



## Re-Imagining Strategies to Counter the Criminalization of Women Living with HIV In Canada

Ancillary Event Summary, CAHR 2017

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The Women, ART, and Criminalization of HIV (WATCH) ancillary event brought together researchers, people living with HIV, service providers, and community organizers interested in issues surrounding the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure in Canada.

After an opening by an Elder, WATCH team members opened the event with a panel to present an update on the WATCH study and how Body Mapping is used to engage women living with HIV in issues related to the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure; survey data from CHIWOS suggesting that some women are responding to the criminalization of non-disclosure by choosing to be abstinent; advocacy efforts in Canada from the Canadian Coalition to Reform Criminalization of HIV; and how HIV non-disclosure fits into the current legal landscape in Canada by offering a few examples of legal responses to date.

Next, a diverse panel of women shared lived experiences as women living with HIV, and as facilitators of the WATCH Body Mapping workshops. Women shared personal stories illustrating how criminalization and the overreaching shadow of surveillance impacts women's lives, relationships, community participation, and health and well-being outcomes. WATCH facilitators shared what it was like to hold a space for these complex and personal discussions during the Body Mapping process, and the importance of hosting a space where women are comfortable and free from judgment and stigma.

After hearing about the direct and indirect impacts of criminalization attendees divided into groups to participate in a World Café. The questions asked participants to reflect on research, evidence, and information needed to fast-track government decision-making; potential strategies to link research and advocacy; and the broader effects on criminalization on women's day to day lives. A common theme throughout the report-back stressed the importance of approaching discussions of criminalization with an intersectional lens, addressing socio-structural violence and social underpinnings that place people, especially those who are most marginalized by society, at the highest risk of experiencing criminalization. Media outlets were identified as a starting point to share stories and build advocacy and community capacity efforts.

Key strategies to catalyze change highlighted the need for service providers, researchers, and community members to work together: to break out of individual 'silos' to bridge law, public health, medicine, and women's rights. This was identified as important to highlight community voices that are currently being left out of decision making, addressing not only the current application of the law, but the over-reaching effects of criminalization and surveillance that impact women's lives as well.

To learn more about WATCH and it's team members, please visit our website [watchHIV.ca](http://watchHIV.ca), or connect with us on Facebook @watchHIV; or contact BC provincial coordinator Rebecca Gormley (1-855-506-8615 option 1, [rgormley@cfenet.ubc.ca](mailto:rgormley@cfenet.ubc.ca)) or ON provincial coordinator Allyson Ion ([iona@mcmaster.ca](mailto:iona@mcmaster.ca)).