



# *Key to Women's Health*

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Addressing Health Inequities  
through Women's Health Circles

Ontario Public Health Association Conference  
November 3, 2009

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# Key to Women's Health

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- Our work draws attention to and acts upon the barriers women face accessing health and well-being by underscoring the connection between socio-economics and health – recognizing that poverty, housing and social exclusion are primary determinants of health.
- Inclusion Research



# Key to Women's Health

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*“Women who experience or face challenges in relation to the determinants of health often do not survive a stroke...if they do not have the family support system to ensure their rehabilitation, they inevitably suffer from further strokes.”*

Key to Women's Health, 2006



# Key to Women's Health

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## *Marginalized Women, Inclusion and Stroke— Key to Women's Health*

This three phase project addresses the gaps in primary stroke prevention interventions targeting marginalized women.

**Phase 1** (2006): Used Inclusion Research to explore marginalized women's awareness and understanding of chronic disease prevention at three sites in Ontario (Sudbury, downtown Toronto and Peel) and created a framework for new health promotion strategies to reach and support women who are particularly vulnerable and at-risk for stroke.

**Funder:** Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care (Phase 1) and Ministry of Health Promotion (Phases 1-3)




# Key to Women's Health

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## ***Marginalized Women, Inclusion and Stroke— Key to Women's Health***

**Phase 2** (2008): builds upon *Phase 1* by continuing to share the findings and develop strategies that are accessible and meaningful to women who are marginalized, including *Stroke Resource Guide for Women's Health Circles* and the *Training Program for Health and Social Service Providers*.


**Phase 3** (ongoing): transitions the project from a pilot project to an integrated, comprehensive sustainable stroke prevention program. This includes coordinating health circles in six LHINS.



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***“There are many things we want to talk about. We could have more discussions like this.”***

Focus Group Participant



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***“It’s easier for us to come to groups like this one (even once a month) to gain health information.”***

Focus Group Participant



# Why Women's Health Circles?

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Women have told us that:

- Coming together to address health concerns is a preferred way to receive health information for many women
- Focus groups created a sense of belonging and of being heard for the first time
- They wished to talk about many other health issues in the small group format
- The safety and security of peer-led groups is an ideal place to learn and share about health issues in the very broad way they understand them



# What are Women's Health Circles?

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## **Collective education forums for women:**

- Participants determine the health topics of discussion, engage with other women to learn from each other's thoughts and experiences, ask questions of health and social service providers and learn about community resources.

## **Learning spaces for health and social service providers:**

- Health and social service professionals learn about the lived experiences of women to create more appropriate and sensitive care



# The Pilot Project

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The Women's Health Circles project was piloted in the Fall/Winter 2007 - 2008 in rural, suburban and urban communities.

## **The Pilot sites include:**

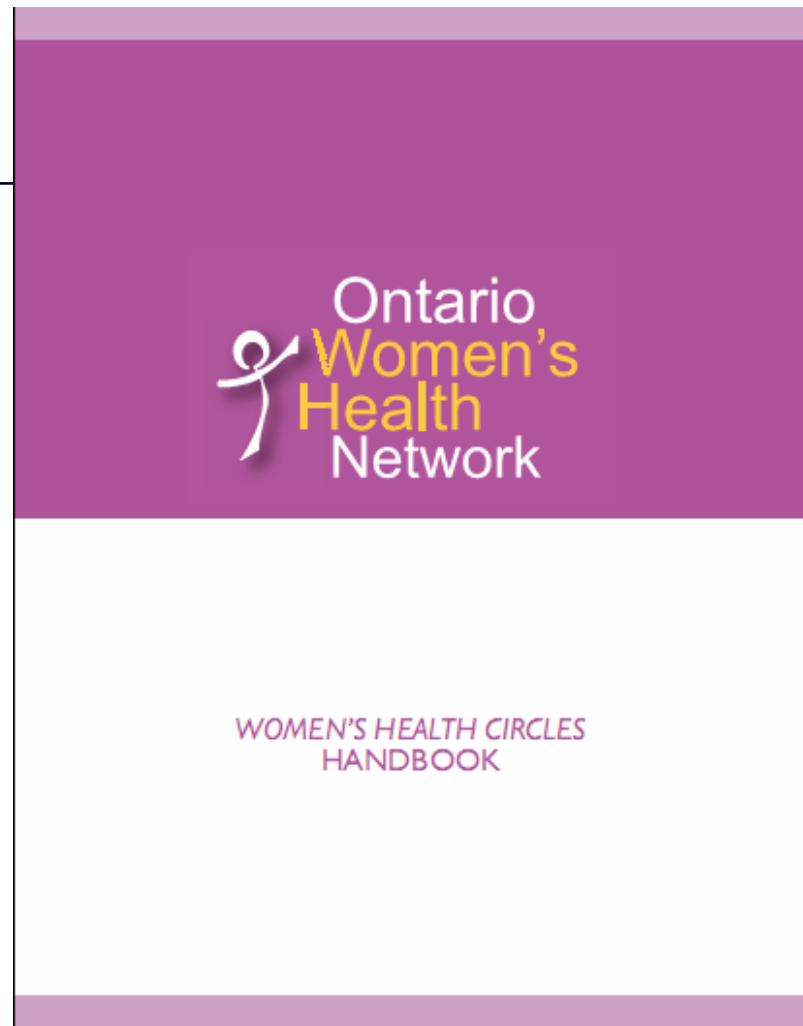
- Sudbury Women's Centre with lower income women who additionally face other barriers
- Immigrant Women Services Ottawa with immigrant women
- Asset Mapping Research Project of the Toronto Christian Resource Centre with homeless and underhoused women

**Funder:** Public Health Agency of Canada

# The Handbooks

**The *Women's Health Circles Handbook* is available in print and online to support communities and agencies organize health circles:**

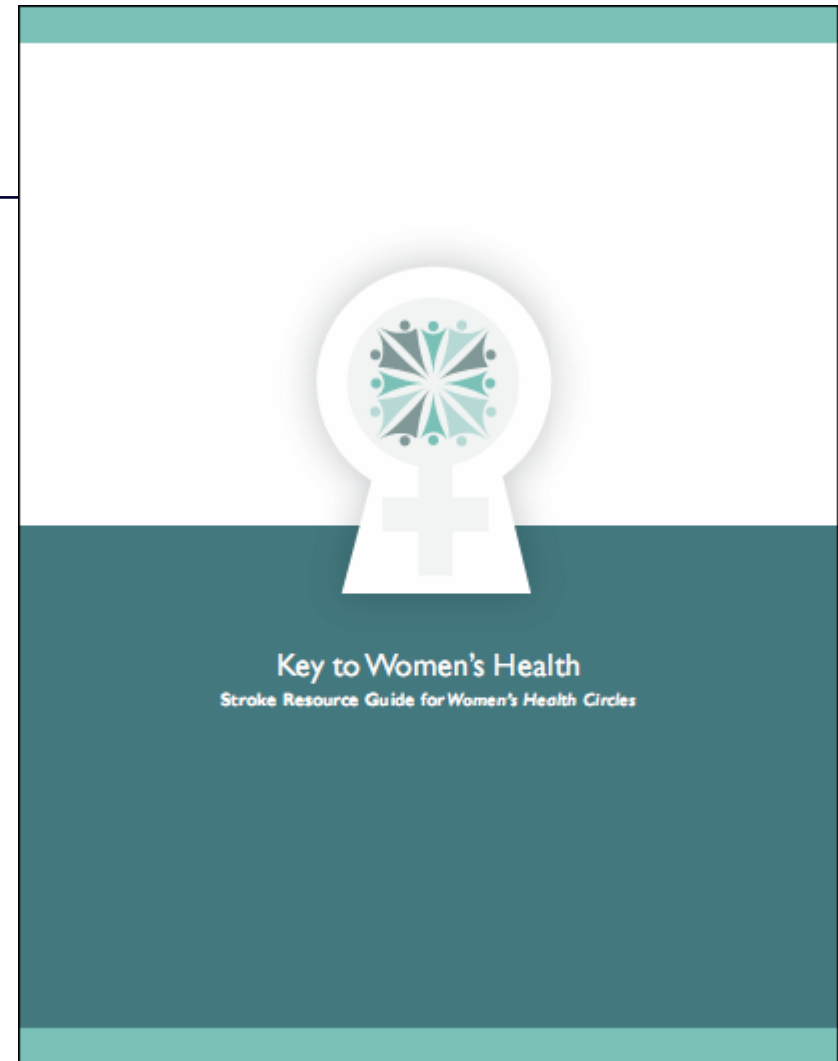
- Based on the experiences of each pilot site
- Offers first hand accounts of the methods and examples of the tools that each site used in planning, staffing, structuring and conducting the circles



# The Handbooks

## ***Key to Women's Health: Stroke Resource Guide for Women's Health Circles:***

- Illustrates how to link discussions on the social determinants of health or other topics chosen by women attending *Women's Health Circles* to the risk factors, signs and symptoms of stroke

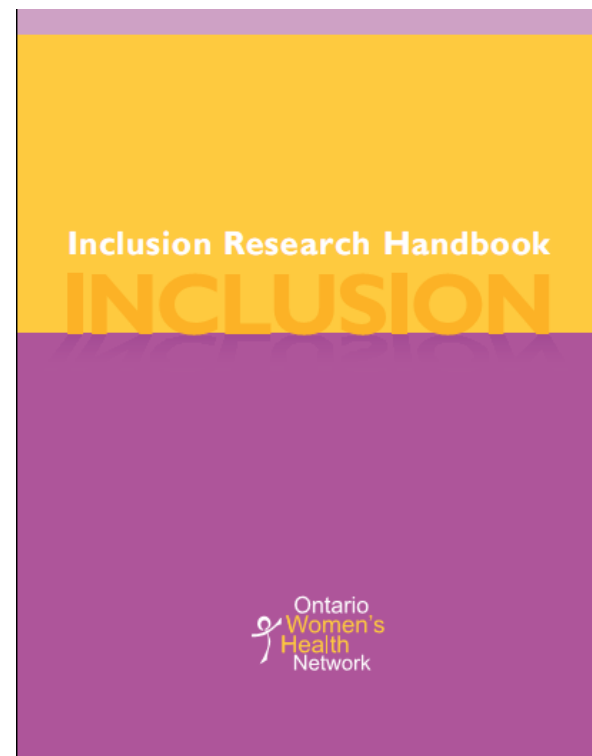


# OWHN Discussion Tools

OWHN has also developed two additional tools to support the inclusion of women's voices in health and social services:

***Inclusion Research Handbook***

***Guide to Focus Groups***



**Funder:** Echo: Improving Women's Health in Ontario

**Please join us for the launch of these new tools on November 19!**



# What's Next

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- Seeking funding to offer health circles training for community agencies across Ontario
- Working to secure funding to move forward on Inclusion Research projects.
- Launch of Inclusion Research Manual and Guide to Focus Groups: Nov. 19



# Thank You!

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## Questions and discussion

For more information:  
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