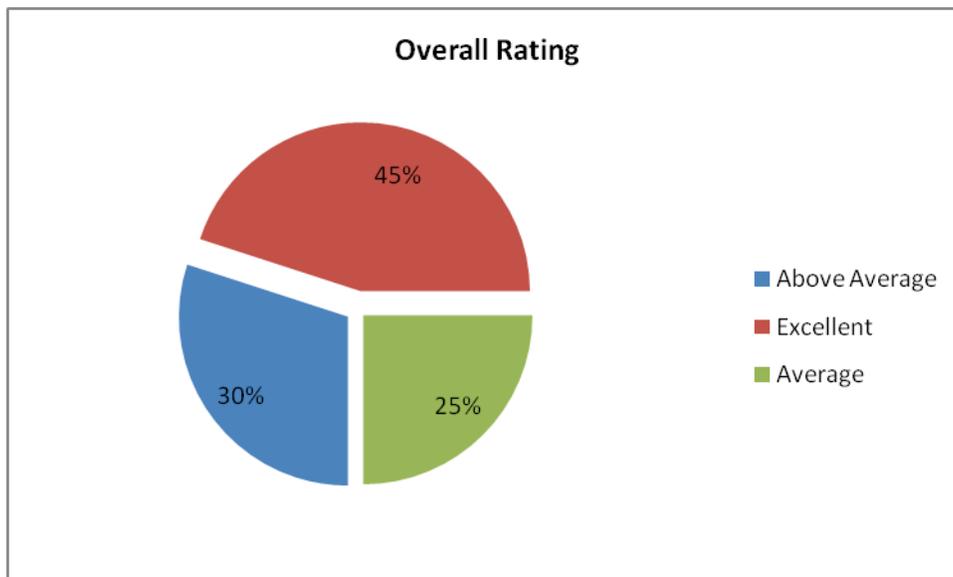
Forty percent of the respondents identified a few changes they intended to make in their practice or work as result of the meeting. Their comments show participants would follow up with potential research partners, including collaboration across disciplines within own institutions. One participant indicated an interest in engaging provincial partners, while another respondent would pursue the establishment of links between clinical sciences and community.

Practical Aspects

Participants were asked to comment on organizational and practical issues of the meeting. Thirty and fifty five percent of the respondents felt that the meeting was very adequate and adequate, respectively, to achieve the objectives set. While most of participants believed that there was enough time for participation, thirty percent felt that the time was insufficient. All but one participant agreed that the event was free of commercial bias.



Overall, all respondents were satisfied with the meeting. Forty five percent indicated the meeting having been “excellent” and for another 30 percent, this as “above average”. For the last quarter of respondents, it was “average”.



For Future Consideration

Participants suggested ideas regarding a follow up meeting. These suggestions can be divided into two main areas. One area correspond to the **specific comments regarding the organization of a future meeting** such as organizing a teleconference to discuss next steps, **follow up communication** (e.g., follow-up meeting in 2010, email communication, teleconference) incorporating more time for discussion and sharing among all participants, establishing an annual meeting on HIV research in the prairies. Second, a few participants shared ideas on the

content of the meeting. Among the ideas were development of research proposals and having participants to comment on “what they need to feel more comfortable/able to participate in new research/new research areas (e.g., capacity building).”

Opportunities for Partnerships and Collaboration

To further the objective of strengthening communication and building partnerships across the region, we asked participants about their interest to take part of a Prairie research focused network. Three quarter responded positively to this question.

About the same number of participants (seventy percent) also responded positively to the question that tried to assess participants' interest in assisting in the organization of future events that bring together researchers and community. A few participants named potential contacts who would be interested or benefit from such network. Many of these were originally invited to the event.

Conclusions

A few concluding remarks and lessons can be drawn from this gathering. Overall, the event was well received and enjoyed by the participants. Participants increased their interest in seeking connections, increased their awareness of potential partners. The meeting also increased their knowledge on the current state and the gaps in HIV research. Most participants also indicated that the Compendium of research would be useful in their work.

We learned that dialogue across disciplines and throughout the prairies is necessary and well received. Yet, more time for people to network and share knowledge needs to be accommodated in future events or activities.

Now that a broader group of researchers and practitioners have been made aware of the development of knowledge sharing opportunities through this initial event, upcoming activities should incorporate ideas from a wider base of potential participants.

We also learned of the limitations to participate of an event that requires travel. The assumption was based on the draw that the Canadian Association of HIV Research conference would provoke. However, the event had to compete with other concurrent activities also brought about because of the conference. Although successful, a careful decision on the date and time of the event continue to be required for upcoming events.

Next Steps

The success of this event has consolidated the interest and need to continue sharing information and knowledge across the region. The organizing committee will extend the invitation to the participants to discuss the development of a similar event concurrent to the 2010 Canadian Association of HIV Research conference to be held in Saskatoon.

Participants will also be invited to submit new information to the database of HIV research on the prairies that has been incorporated to the site of the Prairie HIV Community-Based Research program (www.prairiecbr.com).

Appendices

List of Participants

Micaela Belisle
Wood Buffalo HIV and AIDS Society
Fort McMurray, AB

Neil Boutin
Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.

Germain Bukassa-Kazadi
Public Health Agency of Canada, Regina, SK

Shanna Chan
Manitoba HIV Program, Winnipeg, MB

Dave Esté
Social Work, University of Calgary, AB

Greg Deans
University of British Columbia, BC

Keith Fowke
Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba,
MB

Ed Gudaitis
Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.

Jennifer Juno
Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba,
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Ken Kasper
Health Sciences Centre HIV Program,
Winnipeg, MB

Yoav Keynan
Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba,
MB

Allison Land
Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba,
MB

Tanis Liebreich
Public Health Agency of Canada, Edmonton, AB

Shauna McQuarrie
Nine Circles Community Health Centre,
Winnipeg, MB

Susanna Ogunnaike-Cooke
HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Section
Public Health Agency of Canada, OT

Jessica O'Reilly
Consultant in Sexology

Mike Payne
Nine Circles Community Health Centre,
Winnipeg, MB

Daven Seebarran
Wood Buffalo HIV and AIDS Society
Fort McMurray, AB

Cinda Serianni
Gilead Sciences Canada Inc.

Shannon Stone
HIV & hepatitis C outpatient clinic, Saskatoon,
SK

Kurt Williams
University of Saskatchewan, SK

Catherine Worthington
Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary,
AB

John Wylie
Community Health Sciences & Medical
Microbiology, University of Manitoba, MB

Representative
HIV Edmonton, Edmonton, AB

Organizing Committee

Carole Beaudoin

National Microbiology Lab, Public Health Agency

Marissa Becker

Medical Microbiology, University of Manitoba and Manitoba HIV Program

Bohdanna Kinasevych

Health in Common, formerly with Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Paula Migliardi

Prairie HIV Community Based Research Program

Carla Pindera

Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Event Animator

Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco

Cocktails Scientifique HIV Research in the Prairies Evaluation

For each of the following, please check off the best response:

- | | + | | | - |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The meeting increased my knowledge about the state of research in the Prairies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. The meeting increased my awareness about the gaps in research in the Prairies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. The meeting increased my awareness of potential partners for research. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. The meeting increased my interest in seeking new connections in the Prairies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. The format of the meeting was adequate to achieve the objectives set. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. The Compendium of HIV Research in the Prairies would be a useful resource in my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Was sufficient time allowed for participation?
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| 8. Was this event free of commercial bias?
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| 9. Overall, I would rate this event as (please check):
Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Above Average <input type="checkbox"/> Average <input type="checkbox"/> Below Average <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| 10. What changes, if any, do you intend to make in your practice or work as result of today's event? | | | | |

Opportunities for Partnership and Collaboration

- | | Yes | Need more information | No |
|--|-----|-----------------------|----|
| 10. I would like to become part of a Prairie research focused network. | | | |
| 11. I would be interested in participating in the organization of future events that bring together Prairie based researchers and community? | | | |

12. Do you have any suggestions or comments regarding a follow up meeting?
Please comment.

13. Please provide us with one primary contact from your province for the purpose of expanding the Network and knowledge sharing:

Name: _____

Position: _____

Province: _____

Thank you for you participation and collaboration.

Members of the organizing committee may be following up with the individuals who have attended this event in the next few months. We look forward to working with you to build successful ties regarding HIV research in the Prairies.