

## HIV & AIDS LEGAL CLINIC ONTARIO ANTI-OPPRESSION/ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

Approved by Board of Directors: July 3, 2025

The staff and board of directors of the HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO) are dedicated to fighting for social, economic, racial, and health justice. HALCO aims to dismantle HIV-related stigma and HIV-related discrimination. Our work is informed and supported by the greater and meaningful involvement of people living with HIV (GIPA/MIPA), an approach that has always been and must continue to be central to the HIV movement (for example, the majority of the members of HALCO's board of directors must be persons living with HIV).

In Ontario, high rates of HIV are consistently reported in some communities, including Indigenous, Black and gay communities, as well as among people who use intravenous drugs. Approximately one in five people living with HIV in Ontario are women, and Black and Indigenous women are more likely to be living with HIV than other groups of women. In addition, trans women are more likely to report having been diagnosed with HIV than others in Ontario.

Colonialism, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Black and other racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression contribute to this reality. The state and other institutions, but also community-based organizations, perpetuate oppression and inequity, which, among other factors, can lead to increased risk of HIV and overall inequitable health outcomes. As a legal clinic, we recognize the role we play in a legal system that is often another site of oppression for low-income, Indigenous, Black, trans, Two-Spirit, and other people living with HIV. It is not enough to promote, sign, and publish statements of solidarity. HALCO must also examine the ways in which we are complicit, and take concrete action to reduce barriers and inequities that replicate systems of oppression and inequity.

We also recognize that the legal system and dominant legal professional cultures can be sites of oppression and/or racism for HALCO's staff when carrying out their work. HALCO staff can be subject to oppression and/or racism in their interactions with members of the legal system, clients, community members, and others. In addition, we recognize that there are default and dominant work practices (e.g., hours of work, location of work, and size of assigned workload) and organizational structures in our society that can be sites of oppression for HALCO staff. We therefore commit to ensuring a workplace that is culturally safe for staff, board, and volunteers and that embeds an anti-oppression and anti-racist approach to all workplace matters, with a particular focus on work practices and organizational structures. We also commit to ensuring that policies and procedures are in place so to respond to oppression or racism encountered in the workplace.

HALCO acknowledges that to be more effective and connected to people living with HIV and communities most impacted by HIV, we need to continue to respond to emerging needs and issues. We reaffirm our commitment to developing new and strengthening existing partnerships to develop trust and learn from Indigenous, Black, racialized, trans, Two-Spirit, and other people living with HIV and communities impacted by HIV in Ontario. Central, and indeed necessary, to our work is also ensuring a workplace for staff, board, and volunteers that embeds in all activities, practices, and structures an anti-oppressive and anti-racist approach. We will hold ourselves accountable, including through interactions with clients and communities of people living with HIV (for example, by soliciting feedback from clients

and others in HIV communities), and we are confident that the work we do will improve HALCO's services and HALCO as a place of work.

A decolonizing and gender-based lens has and will be used in all areas of our work, in recognition of ongoing colonialism as well as the unique needs and supports that women may need. In addition, HALCO commits to supporting the self-determination, agency, and autonomy of people living with HIV and communities most impacted by HIV.

HALCO recognizes that it is not the responsibility of those who experience oppression to educate others and be solely responsible for challenging oppression; such a further burden should not be placed on those experiencing oppression. This work requires individual, community, and organizational commitment. To that end, this statement will guide all of our work, from client engagement, public legal education and law reform activity, to human resources approaches and policy development. We pledge to be more self-reflective, self-critical, and open to learning and growing as part of our commitment to addressing oppression and inequity. Moreover, seeking out, hearing, processing, and acting upon feedback are essential components of our commitment, as are transparency and accountability.