

Scoping the Field: Identifying Key Research Priorities in HIV and Rehabilitation

Background: HIV is increasingly experienced as a lifelong, episodic disease, characterized by unpredictable cycles of wellness and illness. There is a need to develop the field of research, clinical practice, and policy for HIV rehabilitation, to address the range of impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions associated with the disease and its treatments.

Objective: To identify key research priorities related to HIV and rehabilitation that will advance policy and practice for people living with HIV in Canada.

Methods: We conducted a scoping review of the published and grey literature, followed by focus group and interview consultations with 28 stakeholders including people living with HIV, researchers, educators, clinicians, and policy makers with expertise in HIV and rehabilitation, across Canada and internationally. We asked participants their thoughts and perspectives on research priorities in HIV rehabilitation. All discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify key emergent themes that related to research priorities in HIV and rehabilitation.

Results: The *Framework of Research Priorities in HIV and Rehabilitation* was developed to important topics in HIV and rehabilitation research. In this framework, research priorities fell into three overlapping themes: A) living with HIV across the lifespan (e.g. aging with HIV, concurrent health conditions, changing outlook over time), B) disability (e.g. impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions), and C) rehabilitation (e.g. access to services, effect of rehabilitation interventions, and impact of education of health care providers on HIV and rehabilitation). These research priorities may be explored through environmental contextual lenses (e.g. urban versus rural, developing versus developed countries, stigma, legal, policy and social justice issues) and/or personal contextual lenses (e.g. gender, ethnocultural backgrounds), using different methodological approaches (e.g. using a mixed methods study design, considering cross-disease versus HIV-specific approaches, incorporating longitudinal study designs (to explore disability over time), increasing the number of treatment effectiveness studies (to explore the impact of interventions), and pursuing outcome measure development).

Additional consultation identified **six top research priorities** from this framework field which included:

- 1) disability and episodic disability,
- 2) concurrent health conditions living with HIV (e.g. mental health, bone and joint disorders, cardiovascular disease),
- 3) HIV and the brain (e.g. mild to moderate memory and concentration problems, minor cognitive motor disorder),
- 4) labour force and income support issues,
- 5) access to and effect of rehabilitation, and
- 6) development and evaluation of outcome measurement tools.

Conclusions: Despite increasing evidence in this field, there is a need for future research in the area of HIV and rehabilitation. Six key priorities for HIV and rehabilitation research were identified through a collaborative scoping review process that integrated perspectives of multiple stakeholders in the field. These priorities propose a future plan for HIV and rehabilitation research that may increase our knowledge to collectively enhance future practice, programming and policy for people living with HIV in Canada.