



VIBE-BGB MEN

IN LIVING COLOUR R&B SIP N PAINT TOWN HALL

REPORT

Voices, Insight, Belonging &
Equity for Black Gay and
Bisexual Men

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IN LIVING COLOUR: R&B SIP N PAINT TOWN HALL COMMUNITY REPORT BACK & RESEARCH BRIEF

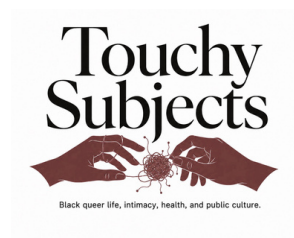
An Arts-Based Community Consultation Exploring the Meaning of Affirming Healthcare for Black, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and other Men who have Sex with Men in Toronto

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The SCWaSH Lab (University of Guelph), Touchy Subjects Lab (Western University), the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), Making Spaces Lab (University of Toronto), the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) and the Voices, Insight, Belonging & Equity for Black Gay and Bisexual Men (VIBE-BGBM) Project.



Published: August 2026



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Purpose: Traditional public health consultations often fail to capture the nuanced lived experiences of Black gay and bisexual men. Thus, our goal was to cultivate a safe, culturally affirming "third space" where Black gay, bisexual, queer, and other men who have sex with men could gather, build social connection, and share their priorities regarding sexual health and healthcare access. This consultation was essential to inform the future directions of the VIBE-BGBM (Voices, Insight, Belonging & Equity for Black Gay and Bisexual Men) Project, which is being undertaken in partnership with Black CAP, the University of Guelph, the University of Toronto, Western, and ACCHO.

Methodology: This event, *In Living Colour: R&B Sip N Paint Town Hall*, used an innovative, arts-based research methodology that combined a guided painting experience with facilitated community dialogue. Guided by the central prompt, "What does affirming healthcare mean to you?", 31 attendees from across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) painted individual canvases expressing their healthcare experiences and aspirations for Black gay/bi/queer men. Qualitative data collection was triangulated using three distinct channels: interactive digital polling via Mentimeter, handwritten notes taken by research team members during conversations with attendees, and post-event online evaluation surveys.

Key Findings: Attendees reported pervasive gaps in terms of cultural safety within healthcare settings, a lack of integrated mental health supports, systemic workplace discrimination, and ongoing social stigma surrounding sexual health and chemsex discussions. Conversely, successes were anchored heavily in peer-led conversations driving PrEP awareness, trusted word-of-mouth recommendations for specific affirming providers, and pleasure-based, non-judgmental harm reduction messaging. Moving forward, the community demands culturally responsive sexual health education, expanded outreach that actively builds safe social spaces to combat loneliness, and dedicated support for navigating intersectional Black queer identities.

Conclusion and Next Steps: These findings emphasize a critical community desire for holistic healthcare that seamlessly integrates physical, mental, and social well-being. As an immediate next step, VIBE-BGB Men hosted a community report-back social event to showcase paintings alongside a lay summary of major themes and findings, maintaining a transparent loop with the community. Concurrently, the research team is launching a comprehensive national survey and follow up using focus groups to systematically map the structural barriers, which will ultimately inform the design of targeted, Afrocentric and GBQ-positive health interventions.

PURPOSE OF THE TOWN HALL EVENT

Through their work with Black communities in Toronto, the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) identified a **critical need for affirming, accessible, and culturally safe sexual health education and care** that can empower Black gay, bi, queer and other men who have sex with men (GBM) to make decisions about their sexual health and navigate the services available to them.

In collaboration with Black CAP, the SCWaSH Lab (Skakoon-Sparling) at The University of Guelph; the Making Spaces Lab (McCready) at the University of Toronto, and the Touchy Subjects lab at Western (Grey), as well as the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO) we formed the **Voices, Insight, Belonging & Equity for Black Gay and Bisexual Men (VIBE-BGBM) team** and developed a set of research projects that would inform the development of interventions targeting this gap.

To maintain strong community involvement throughout the progress of these projects, we planned to hold regular themed community meetings with a dual purpose: (1) creating third spaces where Black gay, bisexual, and other queer men can unite and (2) providing a venue to gather feedback and disseminate updates and preliminary findings as our work progresses.

This report presents a summary of our learnings from the first VIBE-BGBM Town Hall Meeting in February 2026. **The purpose of this meeting was to connect with the Black GBM community to learn about their experiences, concerns, and priorities in terms of access to affirming, culturally responsive sexual health education and care.** It also aimed to build community rapport and bring Black GBM together in a space centred on their needs and lived experience.



A canvas depicting two stylized profile portraits of Black people facing each other. The artwork utilizes vibrant, multi-colored geometric headwraps to visually symbolize themes of intimacy, social connection, and shared vulnerability within the Black queer community.

WHAT WE DID

On Friday, February 13, 2026, the VIBE-BGBM team held an open event at The 519 on Church Street in Toronto. Black GBM from across the GTA were invited to attend the event via email and social media posts through our networks and partners.

The theme for this event was **In Living Colour: R&B Sip N Paint**. Our goal was to create a culturally welcoming and affirming space for creative expression and connection among Black GBM. The event featured music by DJ Blackcat and a light dinner. Canvases, paint, and paintbrushes were provided, and attendees were guided by the prompt, *"What does affirming healthcare mean to you?"*

Attendees created paintings that expressed their hopes, experiences, and aspirations for health and well-being among Black GBM. Images of blooming flowers, vibrant landscapes, human connection, and affirming messages such as *"Feel So You Can Heal"* reflected themes of healing, trust, growth, dignity, self-expression, and community resilience. These artworks served not only as creative expressions but also provided rich insights into how Black GBM envision culturally responsive healthcare and supportive community spaces.

While attendees painted, they had the option to engage in directed conversations with members of the VIBE-BGBM team. Team members kept handwritten notes summarizing points raised during discussions (omitting any identifying information) as they asked the following questions: **(a)** *In your opinion, what are some of the sexual health or dating issues Black gay, bi, and queer men face?* **(b)** *What do you think should be the top priorities for improving access to affirming sexual health education or care for Black queer men?* **(c)** *If this work is successful, what changes or outcomes would you want to see for Black gay, bi, and queer men?*

To ensure that all attendees had the opportunity to share their perspectives in ways that were comfortable, accessible, and meaningful, we also asked these questions using a MentiMeter poll at the start of the event and circulated an online post-event evaluation survey where folks were invited to provide additional comments on these topics as well as feedback on the event.

WHO ATTENDED

The event successfully brought together 31 Black gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men from across the Greater Toronto Area who identify with Caribbean, African, and other Black LGBTQI+ communities.

ANALYSIS

Qualitative data generated from the town hall included responses to a Mentimeter poll, handwritten summaries from the facilitated conversations during the event (converted to digital format), and responses to a post-event survey. Dr. Lance McCready facilitated coding training with the peer researcher analysis team (Barnaby and Edward) to discuss the goals of data analysis and provide an overview of the coding process. Subsequently, this analysis team worked at identifying themes and coding attendee responses, discussing emergent findings with Dr. McCready during research team meetings. Coding was conducted using a grounded theory approach.



Promotional poster for the In Living Colour: R&B Sip N' Paint Town Hall.



The Voices, Insight, Belonging & Equity for Black Gay and Bisexual Men (VIBE-BGBM) Project Team.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The analysis identified **interconnected themes related to sexual health, dating experiences, access to care, and community well-being** among participants. The importance of culturally responsive and affirming care, inclusive healthcare access, community, and representation were also emphasized in attendee responses. Key themes related to **healthcare systems** drew attention to the limited availability and access to culturally competent providers, inconsistent access to services, as well as experiences of stigma, judgment, and gaps in mental health integration. Attendees also shared challenges related to dating, intimacy, communication, navigating a Black queer identity, workplace discrimination, housing insecurity, and other social factors affecting their health and well-being.

We also asked attendees to identify **what is working** or has had a positive impact. Responses included the availability of self-testing options, digital health education, harm reduction approaches, and selected community-based healthcare providers. At the same time, attendees said they are **seeking more dignity, respect, acceptance, healthier relationships, and stronger community engagement**. They also shared that holistic services and pragmatic approaches are needed, incorporating mental health, spirituality, and human rights /justice approaches.



Feel the Colours (Left Canvas):

An emotive abstract painting featuring rainbow colours, alongside the name "JAMES" written across the canvas. This artwork illustrates the profound intersection between emotional processing and physical well-being, capturing the idea that true clinical healing requires a safe, non-judgmental environment that honours emotional vulnerability and holistic wellness.

In our DNA (Centre Canvas):

An abstract painting evocative of a DNA strand with multiple colours, centring notions of diversity, cultural mosaics, and community.

Ribbons (Right Canvas):

A hand-drawn red, blue, and pink ribbons on a white canvas shows a steep upward trajectory, reaching a peak labelled "Black Men" in the upper right corner. This visual represents an attendee's conceptualization of public health advocacy.

Theme 1

What is not working:

- Lack of cultural safety within healthcare settings.
- Lack of integration of mental health support with sexual healthcare.
- Dating, intimacy, and relationship challenges.
- Stigma around discussions about chemsex and sexual health.
- Lack of inclusive outreach and community engagement.
- Discrimination in the workplace and the wider society.

Theme 2

What is working:

- Awareness and knowledge of PrEP through peer-led conversations.
- Locating selected and trusted affirming healthcare providers by word of mouth from colleagues/friends.
- Self-testing, which provides privacy and convenience and helps reduce concerns about HIV stigma.
- Harm reduction messaging that is pleasure-based, because there is typically a non-judgmental tone in this kind of messaging, which increases uptake.
- Digital information about sexual health is readily available on social media, which makes accessing that information easy, and information is presented in an appealing, informal way.

Theme 3

Priorities for Sexual Health Research and Care:

- Sexual health education that is culturally responsive.
- HIV/AIDS education, awareness, and advocacy
- Consistent access to affirming healthcare providers.
- Less judgment and more inclusive spaces
- Services that are affirming of identities and experiences that support Black GBM.
- Access to expanded outreach, community engagement, and networking events.
- Social connection opportunities and community-building spaces (safe 3rd spaces).
- Advocacy for culturally different/specific experiences.
- Support for navigating Black queer identity and intersectionality.
- Non-judgmental conversations surrounding substance use and sexual practices.
- Communication that increases Black GBM visibility and representation.
- Reduced systemic barriers when navigating healthcare and social services.

Theme 4

Desired Changes and Outcomes:

- Harmonization between community organizations and the people they serve.
- Greater Black representation and acceptance.
- Improved healthcare access, insurance, and services.
- Increased community engagement that is fun and empowering.
- Improved language and communication
- Healthier relationships among Black GBM.
- Capacity-building opportunities.
- Greater mental health and religion/spiritual integration in care.
- Stronger human rights protection and advocacy.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS

- Attendees emphasized the need for **sexual health services and spaces that are culturally responsive, affirmative, and non-judgmental**.
- Attendees reported that their experiences around dating and relationships are shaped by communication, identity, and societal expectations, which can make developing strong, positive relationships challenging.
- Attendees expressed a strong desire for a holistic approach to their care that purposefully integrates sexual health, mental health, and community at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels.
- Components such as representation, dignity, respect, and acceptance are essential both in healthcare and the Black GBM community.
- Mental health, as well as securing trusted healthcare, housing, and social services, were identified as determinants of sexual health and well-being.
- Community connection and networking opportunities were noted as important methods that can help to reduce feelings of isolation and/or loneliness.



Community Artworks representing themes of growth, health outcomes, and intersectional identity.

CONCLUSION

The VIBE-BGBM In Living Colour R&B Sip and Paint Night event created an opportunity for honest expression and meaningful conversations among Black GBM in the GTA. The experiences shared at this meeting will inform the future work conducted by the VIBE-BGBM team and will guide future projects that aim to empower Black GBM. We will continue to create opportunities for the Black GBM community to connect through social events, where open dialogue and community gatherings can help us better understand the realities the Black GBM community faces when accessing affirming and culturally responsive sexual health education and care. Through these ongoing efforts, we aim to strengthen community connections, highlight community priorities, and continue creating spaces where Black GBM can speak openly, share freely, and feel a true sense of belonging.

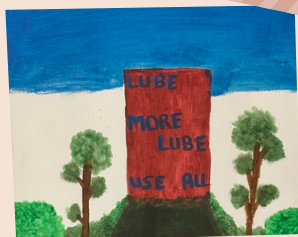
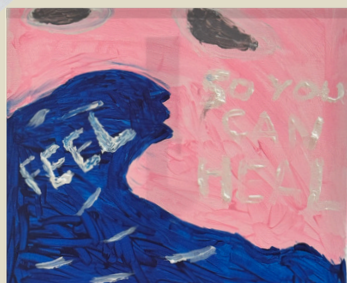
The findings from this community event demonstrate the value of arts-based approaches for fostering dialogue, strengthening social connectedness, building trust, and generating community knowledge that can inform more responsive HIV prevention, health promotion, and healthcare service delivery for Black GBM.

NEXT STEPS

The future work of VIBE-BGBM will focus on maintaining open communication and contact with communities of Black GBM. We anticipate hosting future events for open conversations about Black Queer communities, centred on people's experiences, concerns, and priorities when it comes to accessing affirming, culturally responsive sexual health education and care. This will help keep community members informed about upcoming activities, as well as create safe and welcoming third spaces where Black GBM can connect, exchange ideas, and express themselves freely without judgment or stigma.

We are also in the process of developing an online survey and creating focus groups to better understand the challenges and strengths that Black GBM experience in the ways they navigate finding community and accessing culturally affirming healthcare and support services. These tools will help us identify gaps and areas where support is most needed so that we can begin exploring potential points of intervention.

COMMUNITY ART GALLERY PORTFOLIO



Research team members engaging with participants during facilitated discussions at the In Living Colour: R&B Sip N' Paint Town Hall.

