



**2SLGBTQIA+
Health**

**HIV Support
For All**

2023-2024 Annual Report



in memory of those lost in 2023-2024

**David
Blain
Ron
Dawn**



Report ... from the Chair

Welcome to the
2024 Annual General Meeting!

It has been a year of flux for our organization. New mandates, new staff and new ideas.

Chris has been an able captain of our ship. Keeping us all on track and making sure we travel on the same journey.

As chair, I am very happy that he is here with his great deal of experience. As well as the rest of our staff.

To the rest of the board, glad you on this journey with me and that we continue.

Marc Charrier
Chair, Board of Directors



Report ... from the Executive Director

The Fiscal Year ...

2023-2024 continued the strong and more stable funding picture that we began in 2022-2023 (after 5 years on fiscal “life-support” because of a 40% federal funding cut that occurred in 2017).

Our operating budget for fiscal 2022-2023 increased by 75% over 2021-22, but left us with deficit of \$55,746. **The current fiscal bettered last year with a 7.5% increase in budget over 2022-23, and ended the year with a surplus of \$2,046.**

The 2022-2023 agreement with Vancouver-based CBRC to be an implementation partner in a national pilot of the 2SLGBTQIA + Harm Reduction project (funded by

Health Canada’s SUAP funding) did not get renewed by the funder for 2023-24. However, that loss was offset by a continuance of the Public Health Agency of Canada’s **HIV Self Test** funding for 2023-24. For 2022-2027, we originally signed a **Public Health Agency of Canada CAF (HIV prevention)** contribution agreement for \$1.2 million over the five years. With the addition of the HIV Self-test monies for fiscals 2022-23 (5 months of funding) and 2023-24 (12 months of funding) that contract has now grown to almost \$1.4 million.

New this fiscal, we were approved for a 30-month federal Women And Gender Equality **2SLGBTQ+ Community Capacity Fund** grant for \$449,881 and covering a 30-month period beginning October, 2023. This new grant added \$76,480 to the current fiscal and will contribute more to fiscals 2024-25 and 2025-26.

For 2023-2024, we also added one additional year (at \$46,000) to our three-year **Nova Scotia Dept. of Health** funding that supports the staff component of our PLHA client programming. Again an annual grant from **ViiV Healthcare** provided the majority of the program budget for our PLHA client programs.



The Fundraising Year ...

Building on the success of the Moulin Rouge Drag Sing-Along from the previous fiscal, in November 2023 we hosted our "**Chicago: Drag-Along Spectacular**", which featured 17 performers and netted a sold-out crowd of 550 at the Light House Arts Centre. When the dust settled we cleared over \$15,000.

Also in this fiscal, we had two raffles. Coinciding with the Major League Baseball playoffs, we raffled off a signed and numbered limited edition print of legendary Toronto Blue Jay

Tom Henke (2-time All-Star, World Series Champion and Canadian Baseball Hall of Famer). This framed print of a Hanne Lore Koehler painting of Henke was signed by the artist, and autographed by Henke as well! Then in February we raffled off two tickets to, star of stage and screen, Mandy Patinkin's "Being Alive" spring concert at the Dalhousie Arts Centre – including a meet-and-greet with Mr. Patinkin himself. The raffles jointly cleared \$2226 –

with more than 90% of that coming from the Patinkin raffle.

The biggest fundraising project this fiscal was advance preparations for the April 20, 2024 (just barely next fiscal) of our inaugural **Red Gala**!

The Health Year ...

With COVID causing major disruptions to HIV/STI testing in NS for several years (and with HIV/STI testing options being grossly inadequate even before that impact), we've been concerned about a likely increase in HIV infections as a result of restricted access to testing.



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 appeared to confirm that both a backlog AND an increase have happened. It seems clear the absence of testing may have contributed to the ideal



Jordan, and Cole (and our friend Rouge!) at Annapolis Royal Pride.

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 accessible oral PrEP for HIV hasn't helped.

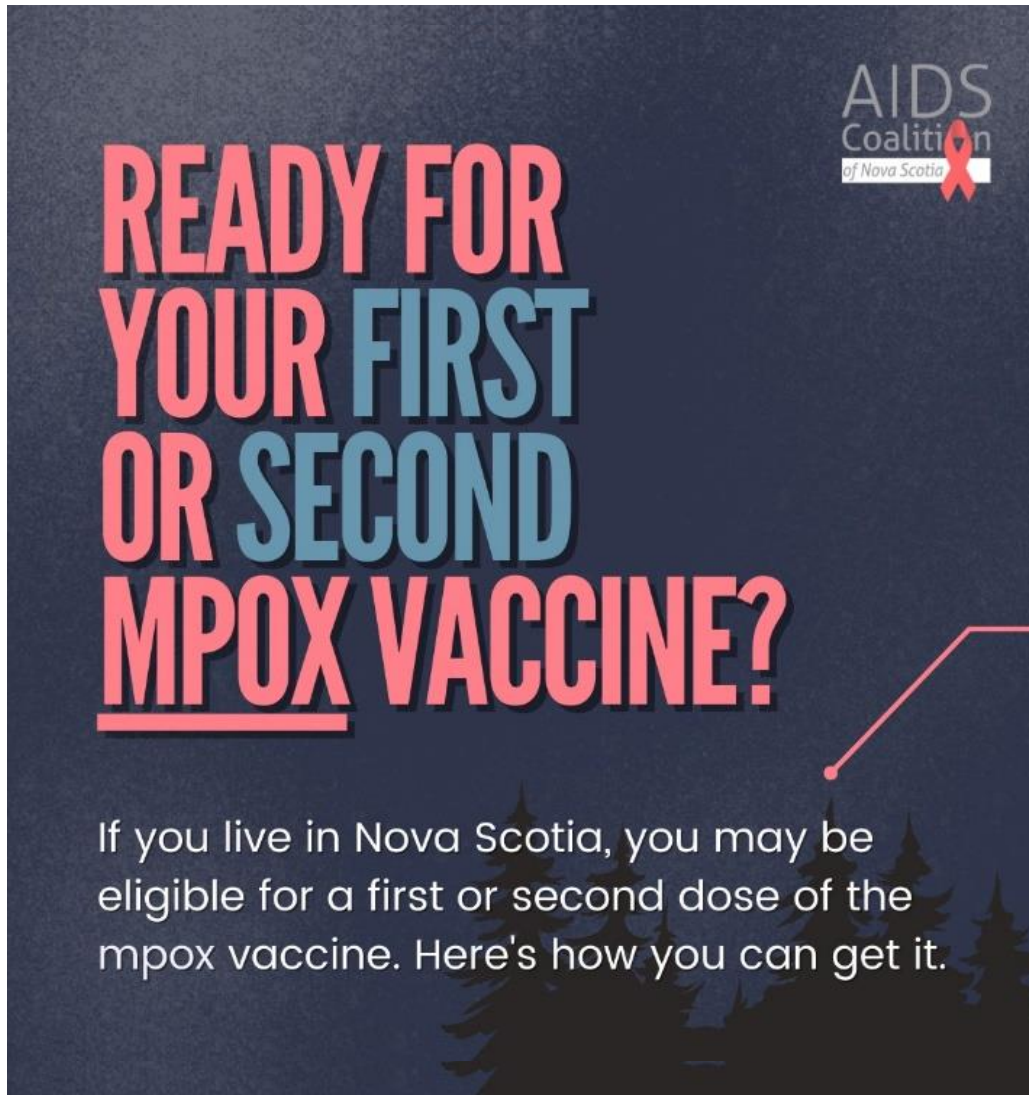
One response we had to the absence of testing for the first few years of COVID was to seek funding to offer the newly approved **HIV self tests**

for free. When the Public Health Agency of Canada announced they would supply free HIV Self-tests to front line agencies like ours we dove in deep in Fall 2022.

Since that federal program launched we have been steadily promoting and providing HIV Self-tests across Nova Scotia, and we'll do all within our power to continue doing so.

The Health Year ... Part 2

In the summer of 2022 we produced the first Nova Scotia information resources about the emerging/evolving Mpox situation in Canada. We worked with NS Health regarding language for their materials targeting MSM (Men who have sex with Men – the public health category) 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 the NS vaccine program. It appears targeted public awareness campaigns and vaccine programs brought numbers under control in Canada fairly quickly and kept them low.

In Spring 2023, fear of another wave of Mpox infections amongst Gay/Bi/Queer men in Canada largely did not materialize.

However, we've been keeping our ear to the ground on this issue, and continue promoting vaccinations for those who have not yet gotten them.

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 prevents Mpox.

The Year of Implementing Change ...

The first community consultation to change our mission and name 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 2S/LGBTQIA+ community consultations in the Spring/Summer of 2023. Universally those in attendance at these consultations understood our case for the need for change, and agreed with the proposed plans being put forward.



At our AGM last Fall we finally voted on (and approved!) the mission and name changes that had been in the planning since 2018. We had a new logo designed by Jennifer Unrau - who did an amazing job!

The new name and revised was subsequently registered with NS Joint Stock in the spring of 2024 as our new legal name (we had the name placed on hold for us for several years to keep it for our use) so we could announce it publicly at our **Red Gala** event on April 20th... were it was received to much acclaim!

Since then we've been gradually addressing the many ways that needs to be followed up:

- immediately let members of the communities we serve know (if they didn't already), as well as our community partners;
- update our formal communications (logo in email signature includes "formerly known as ..., etc.);
- getting the name changed with our bank (red tape) and gradually our funders (more red tape) - some are very simple and quick to resolve, and some drag on ...
- and more to come....

Chris Aucoin
Executive Director

Program Highlights – HIV+ Client Support Programs

Supported with a grant from the **Nova Scotia Dept. of Health**, a grant from **ViiV Healthcare**, plus **fundraising revenues**, we continue 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.

Client Phone Program

We are now in our 4th 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**, **Spring** and **Holiday Hamper** programs for PLHA clients with dependent children. As always, there's great appreciation from our parent clients for the support of their families.

CATS Program

Our **Complimentary and Alternative Therapies** (CATS) program has been having a harder time than ever attracting new professional practitioners in massage, osteopathy, etc. We are very grateful for our lone osteopathy volunteer Martha Faron, and we would welcome others to join her. (All leads appreciated!)



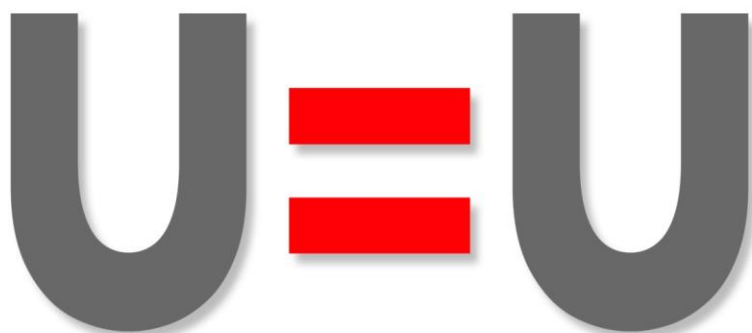
Making Ends Meet, Drop In Food & Travel Support... AND the need for Food!

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.

While COVID had significantly reduced the overall amount of foot-traffic into our offices, this past year traffic has steadily grown in both frequency and in the intensity of demands for service and support. This has especially been the case with regard to inadequate income/resources. We've been actively seeking more funding to address the growing needs – especially around food-support. Just as the fiscal year was ending we got news we had secured a grant for food support from the new United Way "**Urgent Food and Essentials Fund**" that will be in place for April 2024.

The Vigil

This year we again held a hybrid model online/in-person World AIDS Day vigil. Attendance of the event was strong. Our guest speaker was **Robert Wright**, and opening remarks by **Monique Fong-Howe**. Again we had live performances by **The Women Next Door** and the **Halifax Gay Men's Chorus**. The in-person attendance at the U. of King's Colleges KTS Lecture Hall was larger than we'd seen in quite a few years at approximately 90 people.



**Undetectable HIV =
Untransmittable HIV ...**

but that's a mouthful ... so it's usually abbreviated as **U=U**

“It's very, very clear that the risk is zero.”

- Dr. Alison Rodger, lead author of the PARTNER study

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

**Know
Your Status!**

Get Tested . Get Treated . End HIV

for more info:

www.acns.ns.ca/info-resources/U-U

AIDS
Coalition
of Nova Scotia

supported
by a grant from

ViiV
Healthcare

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.

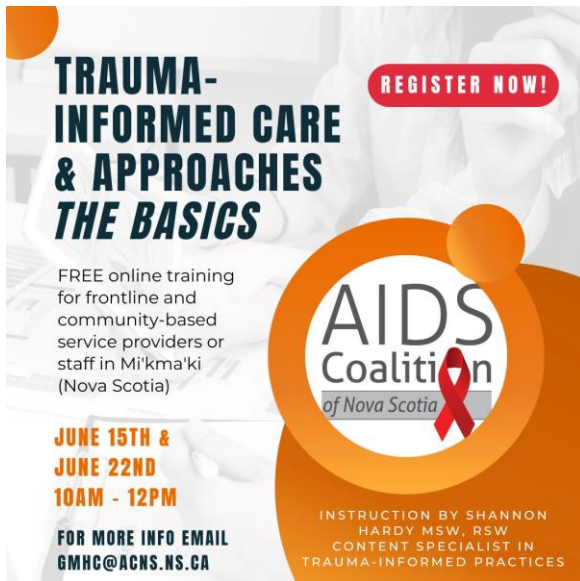
Program Highlights – HIV Prevention Programs

Our ongoing **Public Health Agency of Canada CAF funding** continues to support our core HIV prevention efforts

Totally OUTright in Nova Scotia

Our ongoing **Public Health Agency of Canada CAF (HIV prevention) funding** continues to support our **Totally OUTright** program for Queer men, and for Trans and Non-Binary folk

Our **Totally Trans Outright** program (our 2S/T&NB adaption being the first offering of the program anywhere) was held in May, 2023 (and will again in spring 2025). The 2S/GBQ+ men’s iteration was offered in May 2024, and will repeat in 2026.



Trauma-Informed Care Training

This program for service providers about how to better work with PLHA, HIV/HCV priority populations, and 2S/LGBTQIA+ populations is another piece we’re carried forward from the previous CAF cycle.

Continuing in the 2023-24 fiscal was our introductory level training to **Trauma-Informed Care** 4-hour online program for frontline service providers, and in 2024-25 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 3-5 of the CAF cycle.

HIV Self-Test Distribution

With the addition of **HIV Self-test funding** to our CAF contract for 2023-24, we also tapped into some funding from **ViiV Healthcare** to support an **HIV Self-Test** provincial tour of Pride (and pride-like) events in Nova Scotia to promote and hand-out free HIV Self-Tests as widely as we could!

Staff began traveling in June, and visited Amherst, New Glasgow, Truro, Annapolis Royal, Wolfville, Cape Breton, Musquodobiot Harbour, Sydney and (in the absence of a formal Halifax Pride in 2023) multiple events in and around Halifax.

In addition to the pride tour we did distribution at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre health centre, and to an Atlantic-region Two-Spirit conference on the south shore. We did a joint booth at the Halifax Central Library with the Approach research team with self tests being handed out along with them doing HIV/HCV/Syphilis dried blood-spot testing. All told, since we started the Self test program in the fall of 2022, **by March 2024 we've distributed approximately 4000 HIV self tests across the province.**



2013 Check Me Out Logo

Coming Soon... Check Me Out

Also happening on the CAF grant during 2023-24 was work towards bringing back two former ACNS programs that will launch later in the CAF grant cycle. First there is the highly-regarded (and ACNS-created) **Check Me Out** HIV/STBBI (Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Illnesses) testing promotion program.

The original user-friendly STI+ checklist was developed more than a decade ago for 2S/GBTQ men, and now we're expanding it to include the entire 2S/LGBTQIA+ umbrella to better reflect our new mission. This new version will also offer a comprehensive sexual health info support web site. Look for this much updated and expanded program to launch Fall 2024.

Coming Soon...ish – HEAL NS Provincial Forum + Provincial PLHA Meet-Up

The other program that we're also working towards 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 and 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).

Program Highlights – 2S/LGBTQIA+ Capacity Development

Our new WAGE **2SLGBTQ+ Community Capacity Fund** grant began in Oct 2023 with the launch of a new DEI staff position (100%) to examine the organization, in all its facets, with an intersectional lens. The goal is to make HEAL NS do a better job at embracing all aspects of diversity within the populations we serve, our board, and our staff - to identify where and how we can do better. Our internal policies are going through a thorough review and overhaul, and training opportunities for current board and staff are being pursued (both staff and board will be doing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training early in the new year).

Also part of this WAGE funding is support for our Fund Development staff (80% position, began January 2024) and to contract a FD consultant to guide us in refining, expanding and improving our fund development capacity overall as an organization.

Organizational Resources – Internships

We continued to make much use of student cooperative and other intern funding programs to bolster our staff compliment in 2023-2024. This included **NS-DLSI CO-OP** funding, **Venture for Canada** internship funding, and **Canada Summer Job** funding. Through these programs, we were able to temporarily (and sometimes serially) employ Michael Davies-Cole, Jordan Parker, Cole Hardiman and Matthew Thibodeau.

Organizational Resources – Fund Raising & Visibility

See an overview of our 2023-24 fundraisers in the Executive Director’s report above. However, visibility projects are also crucial to support our fundraising AND to garner



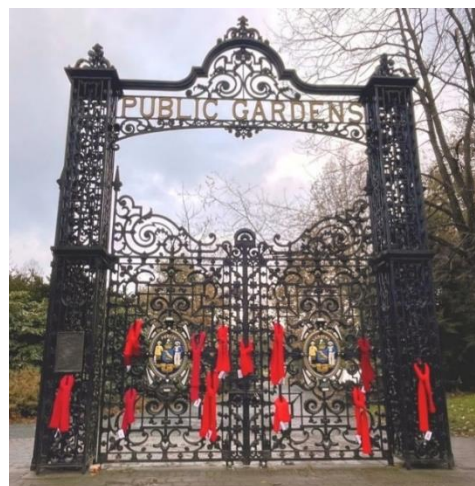
attention and support for programs and campaigns as well - to raise both the organization’s visibility and the issues we aim to address. In the past, some fundraising events had

**Red
Scarf**
PROJECT-HALIFAX



both visibility and fundraising aspects – 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. 1st. Response from 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! **Red Scarf Project 2023** saw the number of scarves donated and shared again on the Public Gardens fence hit 303! **This coming December we hope to exceed that total again!**



Funders & Key Supporters

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

Funding Partners

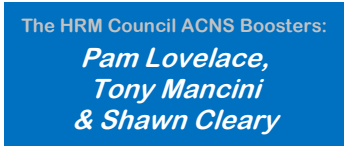
Public Health Agency of Canada (CAF)
Women and Gender Equality (2SLGBTQI+ Community Capacity Fund)
Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
ViiV Healthcare Canada (Positive Action Community Grant)
Venture For Canada
United Way Halifax
Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia
Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union
Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration (COOP)
Employment and Social Development Canada (CSJ)
City of Halifax Culture and Heritage

Community, Corporate & Business Supporters

ViiV Healthcare Canada
Unleashed Studio
MAC Viva Glam / the MAC Cosmetics Crew
My Mothers Bloomers
The Women Next Door
The Halifax Gay Men's Chorus

Event & Program Sponsors

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



ACNS Staff & Interns (2023-2024)

Chris Aucoin	Executive Director
Ned MacInnis	Program Support
Dylan Samson (till July)	PLHA Support & Program Services Coordinator
Jordan Upshaw (April - July)	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2S/GBQ+ Men
Jordan Upshaw from July forward)	PLHA Support & Program Services Coordinator & Programs Manager
Hanley Smith	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2S/TNB+ Folk
Olivia Kerr (from September forward)	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2S/GBQ+ Men
Michael Davies Cole	Equity & Diversity Project Manager
Jordan Parker	Fund Development Manager
Cole Hardiman	Fund Development & Marketing Intern (Summer/Fall/Winter)
Matthew Thibodeau	Fund Development & Marketing Intern (Winter)

ACNS Board (2023-2024)

Marc Charrier	Chairperson
Nakie Davies	Vice Chairperson
Colin MacLeod	Treasurer
Sheena Jamieson	Secretary
Ashley Martell	Board Member