

**2022-2023  
Annual Report**

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**in memory of those lost in 2022-2023**

**Mike  
Janet  
Wolf  
Jim  
David  
Ron**



# Report ... from the Chair

Welcome to the 2023 Annual General Meeting!

It has been a year of great change. From adding many new staff members – to moving forward with plans to potentially change the name and vision; it has been exciting to see the changes and what is to be.

We have steady hands at the helm and a very capable crew. The ship is sailing as it should.

Changes were and are needed because government priorities change, but our fundamentals have not. The emphasis still remains on People Living With HIV/AIDS and moving closer to serving broader 2SLGBTQIA+ communities - and speaking up for them. Now we have more stable funding which allows us to maintain existing services and add new ones. We are excited to see what the future brings.

I wish to thank our Vice-Chair Carolyn Dawson for her help over the past few years, and to all my other board members. May we continue to allow this organization to shine.

**Marc Charrier**  
**Chair, Board of Directors**

## *Post Script ...*

ACNS lost a current and former board member in 2022-2023. 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

## *The Fiscal Year ...*

After five lean years, 2022-2023 was a year of significant growth for ACNS as we started a new five-year HIV prevention funding “Community Action Fund” (CAF) agreement with the Public Health Agency of Canada. This brought us back to pre-2017 levels - before the disastrous 40% cut that was locked in for the past five years.

This new CAF funding continues to support our **Totally OUTright** program for Queer men, but we have now added a parallel reimagining of the program for Trans and Non-Binary folk (our Trans adaptation being the first offering of the program anywhere) and we’ll alternate the two versions during this funding cycle. Also continuing into this funding cycle is our introduction to **Trauma-Informed Care** program for frontline service providers, and next year we’ll add a “Level II” TIC for more depth with a focus on systems and environments. We’ll continue both level I and II TIC for years 2-5 of the CAF cycle.



This new CAF cycle will also bring back two former ACNS programs: the highly-regarded **Check Me Out** HIV/STBBI (Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Illnesses) testing promotion campaign – for Queer men and now adding Trans & Non-Binary folk as a target population, plus a much-expanded web-based sexual health information support site. We’re also bringing back our long-missed provincial knowledge-exchange forum (once known as **The Ceilidh**) in spring 2025 and 2026. As before, this will bring together People Living with HIV or AIDS (PLHA), HIV researchers/academics, front-line service providers, and healthcare system employees. There will be scholarships for PLHAs to attend this weekend of presentations and discussions, and we plan to have some PLHA-exclusive time as part of the weekend (many details TBD).

During the summer of 2022 we were able to line up several modest funding grants (from ViiV and Halifax Pride/TD Bank) to purchase a small supply of **HIV self-tests** to distribute in Halifax and Sydney during Pride festivities. Then in late summer PHAC offered CAF-funded

organizations across the country **free HIV self-tests** to deliver in their geographic area of focus, and money for staff time and related distribution expenses. This was a very welcome program in light of HIV/STI testing options being very limited in Nova Scotia for three years because of COVID impacts, and a new and promising tool for HIV prevention over the long-term. (This CAF *HIV Self-Test* program also got extended into the 2023-24 fiscal – and will hopefully continue moving forward.)

For 2022-2027, we originally signed a CAF contribution agreement for \$1.2 million over the five years. With the addition of the HIV Self-test monies for fiscals 2022-23 and 2023-24 that contract has now grown to almost \$1.4 million.



In addition, we secured for 2022-2023 a one-year agreement in partnership with Vancouver-based CBRC to be an implementation partner in a national pilot of the 2SLGBTQIA + Harm Reduction project '*Peer N Peer*', funded by Health Canada's Substance Use and Additions Program (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 2022-2023, we also have in place the last year of our three-year Nova Scotia 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 increased by 75% over 2021-22.**

**The Fundraising Year ...**

One fiscally-relevant area that we have been far off from where we want to be is in fundraising. 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 2021. That virtual offering was a moderately successful experiment... but made it clear that, when possible, we wanted to get back to live events for both fiscal and visibility reasons.

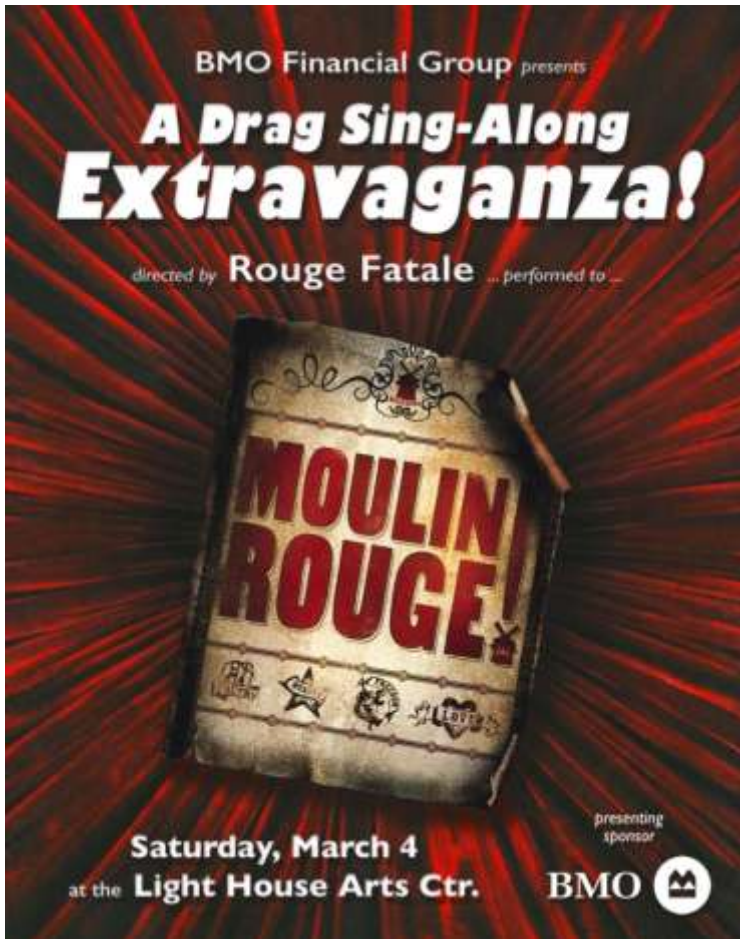


During the 2022-23 fiscal we introduced two new fundraising events plus a mid-sized raffle. The first new fundraising project was “**MasQueerade – A Queer Community Dance**”. Presented by Gilead and also sponsored by ViiV

Healthcare, **MasQueerade** was initially planned for May before being delayed by COVID until July. This new event was a modest



success bringing in almost \$5000 in ticket sales, and we’ll continually reassess how COVID impacts gatherings as we move forward. On February 14<sup>th</sup> we held our first ever **I ♥ Travel** raffle of a pair of WestJet tickets which raised over \$4700. To cap the fiscal year, in March



we held our first ever **Drag Sing-Along Extravaganza** with a showing of the movie *Moulin Rouge* along with live drag production numbers done in concert with the movie. Sponsored by BMO, this event almost sold out and raised over \$12,000 after expenses!

**The Health Year ...**

By late spring 2022 news reports of a MonkeyPox (Mpox) outbreak around the world emerged with The World Health Organization confirmed cases in 30 countries. **In Canada most cases were among “Men who have Sex with Men” (the Public Health category – AKA MSM) in larger cities...** Overnight ACNS began getting calls from queer men concerned about what Mpox was, what this outbreak meant, etc. Early news reports sounded ominously like

early news reports from the early 1980 about what would first be named GRID (for Gay-Related Immune Deficiency), and later renamed AIDS... Gay and bi men of a certain age picked up on that vibe and we got more than a few trauma-triggered / highly stressed community members reaching out fearful of a new “Gay Plague.”

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.

**ACNS produced the first Nova Scotia informational resources in early summer 2022 about this emerging/evolving situation** – and updated them regularly. 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 clearly had an impact of speeding up the launch of NS vaccine program. It appears targeted public awareness campaigns and vaccine programs brought numbers under control in Canada fairly quickly and kept them low.

Fortunately Mpox is not anywhere near as serious as HIV was before the good ART treatments arrived, and it was already known that the Smallpox vaccine prevented Mpox.

For both the PNP project and the Mpox work **ACNS stepped up... and got lots of public and media interest.** Kudos to PNP Coordinator Andrew Thomas, and HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2SGBQ+ Men Shane Pope for doing media interviews and conference presentations on our work!

### **The Health Year ... Part 2**

One concerning pattern that ACNS began seeing at the end of the 2021-22 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 with HIV 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.

**In early fall 2022, 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. 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.

**2022 HALIFAX PRIDE FESTIVAL**  
**FREE HIV Self-Test POP-UPS**

In partnership with:  
HALIFAX Sexual Health Centre

Supported in part by:  
ViiV Healthcare

July 20th  
12:30pm - 4:30pm  
Halifax Central Library

July 24th  
4:00pm - 6:00pm  
Canada Games Baseball Diamond

For More Info:  
Email - [pc@acns.ns.ca](mailto:pc@acns.ns.ca)

One response ACNS had to the absence of testing for much of the past 2.5 years is to seek funding to **offer free HIV self test at pride events in Halifax and Sydney in July and August 2022**. Thanks to Halifax Pride/TD Bank and ViiV Healthcare, we were able to do so while also providing some tests to members of the public after these events. As previously explained we also tapped into the new federal HIV Self-test funding to continue and expand access to free HIV self-testing across the province moving forward until at least March 2024.

**The Year of Preparing for Change ...**

Lastly, I want to say we finally – after all the COVID delays – moved 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’ve been seeking input on our 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.***

**HIV+ Client  
Community  
Consultations**

ACNS is seeking input from our HIV+ clients to explore the possibility of expanding our mandate to include **sexual health, mental health, and substance use issues for 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians ...** ... while we continue to address HIV issues for **ALL** in Nova Scotia.

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We are holding a virtual meeting by Zoom on **Wednesday, Nov 16 at 6:30 PM**. We'll also speak to people on-on-one by phone or in-person as an option.

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

You can also head to <https://tinyurl.com/ACNS-Consults>

AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia logo and QR code.

The first community consultation was by Zoom in November 2022 and was exclusively for our PLHA clients. A second PLHA consultation happened early in 2023, followed up by several broader 2SLGBTQIA+ community consultations. Universally those in attendance at these consultations understood our case for the need for change, and agree with the proposed plan being put forward – which informs the two Special Resolutions on the agenda for this year’s AGM.

**Chris Aucoin  
Executive Director**

## Program Highlights - PLHA Client Support 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, were still on hold,

most of our client programs are on offer in some form.

we have ...

# Cell Phones & Minutes

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

**AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia**

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

ViiV Healthcare

Canada

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.

### Client Phone Program

We are now in 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

We continue to offer **Back-To-School, Easter 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.

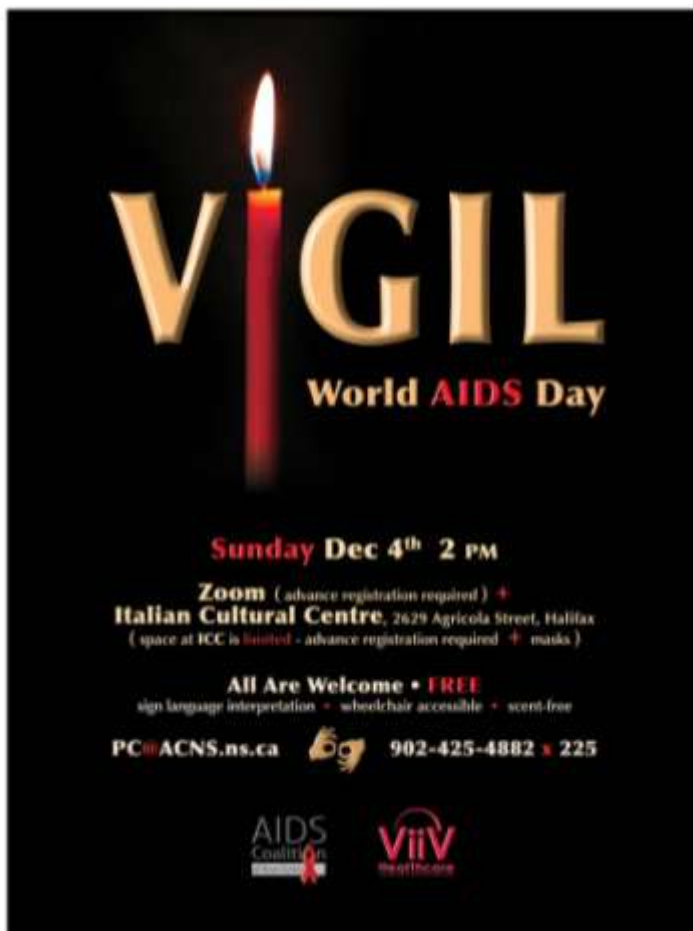
### Making Ends Meet, Drop In Food & Travel Support

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 as well as bus tickets to access essential health and related services.

### The Vigil

This year we again held an hybrid model 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, for the first time since COVID, had live performances by *The Women Next Door* and the *Halifax Gay Men's Chorus*, in addition to our own Hanley Smith. Our guest speaker was **Michael Davies-Cole**.



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 continued our **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.

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.

## Program Highlights – HIV Prevention Programs

### Totally OUTright Nova Scotia

As mentioned in the introduction, our Totally OUTright program is back with Canada’s first first-ever Trans & Non-Binary specific offering ‘Totally TRANS Outright!’ which happened in spring 2023 (and will again in spring 2025). The 2SGBQ+ men’s iteration will be offered in spring 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 carried forward from the previous CAF cycle. In addition to offering our 4-hour online introduction to the topic we are adding a new Level II “Systems and Environments” module in 2023-24.



### Coming Soon - Check Me Out

This highly-regarded ACNS-created sexual health testing promotion program, which has been on hold since 2017, is coming back. Look for this much updated and expanded program for both Queer men and Trans and Non-Binary persons to launch in 2024.

### Coming Soon...ish - ACNS Provincial Forum + Provincial PLHA Meet-Up

The new CAF agreement also allows ACNS to offer two provincial forums in 2025 and 2026. This will include a provincial PLHA scholarship program to attend and PLHA-specific programming during forum weekend.

## Program Highlights – Harm Reduction Program

### Peer N Peer Project

This one-year implementation pilot was focussed on providing harm reduction and sexual health info, education and support for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Halifax, including a particular focus on ‘Party and Play’ activity amongst queer men. We had hoped the funding supporting this program would be extended, but that did not happen. However, we’ll use the experience gained and materials developed to inform a future funding application to bring it (or something similar) back when the opportunity arises.



## Organizational Resources – Internships

With fundraising down overall, we continued to make much use of student cooperative and intern funding programs to bolster our staff compliment in 2022-2023. This included NSDEAL CO-OP program funding, Venture for Canada Internship Funding and Canada Summer Job funding. Through these programs, we were able to temporarily add Abhinn, Teddy, Patrick, and Jordan to our staff.

## Organizational Resources – Fund Raising & Visibility

See an overview of our 2022-23 fundraisers in the Executive Director’s report above. However, visibility projects are also crucial to support our fundraising AND to garner attention and support for programs and campaigns as well - 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**.

With the loss of events like ‘the walk’, in 2021 we borrowed from ASOs elsewhere to do a **Red Scarf Project - Halifax** for World AIDS Day that year. We sent out an invite for volunteer 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. 1<sup>st</sup>. Response from

# Red Scarf PROJECT-HALIFAX



knitters was very strong. We had well over 150 scarves from 80 volunteers in 2021. Response from the media and general public was also strong and favourable (some who couldn't knit donated yarn for those who could!). **Red Scarf Project 2022** saw the number of scarves donated and shared again on the Public Gardens fence to surpass over 200! **This coming December we aim to top that number again!**

**Our social media following** on both Instagram and Facebook has grown by more than double over 2022-23. 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 2022.**

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 Sydney's Cape Breton Pride in August. Overall, we have found ourselves becoming increasingly integral to the communities we serve, and have big plans to expand that presence moving forward.

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# Funders & Supporters

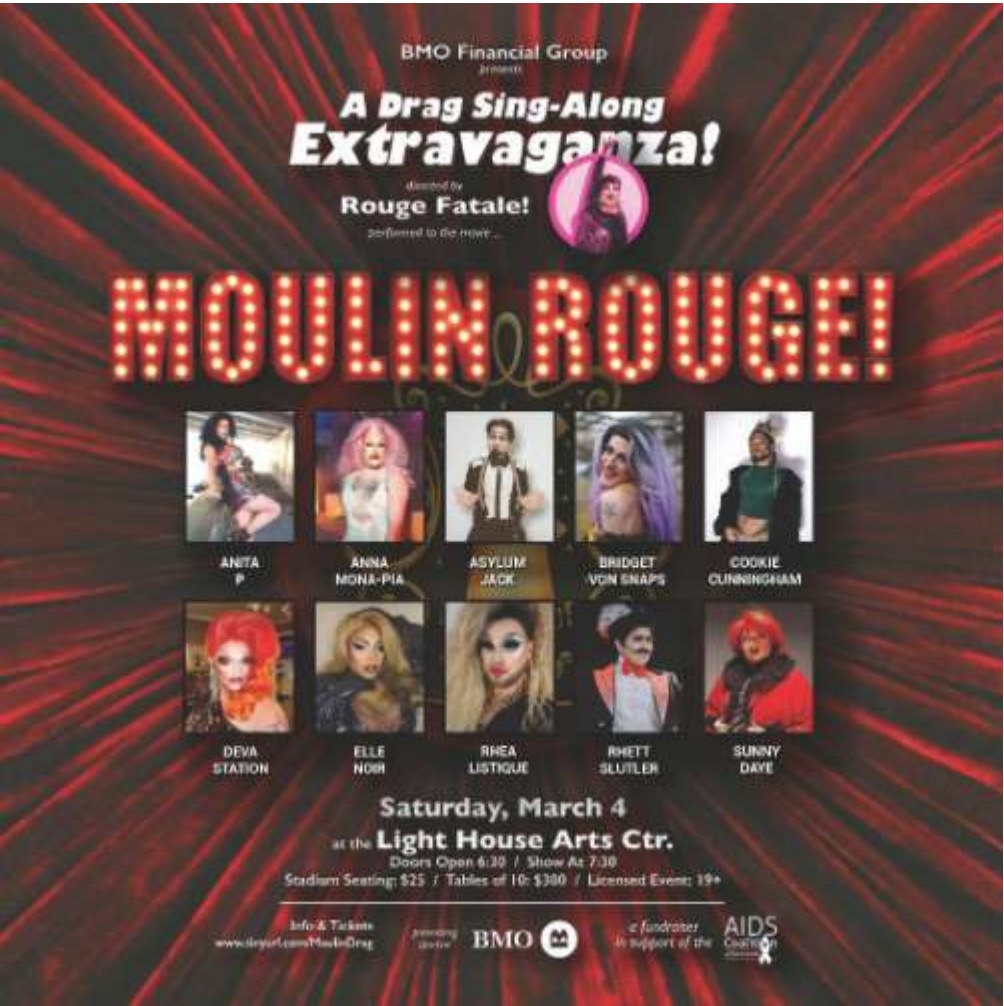
We would like to extend our gratitude to all our funders, sponsors and supporters.

## Funding Partners

Public Health Agency of Canada (CAF)  
Health Canada (SUAP) through a partnership with CBRC  
Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness  
ViiV Healthcare Canada (Positive Action Community Grant)  
Venture For Canada  
United Way Halifax  
Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union  
Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration (Coop)  
Employment and Social Development Canada (CSJ)

## Corporate & Business Supporters

ViiV Healthcare Canada  
BMO Financial Group  
Gilead Sciences Canada, Inc.  
Westjet  
Docaitta Design  
Tour Tech East  
Creative Curve  
Halifax Shopping Centre



# Event & Program Sponsors

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



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## **ACNS Staff (2022- 2023)**

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<b>Chris Aucoin</b>	Executive Director
<b>Ned MacInnis</b>	Program Support
<b>Dylan Samson</b>	PLHA Support & Program Services Coordinator
<b>Shane Pope</b>	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2SGBQ+ Men
<b>Hanley Smith</b>	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2S-TNB+ Folk
<b>Andrew Thomas</b>	Pee N Peer (Harm Reduction) Coordinator
<b>Marisa DiCosta</b>	Harm Reduction Peer Outreach Worker / HIV Self-Test
<b>Patrick Maubert</b>	Harm Reduction Peer Outreach Worker (PT)
<b>Jordan Parker</b>	Fund Development Coordinator (2022-23 Intern)
<b>Abhinn Gudania</b>	Fund Development & Marketing Intern (Winter)
<b>Teddy Elphick</b>	Event & Marketing Intern (Summer / Fall)

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## **ACNS Board (2022-2023)**

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<b>Marc Charrier</b>	Chairperson
<b>Carolyn Dawson</b>	Vice Chairperson
<b>Colin MacLeod</b>	Treasurer
<b>Sheena Jamieson</b>	Secretary
<b>Michael Sangster</b>	Board Member (RIP)
<b>Nakie Davies</b>	Board Member
<b>Chris Frazer</b>	Board Member