



+ POSITIVE DISPATCH

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Woody's Fab March 50/50

Escape the stiffness of winter and join in for the return of Woody's Fabulous 50/50 Fundraiser!

Play for the chance to win your very own pot of gold on March 16, 2022, just in time for Saint Patrick's Day.

If you're feeling lucky, support a great cause and give yourself a chance at a big cash prize. Ticket prices are 1 for \$10, 3 for \$20, 10 for \$50, and 25 for \$100. Visit www2.rafflebox.ca/raffle/acns to buy yours before midnight March 15th!

Also, follow the ACNS Facebook page for updates – and to see what Woody's been up to.

This is our first of four draws in 2022, with others coming in June, September and December as well. Good luck!



ACNS Office Reopens!

Despite having our office closed to the public since mid-December, ACNS staff have continued to serve our clients via phone or email. While our office was closed, clients were still able to access services such as our *Making Ends Meet* program by calling in advance to request supplies and resources once per month. Those supplies can either be received by contactless pick-up, contactless delivery, or by mail.

Now, as Nova Scotia is moving forward with its reopening plan, **our physical office re-opened on Monday Feb 28th**. Appointments are recommended, as we still need to limit numbers in the office. Masks and

physical distancing are still required by ACNS. Hand sanitizer is available inside the building entrance, on each floor, and in our office. We can provide masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes for visitors who need them.

Clients are only allowed in the waiting room and the Support Services office – if they need something in another room, they will need to ask a member of staff to get it for them.

We are taking the provincial re-opening plan into account, as well as being hyper-aware that many of our clients are vulnerable. So we will continue to assess the situation moving forward. As things change, we will provide updates. For any questions please contact Dylan or Ned.

Welcome to the MasQueerade!



Wear your fantasy ... Sequins & Feathers? Latex & Leathers? Surprise us!

Get your dancing boots or sparkling heels and join us this spring for ACNS's "**MasQueerade - A Coming Out Costume Ball.**"

We've needed a touch-up for a while, and our spring charity ball gives the 2SLGBTQIA+ community a chance to cut loose together and get a sneak peek at potential changes ACNS has planned to better serve you.

Late spring date TBA. "**MasQueerade**" is presented by Gilead Canada. Tickets go on sale April 1 @ noon. See ad page 2 or contact Jordan for more info.

In Memoriam 2021

Rene, Calvin, Tom (Blanche)

Gilead Canada Presents

MasQueerade

a coming out costume ball



Spring 2022, Halifax
Tickets on sale April 1 @ Noon

in support of the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia



ACNS Renewed?

ACNS is overdue for a refresh ...

Back in 2018-2019, the ACNS staff and Board of Directors had gone through a detailed strategic planning process to assess the direction of the organization in both the short-and-long-term. We looked at the work we have been doing, the work we want to be doing, the challenges and opportunities that new developments in HIV treatment and prevention have presented, and we especially looked at the challenges and opportunities that changes in funding for programs have presented.

HIV-specific funding – at both the provincial and federal level – continues to shrink each and every year! In addition, fund-raising for all charities continues to get more and more

challenging as the fundraising landscape has grown increasingly crowded and competitive.

Out of that strategic planning process, new ideas and directions emerged that we need to discuss with our clients and the populations we already serve... as well as the populations we may be adding to our service!

To finalize this process, we were planning on doing in-person consultations across Nova Scotia in the spring of 2020. COVID-19 interrupted that process. This spring we will be re-launching that consultation process – however much of that will be virtual.

First off, we want to be clear that we are not planning on giving up any of the HIV support and prevention programs and services we currently offer. **ACNS will continue to address HIV issues for all priority populations in NS.** However, to survive (or even thrive!) and be able to offer those HIV-specific services, we need a broader foundation. Also, we've long been aware of the obvious overlaps and synergies between HIV work and broader 2SLGBTQIA health work.

ACNS wants to hear your thoughts and input on this proposal and we're hoping to have in-depth discussions about how we can best serve our communities moving forward. Our community consultations will include an HIV+ client focus group, and a series of broader 2SLGBTQIA+ consultations.

If you would like to be part of this consultation process, please email Chris at ED@acns.ns.ca and put "Community Consultation" in the subject line. Thanks!



Annual General Meeting



The Annual General Meeting of the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) will be held on Thursday June 23. The location is yet to be confirmed. The meeting will begin at 6:00 pm, with registration at 5:30 pm. For

more information contact Chris.

Join the ACNS Board

The Board of Directors of ACNS is looking for new members. People living with HIV/AIDS are especially encouraged to apply. People interested in being considered should contact Chris by Tuesday, Apr 26, 2022 to express their interest.



Manna for Health to Close?

It was recently brought to our attention that the Manna for Health food bank would be closing its doors on April 24th. Since learning of this, ACNS reached out to the organizers at Manna and have met with them. We will continue those discussions

and are continuing to work with them to explore what options are available to keep Manna open for our HIV+ clients. We are likewise planning to meet with key volunteers at Manna in order to discuss the situation and gain their perspectives.

While ACNS and its staff don't have the capacity to take over the operation and administration of Manna from St. John's United Church (where Manna has been a community outreach project for many years), we are hopeful that there can be a transition and that another organization may be able to take over. If you know of someone who may be interested in stepping in and helping to manage Manna, please direct them to reach out to ACNS as soon as possible.

In the meantime, Manna is still open to our clients. If you require a referral to Manna for Health, please reach out to our Support Coordinator, Dylan.

The proposal which ACNS will be seeking feedback on is:

“to expand our mandate to address broader sexual health, mental health and substance use issues – and to do so for all 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians”.

This is the possible future that we wish to work towards. This is the proposal we now wish to present to our existing clients and HIV priority populations, as well as to the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in NS.

Welcomes Abhinn

Abhinn Gudania (He/Him) has joined the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia for his internship through Saint Mary's University. Serving as the Event & Campaign Marketing Coordinator Intern this winter, he has all kinds of exciting opportunities and responsibilities.



Abhinn Gudania

Abhinn is an International student from India, doing his Bachelor of Commerce at Sobey School of Business of Saint Mary's University, majoring in marketing. He has always been involved within the student community while sitting on executive positions on various student societies. With a background in the digital marketing space, Abhinn has worked with many e-commerce brands.

Abhinn will be working on our campaigns like the upcoming 50/50 draws, ticket sales for our spring *MasQueerade Coming Out Costume Ball*, and so much more here at ACNS. His digital knowledge can help the team expand how we use social media to further our goals and help our clients.

He is passionate about sports and serves as the Director of Videography at SMU Football. He is a part-time boxer, a big FC Barcelona fan and loves anime, his favourite one being Naruto. During his free time you can catch him at the gym or at local Indian restaurants.

Red Scarf Project Knitters?

Our first Red Scarf Campaign for ACNS was a massive success, and we received over 160 donated scarves. Staff and volunteers tied donated scarves to posts and the fence around the Halifax Public Gardens to raise



awareness for HIV/AIDS and to honour those we've lost.

As we gear up for another iteration on December 1, we are inviting knitters and crocheters to reach out if they'd like to make scarves. We are looking for red, knitted or crocheted scarves that are 60 inches long and six inches wide. They can be any pattern people like. We can provide yarn if you need it.

Anyone with questions, or who wants to donate a scarf or help out, please contact Jordan.

\$50 Stigma Research Honorarium

The HIV Stigma Index is still looking for people living with HIV (PLHIV) to learn from your experiences. It is being implemented in Atlantic Canada and the team – made up of community-based representatives, service providers, and academics – is looking for PLHIV participants.

They want to collect information about the experiences of people living with HIV in regards to stigma, discrimination, and human rights. They want to use this information to inform healthcare best-practices, assist in policy development, and empower participants. All participants will be given a \$50 honorarium.

To participate, contact Arthur Dave Miller at 1-877-347-1175 or Arthur.miller@unityhealth.to.

ATLANTIC HIV STIGMA INDEX
LOOKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Call for Participants:
The HIV Stigma Index is a research and community-building tool used in more than 100 countries worldwide. It is now being implemented in Atlantic Canada by a diverse team of community-based representatives, service providers, and academics.

Purpose of the Study:
To collect information about the experiences of people living with HIV related to stigma, discrimination and human rights. In order to help inform best-practices with the healthcare system for engaging with people living with HIV, aid in the development of progressive policies, and empower participants.

All participants will be given a \$50 honorarium.

Research Process:
The HIV Stigma Index is a peer-driven project: It has been developed and implemented by people living with HIV, which means that another person living with HIV will ask the Index questions. The Index is carried out either in person, through secure video conferencing software or over the phone, and takes between 1 and 2 hours to complete.

Benefits of Participating:
In addition to helping inform the wider community about experiences of stigma for people living with HIV, the process of implementing the Stigma Index is empowering.

To participate contact Arthur Dave Miller at 1-877-347-1175 or Arthur.miller@unityhealth.to.

ST. MICHAEL'S UNITY HEALTH TORONTO | reachnexus | MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions | Atlantic HIV Stigma Index Poster Date: 10 May 2021

Help With Your Taxes!

ACNS can assist our clients with their personal tax returns for 2021 (and before) if your tax situation is relatively simple. You must file a return to receive your GST/HST rebate and other tax credits. We'll file it electronically, which means you'll obtain your Notice of Assessment quickly.

You will need your last year's CRA Notice of Assessment, your income slips (T4, T5, T5A, etc.), receipts for medical or educational expenditures, RRSP contribution receipts, etc.

We encourage you to sign up with Canada Revenue Agency's My Account, which grants you access to your personal income tax information – which all agencies and government programmes require – and it will be right at your fingertips. You'll need copies of your tax returns from the last two years. We can help you register if you require it. Once set up, you simply log in with a username and password. For further information, go to <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/e-services/cra-login-services.html>.

This tax help service is provided by appointment-only. All COVID-19 restrictions will be in place and any and all necessary precautions taken. To book an appointment, contact Ned.



CATS is Back! (Again!)

While CATS appointments had been cancelled for the months of January and February, the service will be resuming in March.

We have remained in contact with our volunteer providers, who are continuing to offer osteopathy and massage therapy appointments. However, some of our volunteers will be returning in April – if you have an appointment scheduled in March, reach out to Dylan to confirm details.

We have been in talks with another volunteer and are excited to offer acupuncture appointments starting in March. We are continuing to seek other practitioners to further expand the number of appointments available, and will be providing updates as needed.

For more info about the program and/or to book an appointment, contact Dylan.

Client Phones

ACNS is aware that reaching staff and accessing services is hard without a phone. There is still a limited supply of prepaid cell phones available for our HIV+ clients who need a phone. If you already have a phone that ACNS has provided to you, additional minutes can also be made available for you. We have been successful in extending the funding for this program through several grants, so if you need minutes for your ACNS provided phone, get in touch ASAP. If you need a phone or minutes – or know of an ACNS client who does – please contact Dylan.

we have ...

Cell Phones & Minutes

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



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



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.



*In partnership with
the Community-Based Research Centre
and AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia...*
Sexual Health Nova Scotia presents:
YOU + U = U
YOU + UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE
*A research project aimed at improving healthcare
services involving HIV prevention and knowledge*

Looking for people 18+ Interested in discussing HIV prevention methods, barriers to healthcare and experience with PrEP.

We want input from rural and urban communities, and people of all ages, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations.

Honorarium included for your time

60-90 minute Focus Groups

email: youplus@shns.ca for more info

'Bid' Wraps Up ... For Good?

The much-delayed-by-COVID *BMO Bid for Life* event finally took place on Nov 19 under the new name *BMO Bid for Change!*

Despite all the delays and changes, it finally happened as an entirely virtual event.



While that was not our preferred arrangement, the tickets sales, online auctions and lower overhead (no hall rental or catering bill!) meant that, as a fundraiser, it was still a success. Of course, without our corporate sponsors sticking by us throughout all this upheaval we could not have done it at all. Huge thanks to our Title Sponsor BMO, Gold Sponsors Gilead Canada and ViiV Healthcare, and our Silver Sponsor Docaitta Design for the fabulous artwork!

However, going virtual came at the loss of the usual social and networking opportunity for ACNS to connect with our supporters, discuss our work, and emphasize why their support

HIV Cure #3

Momentous steps toward finding a cure for HIV were strengthened last year. In November, INSTI [reported](#) an Argentinian woman was able to eliminate HIV in her system without treatment. This was done through human trials using gene-editing technology known as CRISPR.

The patient's recovery is encouraging news for HIV-positive patients. Her story was chronicled in a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, and lends credence to the idea natural immunity to the virus can help form a cure.

The 30-year-old woman was diagnosed with HIV in 2013, but gave birth to an HIV-negative child in 2020. Researchers scanned one-billion of her cells and couldn't find any viable traces of the virus.

"I enjoy being healthy," said the patient, who preferred to remain anonymous. "I have a healthy family. I don't have to medicate, and I live as though nothing has happened. This already is a privilege."

She and another patient from San Francisco have been able to suppress virus replication to low levels without antiretrovirals, according to the NBC News [report](#).

While these cases are currently anomalies occurring in one per cent of infected patients, this work does give hope to others.

Researchers have managed to cure two people of HIV therapeutically through stem cell transplants, and scientists are also attempting to use gene therapy to find a cure. Though nothing is concrete, one thing remains certain for researchers.

"Now we have to figure out the mechanisms," Dr. Steven Deeks, a prominent HIV cure researcher at University of California, San Francisco, who was not involved with the study told NBC News. "How does this happen? And how can we recapitulate this therapeutically in everybody?"

makes a difference. It also lost most of the fun of gathering and socializing with colleagues and friends.

Postponing the March 2020 *BMO Bid for Life* was the first thing ACNS did in response to COVID. Initially, we simply postponed, and then it became clear we had to cancel. Then we had to re-imagine it as a online event for spring 2021 with the new name *BMO Bid the Blazes Home!* Then, just as we were about to announce that virtual event the COVID 3rd wave hit NS hard, and we postponed yet again.

Moving forward, we are retiring "Bid" – an event that had been around for several decades, but we're keeping the fall time slot for our new annual keystone fundraiser—*The Red Gala!* Work on that new project is already well under way and we're very excited! Watch for details later this year. Also... be sure to check out our big spring *MasQueerade* event just announced!



HIV is Different Now

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

Know Your Status!

Get Tested · Get Treated · End HIV

for more info:
www.tinyurl.com/HIVisDif

AIDS Coalition
of Nova Scotia

supported
by a grant from

ViiV
Healthcare

FREE HIV SelfTests Available

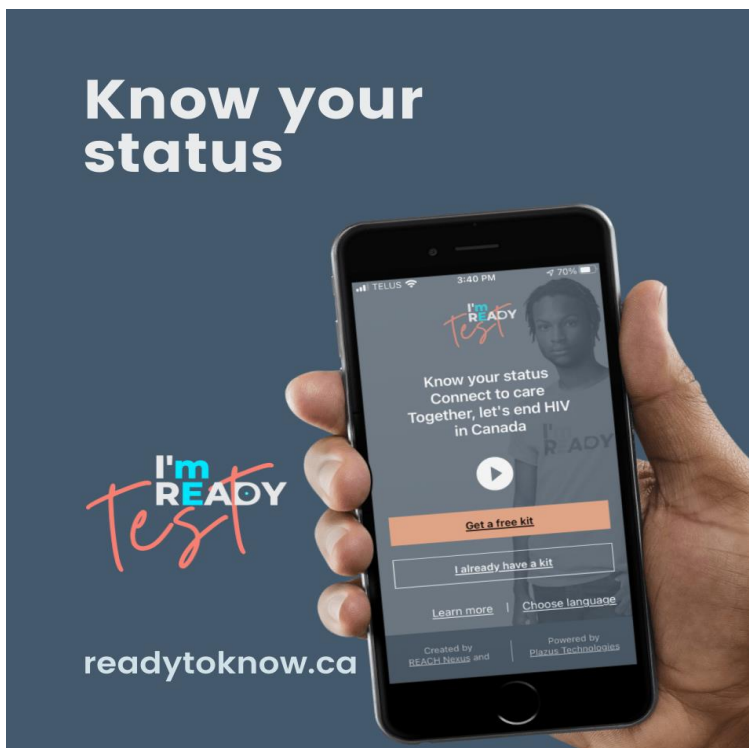
ACNS is a partner in the national *I'm Ready* HIV self-testing research program! Participants will receive an HIV self-testing kit – which is proven to be fast and highly effective – and have access to a telehealth-style peer navigation service to link them to more info about prevention and care.

To participate in the program, participants will need an iOS or Android smart phone to download the *I'm Ready* mobile app, which users can access anonymously. Through the app, participants will be asked to create a profile and answer a pre-test survey. Participants can choose to have up to three self-test kits delivered to their home or another address, or opt to pick up kits at any one of 75 pickup locations across the country – ACNS being one of these distribution partners.

Once a participant has their self-test kit, they will follow the steps in the app and use the test kit's instructions to take the self-test. After the test is completed, they will anonymously record their results in the app and receive access to more information about treating or preventing HIV.

At any time before, during or after the test, participants can also book a free, confidential appointment with a peer navigator through the *I'm Ready*, Talk secure telehealth service. The peer navigator will guide participants through the testing process and provide information and services for HIV care and prevention.

More information is available at <https://www.readytoknow.ca/>.



PrEP Scripts From Pharmacists?

A local research team has been funded to implement prescriptions for PrEP done at pharmacies.

Kyle Wilby, Associate Professor in Pharmacy at Dalhousie University will work with Dr. Tasha Ramsey, Assistant Professor in the College of Pharmacy and part of the Division of Infectious Diseases on the project. Shoppers Drug Mart will fund the project, which Wilby says will "give pharmacists the independence" to prescribe PrEP to patients.

Pharmacists "already prescribe for contraception, UTIs, and minor ailments. PrEP is preventative, and removing the barrier to access would be big," he said. PrEP can only currently be prescribed by a doctor in Nova Scotia, but fear of asking for the drug, stigma, and refusal of doctors to prescribe can all be hurdles. "The two major issues with PrEP are access and cost. We hope that if we remove the access barrier, we can then focus on funding for it," he said.

"Pharmacists have the authority to do lab requisitions, and through our partnerships and collaborations, a patient can come, be screened, and find out if they're eligible for PrEP from lab results. Then the pharmacist would reevaluate after a month and it would go from there."

For Ramsey, the collaborative approach also allows patients access to services they require for better sexual health in general. "Pharmacists could prescribe, but they're also just part of a bigger team and service offerings as well," she said. "There's a collaborative practice agreement in place that could be so helpful. Say an STI is found during testing for PrEP, we can ensure there is access to be treated in an efficient manner."

For Wilby, being new to Nova Scotia and a PrEP user, he was surprised by the lack of access and lack of general knowledge about it by physicians. "There isn't a large willingness to provide prescriptions for it. Patients get referred to the Halifax Sexual Health Centre, which is overloaded. The option to go right into your pharmacy and receive care is needed," he said.

Ramsey says the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the area in early 2020 just made it clearer there need to be changes to how STI testing and sexual health work is done in the province. "It amplified the need for more options. The QEII used to have appointment-based STI testing, and you could wait in the hall to see someone. It was a good drop-in model," she said. "But with that all changes, a lack of primary care providers and especially issues in rural areas, more support is needed."

The initiative will see help go all over Nova Scotia, and the pre-phase has begun. "We are consulting larger stakeholders and community groups. This should see its first patient in the summer.... It's all dependent on approvals going smoothly, but we hope to follow patients for six months," he said.

"This is a collaborative project with the community and health professionals to remove the accessibility barrier. If that works, maybe our data can drive conversations on funding for PrEP forward too."

Massage Clinic

The Invisible Illness Clinic (formerly the Carnation Massage Clinic) at the Canadian College of Massage and Hydrotherapy continues to offer massage therapy services for people living with chronic conditions, including HIV. CCMH students are introduced to many health conditions, including those that are less visible to many of us. These 'invisible illnesses' can benefit greatly from the physiological and psychological effects of therapeutic touch.



Call 902.832.3268 or email cliniccoordinator@collegeofmassage.com to book an appointment. Appointments are \$20. The College is located in Suite 180, 6960 Mumford Road, Halifax.

Heating Assistance Rebate

The Heating Assistance Rebate Program helps low-income Nova Scotians with the cost of home heating. Your rebate is based on your 2020 net income, as reported to Canada Revenue Agency.

To qualify for the rebate, you need to pay for your own home (residential) heat and meet 1 of the following criteria:

- have a net income of \$29,000 or less and live alone with no kids or dependents;
- have a combined net income of \$44,000 or less and live with kids, dependents or other adults;
- receive Income Assistance from the Department of Community Services; or
- receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) or the Allowance from Service Canada.

Contact the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services to find out if you qualify. You can apply until 31 March 2022. For more info, call 902-424-5200 or 1-800-670-4357.

<https://beta.novascotia.ca/apply-heating-assistance-rebate-heating-assistance-rebate-program>

What's Going On?

March

- Thu Mar 16, all of Nova Scotia
Draw for Woody's "Pot O' Gold" Online 50/50
See ad (p1) for details or contact **Jordan**
- Tue Mar 31, all of Nova Scotia
Home Heating Assistance Rebate Deadline
See above article or contact **Dylan**

April

- Fri Apr 15 (Good Friday) - **ACNS CLOSED**
- Mon Apr 18 (Easter Monday) - **ACNS CLOSED**
- Tue Apr 26, all of Nova Scotia
Deadline for Interest in ACNS Board
See **page 3** for details or contact **Chris**

May

- Thu Jun 15, all of Nova Scotia
Draw for Woody's Online 50/50
- Mon May 23 (Victoria Day) - **ACNS CLOSED**
- Date TBA, Halifax
MasQueerade - A Coming Out Costume Ball
See **page 1** for details (and **ad page 2**) or contact **Jordan**

June

- Thu Jun 23, 6 pm
ACNS Annual General Meeting

Want to Contribute

We would love to hear from you! If you know of events coming up, or have any info you would like to share, contact Chris.

Our Funders

Funding Partners

- Public Health Agency of Canada
- NS Department of Health & Wellness
- NS Department of Advanced Education and Labour
- Gov. of Canada (Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy Fund)
- ViiV Healthcare Canada (Positive Action Grant)
- The J&W Murphy Foundation
- Nova Scotia General Employee's Union (NSGEU)
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Main Corporate & Business Supporters

- Admiral Insurance
- BMO Financial Group
- ViiV Healthcare Canada
- Gilead Sciences Canada, Inc.
- Westjet - Docaitta Design - RBC
- MAC Cosmetics / MAC AIDS Fund - The Atlantica Halifax

Staff Directory

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