



**2024-2025
Annual Report**

Memorial Book of Names

**To date,
there are no names known to us in
2024-2025**



Report ... from the Chair

Welcome to the 2025 Annual General Meeting!

It has been an interesting year at the Health Equity Alliance of Nova Scotia.

There has been a number of changes which the organization has needed to deal with.

We are planning on an overhaul of some processes which will make the organization run smoother.

Sometimes an old organization needs to oil its parts. I have enjoyed being the chair and hope to continue in that role.



Chris has been an able administrator, and I look forward to continuing to work with him and the rest of the staff.

Marc Charrier
Chair, Board of Directors

Report ... from the Executive Director

The Fiscal Year ...

2024-2025 continued the general pattern of a strong and growing 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).

The 2023-2024 fiscal finished with a 7.5% increase in budget over 2022-23, and ended the year with a surplus of \$2,046. **Fiscal 2024-2025 saw an additional 14 % increase in the operating budget**, and ended the year with a \$36,689 deficit. However, it should be noted that we also had \$30,126 in accounts receivable at year end to offset that deficit moving forward.



The Public Health Agency of Canada’s **HIV Self Test** funding (which was in place for 2022-2024) did NOT get renewed for 2024-25 (which left us with our base CAF grant for the year of **\$242,150**). However, we still had access to free HIV Self tests, so had to decide if we’d continue to supply them across the province – which meant incurring shipping costs for which there was not new money. **We decided continuing to making them available was the right thing to do** in a province where access to sexual health testing (including HIV) is ridiculously sparse. This meant taking on a small deficit for the fiscal.

This fiscal included the first full year of our 30-month federal Women And Gender Equality **2SLGBTQ+ Community Capacity Fund** grant for \$449,881 that began in October, 2023. This new grant added \$66,812 to last fiscal and **\$182,531** to current fiscal and will contribute even more to fiscal 2025-26.

For 2024-2025, we also added a fourth year (at \$46,000) to our **Nova Scotia Dept. of Health** funding that supports the staff component of our PLHA client programming. Again, an annual \$25,000 grant from **ViiV Healthcare**, **plus a new United Way Urgent Food Fund grant of \$30,000** provided the core of the program budget for our PLHA Making Ends Meet Program. (NOTE: Unfortunately, both ViiV and United Way made it known at fiscal year’s end that their funding priorities were changing moving forward, so neither of these 2 grants are available for 2025-2026...)

We also had a program grant from the **Nova Scotia Mental Health Foundation** this fiscal to cover costs of a limited series of self-care-focussed therapy sessions for HIV+ clients, HEAL NS staff, and members of the 2S/LGBTQIA+ community. However, getting this new program up and running was hampered by staff turnover (thrice!) creating multiple delays launching the program, and there were other unforeseen challenges too. Ultimately, we used \$15,910 of the \$24,750 that was approved before the funding period expired.

The Fundraising Year ...

On April 20 our inaugural **Red Gala** was held at the Light House Arts Centre to great acclaim: launching our new mission and new name + the fabulous logo designed by Jennifer Unrau, and **raising more than \$20,000**.

During Halifax Pride Week we held “**Shayla’s 25th Drag-Iversary Pride Bingo**” event. Hosted at the Garrison Brewery, we sold out, had a great show and a great time and **raised \$5,647!**

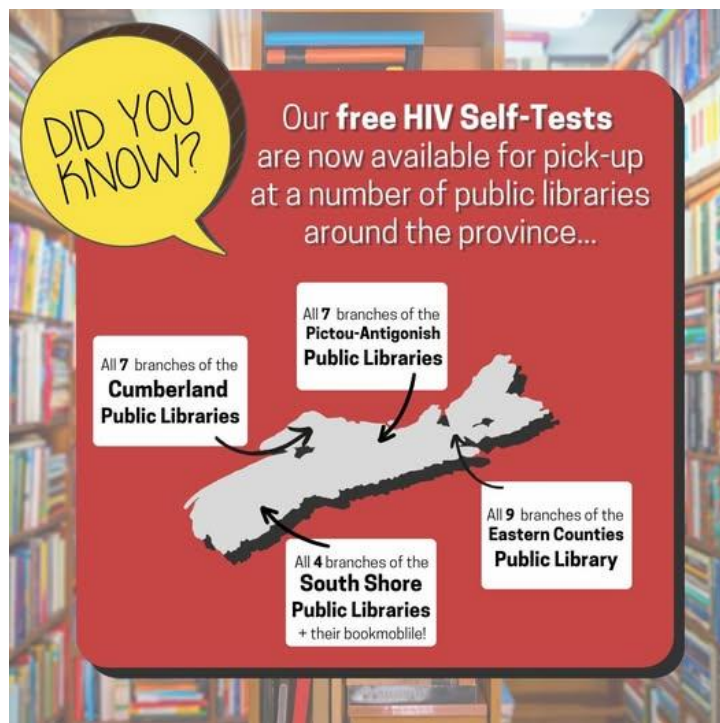
The Nov. 8 Grease Drag-along Spectacular was another Fund-raising success. The show selling out and **netting \$16,586!**

Finally on Feb 14th we raised \$840 in our raffle of two tickets to the **Cavendish Beach Music Festival**. This weekend-long festival headlined Grammy Award winner Shania Twain, Tyler Hubbard, Lainey Wilson, and more!



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. That's why (among many reasons) we were happy when in 2022 the federal government made HIV self-tests available for free with us and many other community-based sexual health organizations. That federal program formally ended in March 2024 (as discussed above regarding program funding), though they continued to provide free HIV self tests until their stockpile ran out – which covered our distribution needs for most of 2024-25.



With increasing rates and woefully inadequate STI testing capacity, and knowing the free HIV self test would soon be running out, we were very happy to hear early in this fiscal year from NS Health that they wanted us to partner with, and provide input into, two new research initiatives they wanted to explore for STI testing. The first is called the **STI Care Now** project (which focused on home-based self-testing for chlamydia + gonorrhea in the Halifax and Truro areas) and the other being the pharmacy-based **SwabRX** project.

By fiscal year end NS Health made it known to us they had ended the STI Care Now research phase, and would be soon moving to a full provincial launch – with HEAL NS again as a key community and distribution partner - becoming a testing kit pick-up location for chlamydia + gonorrhea sample collection, now also with the addition of HIV self tests provided by the province. Test kits can also be mailed anywhere in NS via filling out a form on the STI Care Now website. For more about the STI Care program see <https://globalnews.ca/news/11172699/nova-scotia-take-home-sti-testing/>. Also see **Check Me Out** on Page 10 of this report.

Chris Aucoin
Executive Director

Program Highlights – HIV+ Client Support Programs

Supported with a grant from the **Nova Scotia Dept. of Health** (towards the staff position), and grants from **ViiV Healthcare** and the **United Way Urgent Food Fund** (plus **fundraising revenues**) we expanded and refined our client support programs this year.

Client Phone Program

We continue to offer this in-demand client phone program that began as a response to COVID lockdowns in spring 2020. TeleHealth is here to stay, along with the need to phone the VG Pharmacy to renew HIV med prescriptions, call NS Income Assistance caseworkers, phone HEAL NS, etc., etc.

Emergency Medical Device Assistance

Something else that became apparent during 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.

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.

Making Ends Meet ...

We still get a steady demand for our **Personal Care & Toiletries** program and, to a much lesser degree, our **Drop-in Food Program** of healthy snacks and meal replacement drinks. As well, clients still need to see medical professionals where possible, so we are also providing 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. This fiscal we were able to increase our food support significantly with a one-year grant from the new United Way “**Urgent Food and Essentials Fund**”. This allowed us to support our most economically vulnerable clients with monthly food gift cards to buy groceries.

CATS Program Now On Hiatus

Since COVID our long-standing **Complimentary and Alternative Therapies** (CATS) program has been struggling in attracting professional practitioners in massage, osteopathy, reflexology, etc. Late this year our last remaining volunteer made it known they too would be leaving the program. Martha Faron had been with us for about 8 years providing osteopathy to our HIV+ clients. Thank you, Martha, for your years of support.

The Vigil

This past year, we again held a hybrid model online/in-person **World AIDS Day Vigil**. Our guest speaker was Dr. Jacqueline Gahagan, and the opening remarks were by Aaron Prosper. We had live performances by The Women Next Door and the Halifax Gay Men's Chorus. As always, the centre-piece of the service was a complete reading of the



names in our Memorial Book of all those who have left us in NS who once lived with HIV or AIDS. The in-person attendance at the U. of King's College's KTS Lecture Hall was high at approximately 90 people. Once again, we had a panel from the Canadian AIDS Quilt on display for the service.

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.



**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

**HEAL
NS**

2SLGBTQIA+
Health
HIV Support
For All

supported
by a grant from

**ViiV
Healthcare**

Program Highlights – HIV Prevention Programs

Our ongoing **Public Health Agency of Canada CAF funding** continues to support our core HIV prevention efforts (This is now supplemented in a minor, but not insignificant way, by our partnership with the NS Health STI Care Now program.)

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). This year we offered our 2S/GBQ+ men's iteration in May, and will repeat that targeted program again in May 2026. (NOTE: we are also now in development of our first ever **BIPOC Totally Outright** program – funded by a NS



Office of Equity and Anti-Racism “Community Network Grant”, and to be offered in Spring 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 work piece we're carried forward from the previous CAF cycle.

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

**Trauma Informed
Care at the
Organizational Level**

FREE online training for **frontline and
community-based service providers or
staff and their supervisors/managers.**

**March 18th and 20th,
10am-12pm Via Zoom**

**Limited spots are available. Preference will be given
to those who attended 'TIC the Basics' previously.**



Check Me Out
Logo in 2013

Check Me Out 2025 is Launched!

The original **Check Me Out** user-friendly STI+ checklist was developed by ACNS more than a decade ago for 2S/GBTQ men. In the current CAF funding cycle we revisited that program, and reimagined it thoroughly (and expanding it to include the entire 2S/LGBTQIA+ umbrella to better reflect our new mission), building a new totally customizable sexual health checklist, and building a program-specific comprehensive and well-researched sexual health info support web site (<https://checkmeout.ca/>) to answer most of the questions people ask (and some they should ask but often don't!).

We soft-launched **Check Me Out 2025** in January. The tool is functioning very well, and immediately we started receiving lots of positive feedback (the preliminary social media campaign gained over 100 followers in the first month). Creation of core promotional collateral using community leaders as “poster ambassadors” have been unveiled gradually, and that will continue well into the next fiscal.

The checklist content is based on your provided answers regarding your genitals (whether born with or created via surgery), the genitals you are having sex with, your sexual behaviour, and some other risk factors, so the checklist is tailored specifically to you. With this customization there are at least 380 unique checklists possible!



In it's first 3 months 350 people have used the customized checklist tool, and 3000 have checked out the web site. We have even had 20 people fill out the short-term evaluation form (without us even promoting it yet, submissions have come through people finding it while doing the tool). Once it was confirmed that the Nova Scotia **STI Care Now** project was confirmed (for chlamydia + gonorrhea sample collection, but now also with the addition of HIV self tests) we included that resource prominently on our program web site as a new and province-wise STI testing option.

Program staff have given presentations on how to use this tool with patients / clients to: Dalhousie Social Work Clinic; Dalhousie School of Nursing students; Dalhousie School of Nursing (Yarmouth) students; Womens' Connect (network of women's centres and clinics across the province); Cape Breton University Clinic staff; and many many more!

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

The other program that we're also working towards bringing back within our CAF funding is our long-missed provincial knowledge-transfer exchange forum (once known as ***The Ceilidh***). Advance plans are underway to do an exclusively "people living with HIV/AIDS" (PLHAs) offering in March 2026, while the following year we will bring together PLHAs, HIV researchers and academics, front-line service providers, and healthcare system employees for a full "Knowledge Transfer and Exchange" (KTE) provincial forum. There will be scholarships for PLHAs to attend both programs (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, our staff, and our programs - to identify where and how we can do better. Our internal policies are going through a thorough review and overhaul, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training opportunities for board and staff have been ongoing during this past year, as well as staff training to improve and support their core job competencies.

Another 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. While there has been some turnover in the FD role this past year, the work continues.

This Wage **2SLGBTQ+ Community Capacity** funding will conclude in 2025-26 fiscal with more training, and fund development capacity work, plus a 2S/LGBTQIA+ health survey for Nova Scotia.

Organizational Resources – Internships

We continued to make much use of student cooperative and other intern funding programs to bolster our staff complement in 2024-2025. This included **NS-DLSI CO-OP** funding, **Venture for Canada** internship funding, and **Canada Summer Job** funding.

Organizational Resources – Fund Raising & Visibility

See an overview of our 2024-25 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 – e.g., the ***AIDS Walk***.

Red Scarf

PROJECT-HALIFAX



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. Attached to those scarves were World AIDS Day message cards about HIV testing treatment and prevention, and an invitation to “Take me if you are cold”.

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! Scarf numbers dipped a little in 2024, but **this coming December we hope to surpass 300 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)

United Way Halifax

Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia

Venture For Canada

Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union

Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration (COOP/SKILLS)

Nova Scotia Communities Culture and Heritage

Employment and Social Development Canada (CSJ)

Community, Corporate & Business Supporters

ViiV Healthcare Canada

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:



HEAL NS Staff & Interns (2024-2025)

Chris Aucoin	Executive Director
Ned MacInnis	Program Support
Jordan Upshaw (until May)	PLHA Support & Program Services Coordinator & Programs Manager
Ruben Fererro (May – Aug.)	PLHA Support & Program Services Coordinator
Chana Wielinga (August - forward)	PLHA Support & Program Services Coordinator & Programs Manager
Hanley Smith	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2S/TNB+ Folk
Olivia Kerr	HIV Prevention Coordinator for 2S/GBQ+ Men
Michael Davies Cole	Equity & Diversity Project Manager
Jordan Parker (until Jan.)	Fund Development Manager
Kevin Schultz (Jan. – forward)	Fund Development Manager (interim)
Cole Hardiman	Fund Development & Marketing Intern (Winter '24 / Summer / Winter)
Matthew Thibodeau	Fund Development & Marketing Intern (Winter '24)

SPECIAL MENTION

Jaskaran “Jas” Singh Anand worked for ACNS / HEAL NS under two short-term contracts: as a Peer Recruiter for Totally Outright in 2024, and this summer and fall to develop the content for our upcoming 2S/LGBTQIA+ health research survey.

His untimely passing is a loss to us all.

HEAL NS Board (2024-2025)

Marc Charrier	Chairperson
Nakie Davies	Vice Chairperson
Colin MacLeod	Treasurer
Sheena Jamieson	Secretary
Ashley Martell	Board Member
Arthur David Miller	Board Member
Jordan Upshaw	Board Member
Greg King	Board Member