

Community Engagement

Community engagement is the cornerstone of MUWRP's efforts to conduct ethical, community-informed biomedical research and implement effective public health programs. It acts as a bridge that fosters trust, transparency, and meaningful collaboration between MUWRP and the diverse communities it serves. By actively involving community members in every stage of research and health initiatives, MUWRP ensures that its efforts are culturally sensitive, ethically sound, and aligned with community needs.

Key Functions of MUWRP's Community Engagement

1. Research Participant Recruitment and Retention

Successful research hinges on the active participation of community members. MUWRP employs a multifaceted approach to recruit and retain participants ethically and inclusively. The approaches include:

- a). **Community Sensitization & Mobilization:** Through targeted outreach campaigns, radio programs, and community dialogues, MUWRP raises awareness about ongoing studies, emphasizing their significance for community health.
- b). **Community Advisory Boards (CABs):** These boards serve as trusted intermediaries, guiding recruitment messaging and identifying key community entry points. CABs ensure community perspectives shape research processes.
- c). **Peer-Led Recruitment:** Engaging peer mobilizers and influential community figures helps reach hard-to-reach populations, fostering trust and encouraging participation.
- d). **Retention Support:** To maintain participant engagement, MUWRP offers psychosocial support, transportation reimbursements, appointment reminders, and flexible scheduling options.
- e). **Technology-Driven Follow-ups:** SMS reminders and mobile phone follow-ups enhance communication, making it easier to track and support participants throughout the study.

2. Establishing and Overseeing Community Advisory Boards (CABs)

MUWRP has established several CABs that serve as essential links between researchers and communities. CABs are composed of diverse community representatives and play a pivotal role in ensuring ethical conduct, safeguarding participant welfare, and mobilizing communities for research activities. Currently MUWRP oversees the following CABs:

- a). **Kampala CAB:** Provides oversight and community feedback for clinical studies conducted at MUWRP's Nakasero site in Kampala.
- b). **AFRICOS CAB:** Supports the long-term AFRICOS cohort study conducted in Kayunga district, ensuring community insights inform HIV care and surveillance efforts.
- c). **CASCADE CABs (Kayunga and Mukono):** Recently created to support cervical cancer screening research in Kayunga and Mukono districts.

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3. Fostering National and Global Collaborations

MUWRP's community engagement extends beyond local communities to national and international partnerships:

- **National Cross-CAB Engagement:** Since its inception, MUWRP has supported the coordination of this platform, promoting harmonized engagement practices across Ugandan research institutions.
- **HOPE HIV Cure Research Collaborative:** MUWRP contributes to community preparedness and ethical discussions around innovative HIV cure research.
- **DELIVER Initiative (MHRP):** As a key partner, MUWRP advances leadership and innovation in HIV remission science, strengthening community involvement in cutting-edge research.

These collaborations amplify MUWRP's influence and help shape community engagement frameworks on a global scale.

4. Organizing Impactful Annual Community Engagement Events

MUWRP champions high-impact events that foster awareness, dialogue, and community mobilization:

- **World AIDS Day:** A global observance marked with community outreach, candlelight vigils, and stakeholder forums to highlight progress and challenges in HIV prevention and treatment.
- **HIV Vaccine Awareness Day:** Educational campaigns and interactive sessions are organized to inform communities about HIV vaccine research and the vital role they play in scientific breakthroughs.

These events serve as vital platforms for advocacy, education, and strengthening partnerships.

Impact and Reach

MUWRP's community engagement initiatives extend across urban centres and remote districts, including Kampala suburbs, Kayunga, Mukono, and other regions. The impact has been profound:

- **Enhanced Community Trust:** Building confidence in biomedical research and health interventions.
- **Successful Implementation:** Facilitating vaccine trials and HIV prevention programs with community support.
- **Rapid Mobilization:** Responding effectively during public health emergencies, such as Ebola outbreaks in Fort Portal.
- **Sustained Dialogue:** Promoting stakeholder engagement through commemorative events, health education, and community forums.