

Positive Wellness Survey: Community Report

Kristy Buck, Wellness Program Coordinator
AIDS Committee of Toronto | August 2007

The Positive Wellness Survey* was created by the HIV/AIDS Wellness Advisory Network and the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) to learn more about what kinds of wellness programs people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) are interested in. The survey included questions about PHAs' general health and wellness as well as their interest in the following topics:

- Nutrition
- Sexuality
- Spirituality
- Emotional Wellness
- Complementary Therapies
- Addictions

Who participated?

The Positive Wellness Survey was completed in February 2007 by 119 PHAs who live in Toronto. Overall, the respondents of the survey mainly identified as white, gay men between the ages of 40 and 49, who were born in Canada, have been living with HIV/AIDS for 10 or more years and who are connected to services — primarily through ACT and the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (PWA). The community of PHAs in Toronto is very diverse and we also collected some responses from people of other sexual orientations and ethno-cultural backgrounds.

How are People Living With HIV/AIDS (PHAs) in Toronto feeling?

We asked several questions at the beginning of the survey to get an idea of the current health and wellness of PHAs in Toronto. Overall, close to half of the respondents said that

both their current physical health and their current overall health and wellness are excellent or very good. A quarter of respondents rated their current physical and overall health and wellness as fair or poor.

In terms of emotional health, almost all respondents (95%) agreed that their emotional wellness is an important aspect of their overall health. Three quarters (3/4) of these respondents, though, also stated that they are concerned about the state of their current emotional wellness.

Sexuality was an important topic for respondents — almost two thirds (2/3) agreed that expressing themselves sexually is an important aspect of their health and wellness, though only about one third (1/3) of respondents rated their current sexual health as excellent or very good and only about one fifth (1/5) of respondents rated their current sexual relationships as excellent or very good.

More than half of the respondents said they were addicted to a substance or activity — nicotine being the most common. Most of the respondents said that they were concerned about their addiction.

What are People Living With HIV/AIDS (PHAs) in Toronto interested in?

It was clear from the results of the Positive Wellness Survey that respondents are interested in the health and wellness topics outlined above. They are also interested in learning more about how to improve their health and wellness. Participants were most interested in learning more about nutrition &

healthy eating, followed by emotional wellness, complementary therapies, sexuality & sexual health and spirituality. Some PHAs also indicated that they are concerned about addictions.

What else did we learn?

Respondents of the survey were very interested in receiving information on health and wellness topics. Receiving information was the most popular choice for each of the wellness topics when we asked participants about their interest in various program types (including an information session, a workshop series, a peer-based discussion group and one-on-one support.)

Most respondents filled the survey out online and also expressed an interest in receiving information online, so we plan on making wellness information, such as our upcoming wellness newsletter and calendar of events and programs for PHAs, available online as well as in hard copy. We will also promote program and events on our website and through email.

What are the next steps?

Being Well: The PWA/ACT Wellness Bulletin for PHAs is a health promotion newsletter scheduled for launch in August 2007. The first edition will focus on complementary therapies and will be followed by editions on nutrition and smoking cessation.

In the near future, we will also launch an online community calendar of events and programs for PHAs which will make it easier for both PHAs and service providers to stay up-to-date regarding what's going on in the city.

The HIV/AIDS Wellness Advisory Network has hosted a nutrition information session on 'Eating Healthy on a Budget' and plans are underway for an upcoming session on 'Healthy Eating to Manage Cholesterol' in August, a computer workshop on how to find reliable health and wellness related information on the internet as well as a complementary therapy workshop in the fall.

Keep your eyes on ACT's website for upcoming information about wellness programs, *Being Well* and the upcoming launch of the community calendar for PHAs!

Contact Kristy Buck, ACT's Wellness Program Coordinator at kbuck@actontario.org or 416-340-8484 ext. 234 for more information or if you would like to receive emails about future wellness programs.

To read the full report on the findings of the Positive Wellness Survey, visit our website at:

www.actontario.org/website/home.nsf/pages/positivewellness

**The professional and personal expertise of the HIV/AIDS Wellness Advisory Network members, including PHA membership, consultations with other service providers and clients, an analysis of the past year's ACT Community Health Forum evaluations and evaluations from this past summer's Wellness Workshops guided our decision to focus on these six particular wellness topics. The Positive Wellness Survey was developed by Kristy Buck, ACT's Wellness Program Coordinator, and the HIV/AIDS Advisory Network survey working group. The survey was available online and in hard copy and was promoted in the HIV/AIDS community through flyers, emails, the ACT website, and by members of the HIV/AIDS Wellness Advisory Network.*

ACT
AIDS Committee of Toronto