Let's Talk Stigma Reduction!

June 11, 2021 Event Report



Let's Talk Stigma Reduction! was a virtual event that brought together people working, thinking and living stigma reduction. We sought to bring people together from different areas and identities, in hopes of breaking down siloes, and looking for areas of collaboration to address the 'isms' people experience as forms of oppression. We also wanted to think about, share and celebrate inspiring and innovative ways that people are acting to reduce stigma across what is commonly referred to as British Columbia.

This event hosted 18 remarkable speakers who spoke about their lived experience, their innovations, their perseverance and their ideas for how we can address stigma and oppression.

PAN's stigma reduction work

Following the direction of our membership, PAN has been working on issues related to stigma for about 5 years. Our work started with learning about HIVrelated stigma for people living in BC through a community-based research project called the BC People Living with HIV Stigma Index. This has led us into more targeted work on planning initiatives and projects addressing stigma and work to reduce stigma. Through this work, our understanding of how stigma impacts individuals has expanded. Humans are complex beings with multiple characteristics, such as our gender, race, ethnicity, ability and many other things, that make up part of each individual. Each of these characteristics impact the way we move through the world and experience stigma or discrimination. This is called intersectionality and this term was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black legal scholar and has

PAN is gearing up for a new project to develop an organizational stigma assessment tool using a

frame the work we do around stigma.

become the approach we have used here at PAN to



Attendees represented many different areas of focus, experience and work, as is reflected in this word cloud created by attendees at the beginning of the day.

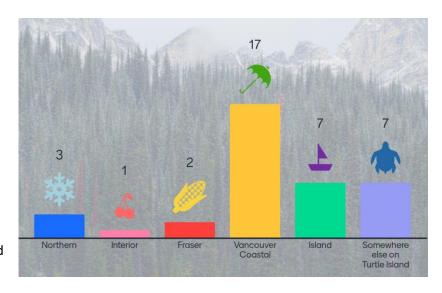
collaborative community-engaged process. To prepare for this, we wanted to bring people together to open up conversations and build relationships with people doing stigma reduction work across different sectors. We look forward to working with many of you moving forward. If you are interested in learning more about this work and maybe being involved, please let us know (paul@pacificaidsnetwork.org)!

Event Summary

Who was there?

Attendees included people with lived and living experience(s), people from community-based organizations and provincial agencies, researchers and people who fill a number of these roles! In line with our focus for the day, attendees worked in a wide variety of sectors, allowing us to break down silos and begin to make more connections of where our work intersects.

Each health area of the province was represented and we had people join us from other places across Turtle Island.



The Morning

The day began with a beautiful Kayachtn (Welcoming) by Elder Sempulyan Stewart Gonzales of Musqueam & Squamish. This was followed by a fireside chat with Sekani Dakelth, Jessy Dame and Charlene Burmeister, moderated by Anita David. You can read the bios of Sempulyan, Sekani, Jessy and Anita here.

Our morning session was described as fierce, impactful, motivational and inspiring. Our speakers spoke about stigma as it is experienced by different people in different places, how detrimental stigma can be to people's health and access to services, how the drug war and bad policy perpetuate stigma and how we can all act to disrupt stigma. As Charlene put it...

"I challenge people to sit in their discomfort. Quite often I hear from people [working in agencies] that they are feeling unsafe, because we're angry. I don't believe that you're unsafe in this space, I believe you feel uncomfortable. And I need you to sit with your discomfort. And I need you to work through that. And I need you to understand why we're angry, and that you have an obligation in your role to hear us out and to give us the respect that we deserve and help us to make effective change."

This rich discussion set the stage for the rest of the day. We hope this will continue in conversations and work that others are doing across stigma reduction work outside of this event. You can watch the recording of the Fireside Chat here.

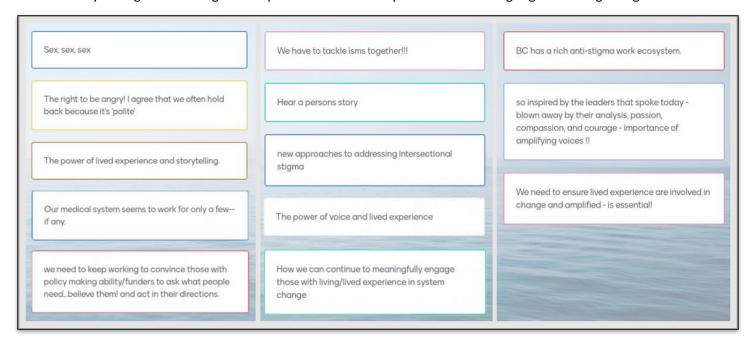
The Afternoon

Candice Norris brought us back with drumming and prayer to begin our afternoon session. The afternoon was structured as a series of short presentations followed by a question and answer period with the presenters. We had presentations by TJ Felix (Pivot), Heather McCain (Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods), Nicolas Crier (Megaphone/Speakers' Bureau), Scott Neufeld (Brock University), Laura "LT" Todd, Kathryn Proudfoot, and Victoria Maxwell (BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services), and Patience Magagula and a team of volunteers (Afro-Canadian Positive Network of BC). More speaker information can be found on the event page.

Presentations talked about the strength of storytelling and sharing experiences to shift attitudes about stigma and the power of arts. We heard how we have to work together to address all the "isms" together, whether it be racism, ableism, sexism or other forms of oppression, and to do this we need to reach across organizations and push towards systems change. And lastly, the message echoed that people with lived and living experience must be included in this work as they are the experts who can lead real change. You can watch the recording of the afternoon presentations here.

Takeaways from the day

We asked attendees to answer, "what is one thing you learned today?" and heard some common themes, including around story-telling and centring lived experiences and the importance of working together to fight stigma.



The event evaluation reflected the overall very positive experience and opportunity for learning that the day provided. Some highlights were that over 90% of survey respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that:

- The event allowed us to move the conversation about stigma in BC towards action and intervention planning.
- The event allowed them to learn about successful stigma interventions happening in BC (and beyond).
- Provided them better understanding of the intersectionality of stigma.
- Helped them to identify new and creative approaches to address stigma.

Reflections and Learnings from the organizers

- Listen, be uncomfortable and don't offer alternatives to someone's experience.
- Nothing About Us Without Us this key phrase that we hear all the time refers to the importance of leadership
 from people with lived and living experience(s). This phrase comes from the disability movement, and has been
 adopted by many fighting against oppression, stigma and for self-determination in doing work in different
 sectors.
- Stop seeing basic care as exceptional (an example shared was giving someone a sandwich in the ER). We need to expect the essentials and demand better care overall.
- We need to stop working in silos we need to reach out across organizations to do stigma work.

Thank you to all our speakers, everyone who helped organize the event, and all attendees for your knowledge and experience that contributed to such engaging event. If you would like to stay in touch about PAN's upcoming work around stigma reduction please email paul@pacificaidsnetwork.org to let us know. And/or sign up for PAN's newsletter here.

We would also like to thank the Provincial Health Services Authority and REACH Nexus for their support of this event.