


AIDS Coalition *of Nova Scotia*

A red AIDS awareness ribbon is positioned to the right of the text, overlapping the word 'Coalition' and the grey bar containing 'of Nova Scotia'.

**2021-2022
Annual Report**



in memory of those lost in 2021-2022

**Tom (Blanche)
Mike
Janet**



Report ... from the Chair

I am glad to welcome everyone to our 2022 AGM as the Chair of the board of directors.

2021-2022 was a lean year for ACNS. However, much effort was made in this fiscal in preparation for the year of growth to follow. This new growth for the organization is thanks to the capable hands of our staff.

Our staff has now more than doubled and we have been successful at obtaining new funding streams that promote the health and well-being of our clients and creates an atmosphere where we can do all that we can for the overall community.



There will be challenges in the next few years as the government changes its focus and we will have to change with it. But I know that we are in capable hands and I am glad to be a part of this team. There are some exciting events happening in the new future. Stay Tuned for more information

It is important to get our voices heard and our concerns seen. ACNS has a unique perspective and that should never be lost.

Marc Charrier
Chair, Board of Directors

Post Script ...

ACNS lost a current and former board member this past year. Both **Michael Sangster** and **Janet Connors** were long-serving and highly regarded members of the HIV community in this province, and in this country. They are sorely missed.

Report ... from the Executive Director

2021-2022 has been another year dominated by COVID-19 and its impacts on all aspects of our organization. Unlike the previous year, we have the experience of going through a fiscal cycle with the changes and unpredictability that COVID-19 brought to our lives, our finances, and to our work at ACNS. That better prepared us to navigate year two of the new Pandemic.



We're now adept and comfortable using Zoom – and this will be our third Zoom-based Annual General Meeting.

Key COVID-required changes and adaptations to both People Living with HIV or AIDS (PLHA) client support and HIV/STBBI prevention programs are already in place, but are always being tweaked as needed. We are still offering our **Client Phone** program of acquiring inexpensive flip phones with pre-paid minutes and making them available to our PLHA clients so they can access the new default 'tele-health' world... and everything else!

This year also marks the final year of our five-year HIV prevention funding "Community Action Fund" agreement with the Public Health Agency of Canada. This agreement was done in partnership with PEERS Alliance (formerly AIDS PEI) as an "alliance funding application" during the last funding cycle.

This CAF funding has supported our **Totally OUTright** program for 2SGBTQ+ men, which wrapped up in 2020-2021, and our **Trauma-Informed Care** training program for frontline service providers - both programs shared with PEERS Alliance. It also included the ACNS-only **Streets Smarts** harm reduction and safer-sex education program. It was always known we'd see a budget drop in year five of the concluding contract agreement that precluded us from having one more offering of the resource-intensive **Totally OUTright** program. Even with this drop in our CAF grant for 2021-2022, and despite all the COVID challenges and a mostly absent fundraising program, we were still able to balance the budget as we had also done for the previous fiscal.

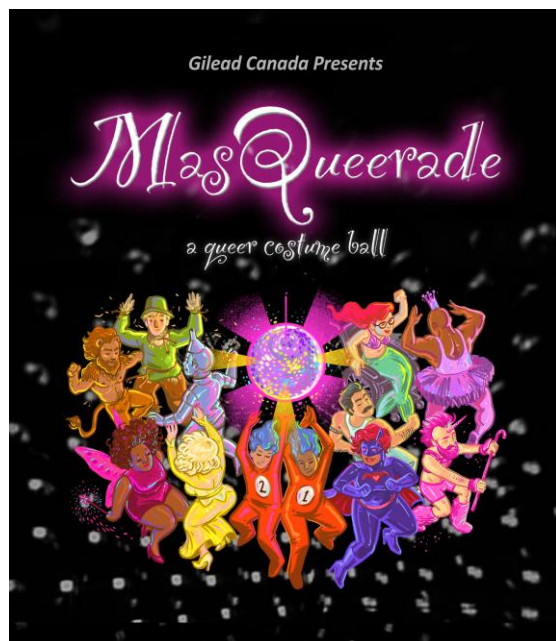
Of course, with one five-year cycle coming to an end, the planning towards the next five-year cycle has been well underway for some time! **I'm very pleased to say that we have now reversed the roughly 40% federal CAF funding cut ACNS experienced five years ago.**

For 2022-2027, we now have in place a CAF contribution agreement for 1.2 million over five years. In addition, we secured for 2022-2023 a one-year agreement in partnership with CBRC to be an implementation partner in a national pilot of the 2SLGBTQIA + Harm Reduction project '*Peer N Peer*', funded by Health Canada (SUAP). This came about on short notice, but was too good an opportunity to pass up, as this work is something we have been planning to expand into.

For 2022-2027, we also have in place the last year of our three-year NS Dept of Health funding that supports the staff component of our PLHA client programming. An annual grant from ViiV Healthcare provides the majority of the program budget for our PLHA client programs. **All told, the ACNS operating budget for fiscal 2022-2023 has grown by 60% over 2021-2022.**

One area that we have been far off from where we want to be is in fund-raising. Obviously, COVID made fundraising especially challenging. However, for various reasons, ACNS had lost key pieces of what had once been an annual calendar of events and programs to raise money before COVID emerged as a new obstacle. The last holdout of that fundraising cycle was the spring *BMO Bid for Life* event. Postponing the March 2020 offering of *BMO Bid for Life* was the first COVID impact on ACNS. Initially, we postponed the event, then cancelled it, then re-imagined it as a virtual 'No-Gala Gala' which finally took place in November. That virtual offering was a moderately successful experiment.

Even so, 'Bid' had grown tired before COVID emerged, so the decision has been made to retire that particular event. Watch for details to come on our new annual signature event to replace it. Another new fundraising project that we have already moved forward during this



fiscal year was the planning of "*MasQueerade – A Queer Community Dance*". Presented by Gilead and sponsored by ViiV Healthcare, *MasQueerade* was initially planned for May before being delayed by COVID until July. This new event was also a modest success and we're already reworking the idea to improve and restage it for spring 2023. Also new this fall: watch for our *Giving Tuesday* fundraising campaign leading up to AIDS Awareness Week.

While this report is ostensibly about April 2021 to March 2022, I'm writing it in September 2022. It's hard not to acknowledge the ever-evolving HIV/STBBI landscape.

One concerning pattern that ACNS began seeing at the latter half of the fiscal was an increase in new - and often young - gay/bi/queer men coming to us for support after their recent HIV diagnosis. There was always the likelihood that, with very little HIV/STBBI testing the past couple of years, there'd be a backlog of infections to capture once the system was accessible again... and there was also the possibility that undiagnosed infections would potentially lead to an increase in infections.

We have long known that a key contributing factor to most sexually transmitted infections is that the person who is **the source of the new transmission is often someone who does NOT know they are infected...** Those who are newly infected are at the highest levels of infectiousness - not being on treatment that would lower their viral load has implications, both for their individual health outcomes and preventing future infections.

As of this week, the province announced an HIV 'outbreak' that appears to confirm that both a backlog AND an increase have happened. Though the details are still being analyzed and will be for months to come, it's clear the absence of testing may have contributed to the ideal environment for an increased of new HIV infections as well. A lack of testing options has always been a hindrance in Nova Scotia. COVID magnified that obstacle and the lack of a provincial program providing easily accessible oral PrEP for HIV hasn't helped. ACNS - and the province, and country – still have much work to do moving forward.

One response to the absence of testing for much of the past 2.5 years is that ACNS sought funding to **offer free HIV self test at pride events in Halifax and Sydney this past summer.** Thanks to Halifax Pride/TD and ViiV Healthcare, we were able to do so while also providing some tests to members of the public after these events. We're also currently pursuing federal funding to continue and expand access to free self-testing across the province between now and March 2023.



The other key new emerging trend is MonkeyPox. Mpox is not classified as a sexually transmitted infection at the moment. However, when it emerged as a growing concern for and amongst 'Men who have Sex with Men' (aka MSM – the Public Health category), it was clear patterns that echoed GRID/AIDS in the early 1980s might be repeating themselves. In fact, for gay/bi/queer men of my generation and older, it seemed eerily familiar – and was very triggering for some.

ACNS was looked to by both the public - especially gay/bi/queer men - and by key staff in the Nova Scotia Department of Health to provide information, leadership, and guidance. We stepped up. I'm especially proud of our new staff as they have been the main driving force behind our Mpox efforts.

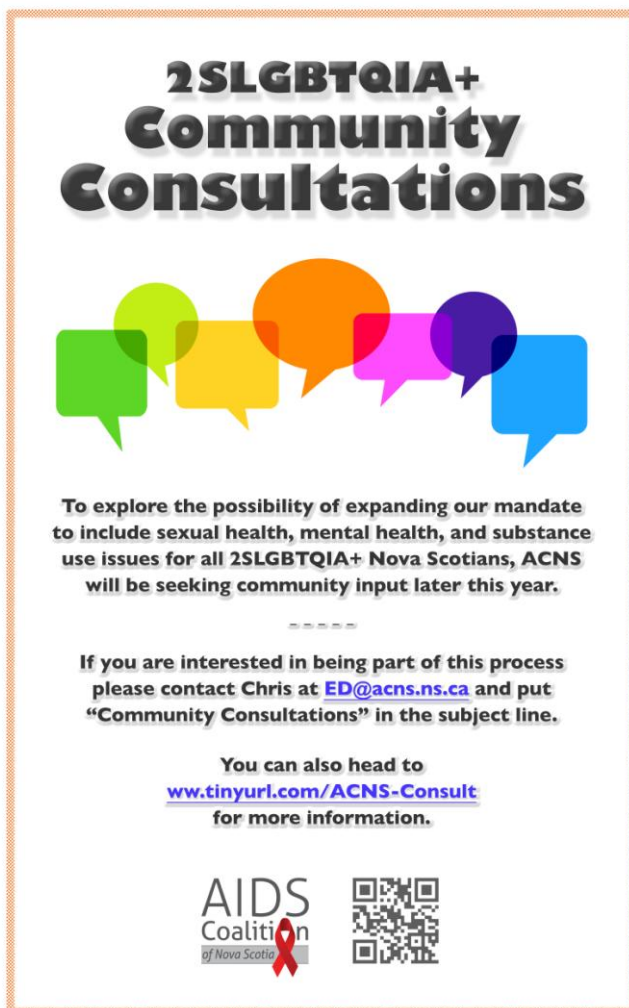
We produced the first Nova Scotia informational resources this summer about this emerging/evolving situation. We worked with NS Health regarding language for their materials targeting MSM as the key population impacted. We joined with others to lobby the province to move forward with preventative vaccines for Mpox, which have finally started. We'll continue to lobby that the new Mpox vaccine program also provide a 2nd dose, per recommendations from the federal experts just recommend this past week.

Lastly, I want to say we're also FINALLY - no thanks to COVID - moving forward with our long-planned community consultations as part of the delayed strategic planning process that the board and staff began over five years ago. We are seeking input on plans:

“to expand our mandate to address broader sexual health, mental health and substance use issues for 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians” while we continue to address HIV issues for ALL in Nova Scotia.

The first community consultation is by Zoom on Nov 16 and will be exclusively for our PLHA clients. For those PLHA clients for whom Zoom is not the best method, we'll also be setting up one-on-one or small-group consults either by phone or in-person. Additional virtual consultations across the province will follow early in the New Year. Contact me directly at the ACNS office for more details.

Chris Aucoin
Executive Director




**2SLGBTQIA+
Community
Consultations**

To explore the possibility of expanding our mandate to include sexual health, mental health, and substance use issues for all 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians, ACNS will be seeking community input later this year.

If you are interested in being part of this process please contact Chris at ED@acns.ns.ca and put "Community Consultations" in the subject line.

You can also head to www.tinyurl.com/ACNS-Consult for more information.

AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia



Program Highlights - PLHA Client Programs

Supported with a grant from the Nova Scotia Dept of Health, a grant from ViiV Healthcare, plus fundraising revenue, ACNS continues to expand and refine our client support programs. While some in-person programs, such as the Poz Guys group, are still on hold, most of our client programs are on offer in some form.

Client Phone Program

We are now moving into our third year of offering this in-demand client phone program that began as a response to COVID lockdowns in spring 2020.

PLHA Hamper Programs

In summer 2021, we added a **Back-To-School Hamper** to our **Easter Hamper** and **Christmas Hamper**

programs for PLHA clients with dependent children. As always, there's great appreciation from our parent clients for the support of their families. As before, we offer contactless delivery with all the hamper programs to maximize client safety.

CATS Program

Our **Complimentary and Alternative Therapies** program continues with great uptake and an ever-evolving roster of volunteer practitioners in Massage Therapy, Osteopathy and Acupuncture.

Making Ends Meet, Drop In Food & Travel Support

While COVID has significantly reduced the overall amount of foot-traffic into our offices, we still get a steady demand for our **Making Ends Meet** program and, to a much lesser degree, our **Drop-in Food Program**. As well, clients still need to see medical professionals where possible and public transit can be very complicated for those with compromised immune systems. As a result of COVID, we redefined **PLHA Travel Support** to allow for taxi fare and bus tickets to access essential health and related services.

The Vigil

This year we held an hybrid online/in-person World AIDS Day vigil. Attendance for both aspects of the event was strong. We were able to have both in-person and virtual readers of the Memorial Names, and had pre-recorded performances by **The Women Next Door**

we have ...

Cell Phones & Minutes

ACNS still has cell phones and prepaid minutes
for our HIV+ clients who need them

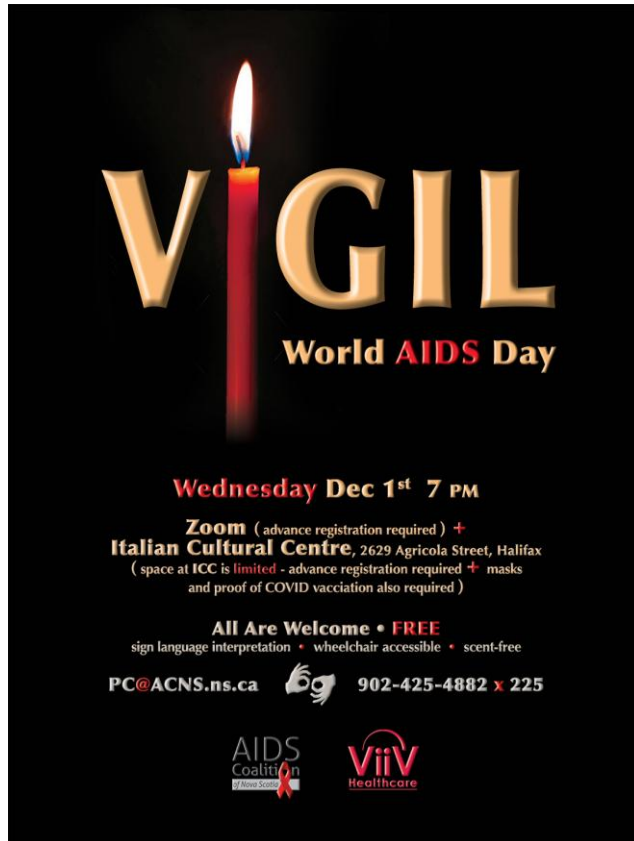
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If you are, or know of, an ACNS client who needs a phone or minutes
text/phone 902-403-7841

ViiV Healthcare

Funding provided by: the Gov. of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund and the Community Foundation of Nova Scotia; by the joint effort of the Atlantic Compassion Fund, the Gov. of Canada's New Horizons Seniors Program, Nova Scotia Power, EfficiencyOne, the Province of Nova Scotia and many generous corporate and individual donors; and by a Positive Action grant from ViiV Healthcare.

Canada



and the *Halifax Gay Men’s Chorus*. There were some technical challenges with sharing the pre-recorded music segments in both the live and online aspects of the vigil that we’re working to rectify for next time.

Positive Dispatch

Our quarterly newsletter has been overflowing with all that’s been going on this past year... and frequently has been coming out a bit late. This is a side-effect of much work, change and expansion going on. Apologies to those who like to see it on time.

Emergency Medical Device Assistance

Something else that became apparent during the heightened times brought on by COVID was the need for a ‘last-resort’ resource to assist PLHA clients in paying

for eyeglasses, dentures or other medically necessary appliances or devices that they would otherwise not be able to access.

U= U Campaign

In this fiscal, we also began an Undetectable HIV = Untransmittable HIV campaign as part of the ViiV funding to educate both our PLHA clients and the general public about the well-proved reality that achieving an undetectable HIV viral load means it’s 100% impossible to pass on HIV through sexual contact. We’ll be continuing that campaign into 2022-2023.

Program Highlights – HIV Prevention Programs

Street Smarts

This harm reduction & safer sex training program for those who use substances in NS has now wrapped up. Interest was good – but it was challenging at times to keep people engaged through an online interface through to program completion. We had sought funding from the Harm Reduction Fund (HRF), -a parallel funding program to CAF, to continue offering this program, but were unsuccessful this round. We’ll reconsider it for the next HRF funding cycle.

HIV *is*
Different Now

Five Facts about HIV

FACT#1

The new **HIV self-test** allows you
to get **results in 2 minutes**
in the comfort of your own home

FACT#2

With **early diagnosis** and treatment,
most HIV+ people will **never get AIDS**
and will have a typical life-expectancy

FACT#3

U=U* means there is **zero risk** of
passing on HIV via sex if
you are on effective treatment

* Undetectable HIV = Untransmittable HIV

FACT#4

Those who don't know
they are HIV+ likely **are the source**
for most new HIV transmissions through sex*

* This pattern likely applies to most Sexually
Transmitted Infections

FACT#5

PrEP* (medication to prevent HIV) has joined
Condoms and **U=U**** to make 3 highly
effective prevention tools backed by solid research

* Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV
** Undetectable HIV = Untransmittable HIV

Know Your Status!

Get **Tested** . Get **Treated** . End **HIV**

for more info:

www.tinyurl.com/HIVisDif

supported by a grant from

AIDS
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ViiV
Healthcare

Totally OUTright Nova Scotia

As mentioned in the introduction, our Totally OUTright program was on hiatus this fiscal. However, it will be back with the new CAF-supported programming for the next five-year cycle – including our first-ever Trans & Non-Binary specific offering ('Totally TRANS Outright!') in spring 2023 (and again in spring 2025). The 2SGBQ men's iteration will be offered in 2024 and 2026.



Trauma-Informed Care Training

This program for service providers about how to better work with PLHA, HIV/HCV priority populations, and 2SLGBTQIA+ populations is another piece we're carrying over from the previous CAF cycle. In addition to offering our 4-hour online introduction to the topic starting this November, we are adding a new Level II "Systems and Environments" module in beginning in fall 2023.

A graphic for 'Trauma-Informed Care & Approaches The Basics'. It features two orange hands cupping a green maple leaf. Below the hands and leaf, the text reads: 'Trauma-Informed Care & Approaches The Basics' in a mix of black and green fonts. Underneath that, it says 'Free training for front-line practitioners in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island' and 'Register Now!' in bold black text. The entire graphic is enclosed in a thin orange border.

Trauma-Informed Care & Approaches *The Basics*

Free training for front-line practitioners in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Register Now!

Coming Soon - Check Me Out

This highly-regarded ACNS-created sexual health testing promotion program, which has been on hold since 2017, is back in the new CAF-funded programming. As with Totally OUTright, we'll be doing two streams over four years: one for 2SGBQ men in 2023 and 2024, and one for 2STNB folk in 2025 and 2026.

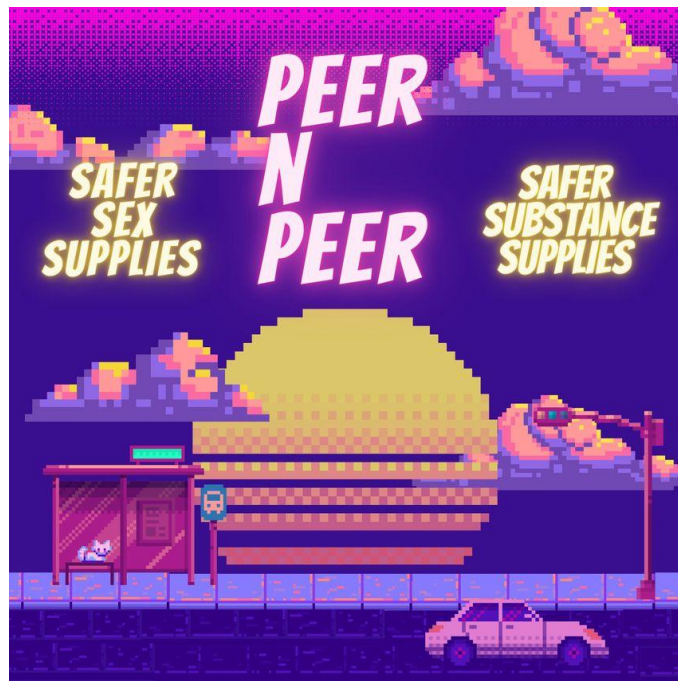
Coming Soon - ACNS Provincial Forum + Provincial PLHA Meet-Up

The new CAF also allows ACNS to offer two provincial forums in 2023 and 2025. This will include a provincial PLHA scholarship program to attend and PLHA-specific programming during the forum weekend.

Program Highlights – Harm Reduction Program

In 2023 - Peer N Peer

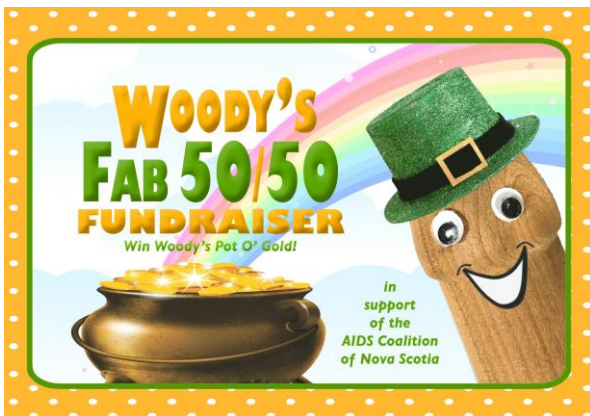
This one-year implementation pilot is focussed on providing harm reduction and sexual health info, education and support for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Halifax. We hope to get funding to extend and expand this program.



Organizational Resources – Internships

With fundraising down overall, plus a lean CAF year, we made much use of student intern and similar funding programs to bolster our meager staff compliment in 2021-2022. This continues into the new fiscal. This included NSDEAL CO-OP program funding, Venture for Canada Internship Funding, Canada Summer Job funding and an NS Community College placement. Through these programs, we were able to temporarily add Joyce, Jennifer, Andrew, Mitch, Jordan and Abhinn to join the ranks of Chris, Ned and Dylan.

Organizational Resources – Fund Raising & Visibility



We bounced back moderately from two very difficult fundraising years due to COVID-19. As mentioned in the ED report, **BMO Bid for Life** finally happened in November, but, even before that, a new cycle of visibility and fundraising efforts has been in development. Visibility projects aim to raise both the organization's visibility and the issues we aim to address. In the past, some fundraising events had both visibility and fundraising aspects to them – e.g., the **AIDS Walk**.

Red Scarf PROJECT-HALIFAX



With the loss of events like ‘the walk’, we decided to borrow from ASOs elsewhere and do a **Red Scarf Project** for World AIDS Day 2021. We sent out an invite for knitters and crocheters to make and donate 5-foot red scarves that were then tied up to the gates and fence around the Halifax Public Gardens on Dec. 1st. Response from knitters was very strong: we had well over 150 scarves from 80 volunteers. Response from the media and general public was also strong and favourable. **Red Scarf Project 2022** is already well under way.

This fiscal also included advance arrangements for the spring 2022 fundraiser and community dance, **MasQueerade**, which was planned for May and then delayed until July. It was well-received, profitable, and, more importantly, raised awareness for our organization. Throughout the year, we have also been doing 50/50s in the community and raised our on-hand presence at events when that was possible.

Our social media following on both Instagram and Facebook has grown by more than double. Through our social media, we have become a go-to for information on sexual health, MonkeyPox, harm reduction for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, and what is going on in the HIV-impacted and broader 2SLGBTQIA+ and substance use communities.



ACNS was very visible at Halifax Pride. This included a parade float that included a six-pack of prominent drag kings and queens - who were all excited to walk with us and promote our efforts. We had information booths at the Garrison Grounds, and HIV self-test booths at the Halifax Central Library as well as at Cape Breton Pride in August. Overall, we have found ourselves becoming more integral in the communities we serve, and have big plans moving forward.

###

Funders & Supporters

We would like to extend our gratitude to all our funders, sponsors and supporters.

Funding Partners

Public Health Agency of Canada (CAF)
Health Canada (SUAP) through a partnership with CBRC
Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Labour
Gov. of Canada (Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy Fund)
ViiV Healthcare Canada (Positive Action Community Grant)
The J&W Murphy Foundation
Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union (NSGEU)
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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Gilead Sciences Canada, Inc.
Westjet
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ACNS PRESENTS

BMO Bid for... CHANGE

Bid. Lounge. Win!

Your ABSENCE is requested.
The event isn't real...
but the **NEED** is!

SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR 'No-Gala' Gala!*

NOVEMBER 20, 2021
LIVE-STREAMED @ 7 PM

- Virtual Door-Prize Draw
- Online Silent Auction Winners Announced
- Preview of Big Changes at ACNS!

* For info or updates see www.tinyURL.com/Bid4Change or contact 902.425.4882 ext 226 or FUND@acns.ns.ca

IN SUPPORT OF

AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

TITLE SPONSOR: **BMO**

GOLD SPONSOR: **GILEAD** Advancing Therapeutics. Improving Lives.

SILVER SPONSOR: **DocaittaDesign**

Event Sponsors

We would like to extend our gratitude to the following sponsors:



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Chris Aucoin	Executive Director
Ned MacInnis	Program Support
Dylan Samson	Support & Program Services Coordinator
Jordan Parker	Fund Development Coordinator (Intern)
Abhinn Gudania	Fund Development & Marketing (Coop)

Our Staff (October, 2022)

Chris Aucoin	Executive Director
Ned MacInnis	Program Support
Dylan Samson	Support & Program Services Coordinator
Shane Pope	Health & Wellness Coord. for 2SGBQ+ Men
Hanley Smith	Health & Wellness Coord. for 2S-TNB+ Folx
Andrew Thomas	Pee N Peer Coordinator
Marisa DiCosta	Harm Reduction Peer Outreach Worker (PT)
Patrick Maubert	Harm Reduction Peer Outreach Worker (PT)
Jordan Parker	Fund Development Coordinator
Teddy Elphick	Fund Development & Marketing (Intern PT)

Our Board (March, 2022)

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Carolyn Dawson	Vice Chairperson
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Sheena Jamieson	Secretary
Michael Sangster	Board Member
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