



Agency Accountability

This resource was developed by the Provincial Black PHA Advisory Body (PAB)¹ with the support of the staff of the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO). It is a companion to the brochure, *Accountability: Our Responsibility*, which was developed as a conversation starter on the concept of accountability at the level of the individual. This brochure is meant to begin a conversation between clients and their local agencies; opening



doors to new relationships and exchanges.

Although there are many areas of accountability at the agency level (i.e., Board of Directors, staff, clients, volunteers, partners, community members and funders), this brochure focuses on how agencies can be more accountable to their clients.

ACCHO defines agency accountability as: The process by which an agency holds itself openly responsible for how it operates, this is accomplished in a transparent manner where clients are meaningfully involved.

It's good practice for agencies to consistently monitor and evaluate whether appropriate mechanisms for accountability to clients are in place at all levels. These could include, but are not limited to, clear vision, mission and values statements; policies/procedures; complaint processes; code of conduct; rules and regulations; and legal instruments. These accountability mechanisms demonstrate how the agency is responding to what it has learnt through its service delivery practices via the feedback offered by clients. To enhance the effectiveness of this process, clients can be involved in decision-making leading to necessary improvements.

Agencies that are accountable to their clients:

- Know their client base (who they are, where they come from, what matters to them, etc.)
- Treat clients courteously and professionally
- Post clients' rights and responsibilities for all to see
- Encourage and appreciate constructive comments/feedback from clients
- Provide opportunities for clients to be involved in their work as staff or volunteers

Ultimately, by agencies being accountable to their clients, they are committed to social change by challenging and helping to end human rights violations that infringe upon the values of human equality, dignity, impartiality, justice, freedom, personal and collective responsibility.

To ensure accountability to its clients, it's important for AIDS and health/social service organizations to be committed to pursuing the following principles and guiding frameworks:

- Anti-racism/anti-oppression
- Clear understanding of policy and procedures

- Client-centered
- Cultural competency
- Evidence-informed programming/services
- GIPA/MIPA
- Harm reduction
- Human Rights
- Information management, confidentiality and privacy
- Sex positive environment
- Anti-homophobia

Below are some indicators that can be used to ensure that agencies are accountable to clients. It can be demonstrated by:

- Staff are representative of the communities they serve
- Commitment to ongoing improvement to processes and programs/services
- Commitment to ongoing training to ensure staff have the skills to respond to clients' needs
- Commitment to operating transparently
- Clearly defined staff responsibilities, roles and authority
- Respect for the confidentiality of clients, and a commitment to rapid action when confidentiality is breached
- Adequate financial and human resources to support program delivery
- Clear and accessible membership processes
- Responsive complaints and resolution processes

We all can make a commitment to ensuring that clients are meaningfully involved in their local agencies.

This resource, as well as *Accountability: Our Responsibility*, can be obtained from www.accho.ca.

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¹The Black Provincial Advisory Body (PAB) is made up of African, Caribbean and Black PHAs from across Ontario. The purpose of the PAB is to 1) encourage and foster the meaningful involvement of African, Caribbean and Black people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) in the work of ACCHO, and 2) work to ensure that the greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA) principle is understood and meaningfully incorporated into the work of ACCHO and all other work aligned with the Strategy.