



+ POSITIVE DISPATCH

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Woody's Fab 50/50

Announcing Woody's Fab 50/50 Fundraiser! In a draw to take place live on Facebook on Dec. 18th, one lucky winner will win

half of Woody's Holiday Jackpot! Invite your friends to buy tickets as well! The more tickets sold - the BIGGER the prize to be won!



Ticket

prices are 1 for \$10, 3 for \$20, 10 for \$50, and 25 for \$100. Visit <https://rafflebox.ca/raffle/acns> to buy your tickets before midnight on Dec. 17th! Also, follow the ACNS Facebook page for updates – and to see what Woody's been up to (he posts about every other day!).

Holiday Hours and Assistance

ACNS will close for the holidays at 4 pm on Wednesday, Dec 23rd and we will re-open on Monday Jan 4th at 10 am. Should you require assistance during this period, contact 211 for information about government and local community programs and services; HealthLink at 811 to speak with a nurse about non-emergency health information or referrals to other services; Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team at 1-888-429-8167 for mental health crisis support; Mobile Outreach Street Health at 902-429-5290 for on-site healthcare services (in Halifax only). For a medical emergency, go to your nearest hospital.

Prepaid Client Phones

ACNS is aware that reaching staff and accessing services— especially during COVID restrictions— is hard without a phone.

We have a limited supply of prepaid cell phones for our HIV+ clients who need one. We also have additional prepaid minutes for clients who have an ACNS-provided cell.

If you are, or know of, an ACNS client who needs a phone, please contact Dylan at 902-403-7841 (phone/text), at 902-425-4882 (ext 225), or at pc@acns.ns.ca to let him know how / when / where to get a phone to you.


Funding for the ACNS Client Phones program has been provided by: 1) the Gov. of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund and the Community Foundation of Nova Scotia; 2) 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 3) by a Positive Action community grant from ViiV Healthcare.


we have ...

Cell Phones

ACNS has a limited supply of prepaid cell phones for our HIV+ clients who do not have one



If you are, or know of, an ACNS client who needs a phone contact **Dylan @ ext 225**



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.



Virtual World AIDS Day Vigil*

World AIDS Day was on December 1st. ACNS's 2020 World AIDS Day Vigil was initially conceived as a hybrid live + virtual event. Unfortunately, an increase in COVID-19 cases in HRM led to ACNS staff deciding to cancel the in-person event; new government restrictions followed shortly thereafter.

ACNS held the virtual Vigil on Zoom. The occasion included pre-recorded performances by the Women Next Door, the Halifax Gay Men's Chorus, and Ross Stewart-Rankin. Our guest speaker was the former Executive Director of Direction 180, Cindy MacIsaac. During a screen-shared candle-lit ceremony, the names of those who have died while living with HIV/AIDS were read aloud.

Approximately 35 people attended the 2020 Vigil from across Nova Scotia.

**Supported by a Positive Action grant from ViiV Healthcare.*



Vigil Candle, Memorial Wall and Memorial Book

AAW Challenge to NS

On the occasion of the 2020 AIDS Awareness Week and National HIV Testing Week (which had been postponed from June) ACNS made a public call on the Province about testing, prevention and treatment. Here is a summary of the ACNS press release.

ACNS calls on the Province of Nova Scotia to:

- to make the new HIV Self Test available free-of-charge to at-risk populations in Nova Scotia;
- to expand HIV testing options in Nova Scotia to include rapid Point of Care Testing (POCT); and
- to provide universal coverage for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for at-risk populations.

Rapid Testing for HIV

Rapid Point of Care Testing has been approved in Canada for fifteen years. However this faster, easier and much-preferred testing option, which is standard in many jurisdictions, is still unavailable in NS. Rapid POCT requires only one appointment to both take the sample and get results back in minutes.

Self-Test for HIV

In November Health Canada approved the *INSTI® HIV Self Test*. ACNS's position is that those communities who are most at risk for HIV infection are also populations who are mostly likely to be economically disadvantaged. Making the self-test available for free would eliminate a barrier to those who would most benefit from having access to it.

Testing (and treatment) as HIV Prevention

Research tells us that most new HIV infections are the result of contact with someone who has not yet been diagnosed with HIV. Until the person with HIV is put on Anti-Retroviral Treatment, that person remains highly infectious. With early diagnosis through accessible testing and access to treatment, the vast majority of people living with HIV will have a typical life-expectancy.

ACNS wants to get individuals with HIV on the care continuum sooner rather than later, both for their own long-term health and to prevent future infections. If someone with HIV is on effective treatment and maintains a very low or undetectable viral load, that person is 100% unable to be the source of infection to others via sexual contact.

A Pill for HIV Prevention

The science behind oral Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV is also clear. Taken daily, PrEP is up to 98% effective in the prevention of sexual transmission of HIV. Jurisdictions where PrEP has been made easily accessible to high risk populations have seen dramatic drops in HIV infection rates: by as much as 40% in a single year. ACNS is pleased that PrEP made it onto the NS formulary two years ago. However, we now need to see it made available to those who would most benefit from it, and the existing NS Pharmacare coverage is not doing that.

Support Programs* Update

After the summer COVID lockdown, ACNS began the process of re-evaluating our support programs in order to determine which ones could resume, albeit with some changes in protocol, and which ones would need to be postponed.

One-on-One Support and the Making Ends Meet program have resumed - client appointments are available Monday through Thursday between 12noon and 4pm, and staff are continuing to offer support via phone, text or email.

The Complimentary and Alternative Therapy Program (CATS) currently offers osteopathy – however, the service will not be available as often as it was prior to COVID. We hope to have more CATS services available early in the new year.

Unfortunately, some programming remains postponed until

further notice, such as the Poz Men's Group. Staff will continue to reassess regularly and will provide updates as to

when meetings will resume.

For a more detailed look at the changes in protocols and procedures, please consult the ACNS home page or talk with staff. To book a support visit or a CATS appointment, please contact Dylan (see staff contact details on page 6). Most of our

**Supported by a Positive Action grant from ViiV Healthcare.*



HIV Self-Test Approved!

In November, Health Canada approved a one-minute HIV Self-Test. The INSTI® HIV Self Test can be bought online (\$34.95 + shipping) and may be in pharmacies soon.

The test uses the same rapid technology that Health Canada approved 15 years ago, and commonly known as Point of Care Testing (POCT) or just the 'rapid test' as it requires only one appointment to both take the sample and get results back in a minute! The original POCT test still required seeing a health-care provider to administer the test. Now you can do it for yourself.

Canada follows dozens of other countries in greenlighting the self-test, which has been endorsed by the World Health Organization as a tool to reduce the number of people with undiagnosed HIV. The Health Canada Approval came after a field study at three sites across Canada which proved that individuals without medical training could perform the 1-minute self-test and interpret their results accurately.

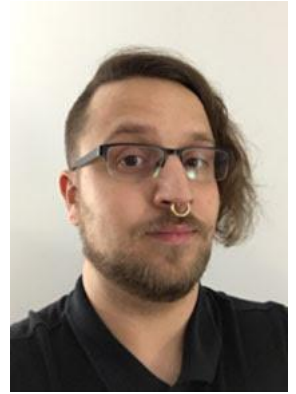
The test is currently available for pre-order from <https://shop.insti.com/insti-hiv-self-test>. More information is available at <https://www.insti.com/self-test-canada/>.



The Insti HIV Self Test Showing a negative result

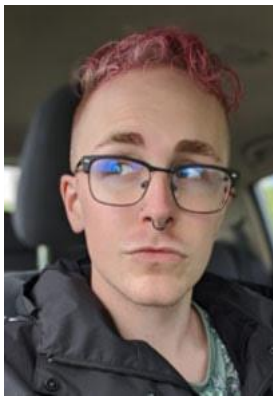
Welcome Dylan and Mitch!

Dylan Samson (He/Him) is the new *Support & Programs Coordinator* at the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia. He is a graduate of Dalhousie University's School of Social Work, and is in the process of working through his social work candidacy with the NSCSW. He also has a double-major in Psychology and French. In addition to his work experience with community services and group homes, he has experience volunteering with a variety of queer organizations and events. He is a self-professed "Massive Nerd" and his hobbies include listening to podcasts, running, photography, and water polo.



Dylan Samson

Mitch Hill (They/Them) is the new *Health & Wellness Educator* at the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia.



Mitch Hill

They are fulfilling their role virtually from Cape Breton and they have worked for many 2SLGBTQ+ organizations over the years, mostly in education, programming, or outreach with Youth under 25. Mitch is also currently a Community Educator with The Youth Project. They have also sat on the boards of local pride groups, and a few non-profits. They enjoy volunteering their time to other grassroots organizing for other causes, and getting involved in political efforts. They have a Bachelor of

Business Administration (Conc. HR) from Cape Breton University. In their spare time you'll likely find them gaming, binge watching YouTube videos, or still out their playing Pokemon GO. Mitch is a Slytherin, their favorite colors are millennial pink and dark green, and is enthusiastic about getting tattoos.

Rowan MacArthur (He/Him) our CO-OP student from last winter, returned this fall for a 15 week placement as a student intern in Fund Development. He's since been busy with researching and planning how to convert our fundraising efforts into virtual formats that will align with the current climate regarding COVID-19. This has involved sourcing realistic virtual event hosting platforms, compiling their information and making recommendations for next spring's show and auction (details to come!), but also to assess some virtual fundraising that ACNS can start now! The first concrete project to come out of this process is a virtual 50/50 fundraiser (see ad and article on page 1 for details), and watch for exciting news about next spring's Bid for Life in 2021.



Rowan MacArthur

COVID and HIV

The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and the “second wave” is currently underway in Nova Scotia with an increase in cases and some community spread. The virus can affect people differently - most individuals are infectious for several days before they develop symptoms.

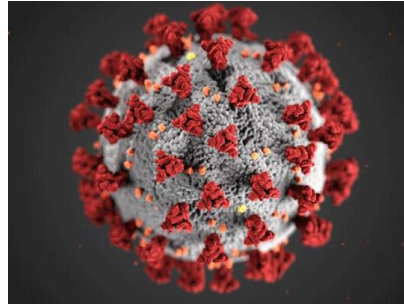
Some people who get COVID-19 never develop symptoms, but they can still transmit the virus to others. Most people will experience mild to moderate illness and will recover on their own. However, about 20% of people diagnosed with COVID-19 will go on to develop severe illness. Some of may require hospitalization or intensive care. A small number may die from COVID-19 infection.

For people living with HIV, there are three main risk factors that can increase the risk of serious illness from COVID-19: a weakened immune system, underlying health conditions, and older age. A person with HIV who is on HIV treatment with an undetectable viral load and a strong immune system (CD4 count

above 200) is not expected to be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. However, a person who is not on HIV treatment and/or has a low CD4 count may be at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

It is important for people living with HIV to stay engaged in healthcare to remain healthy and minimize their risk of serious illness from COVID-19. Because of measures and restrictions put in place during the pandemic, there may be some changes to your HIV care and to the way your medications are dispensed. Despite these changes, it is very important to stay engaged in HIV care. Discuss your options with your healthcare provider and your pharmacist.

For more info, contact your healthcare providers or go to <https://www.catie.ca/en/hiv-and-covid-19>.



Committees & Working Groups

ACNS staff have been taking part in several committees and working groups recently. Some of these include the National HIV Awareness & Testing Week in NS planning committee, a National HIV Stigma Index Research planning committee, a working group for the NS Coalition for Election Survey on 2SLGBTQ+ Issues, and the NS Primary Health Care Referral Network for Sexual Health Care working group. Several staff members are also members of the Halifax Queer Health Programmers group. ACNS looks forward to providing you information about the results of these meetings as things move forward.

CTAC \$ and Computers

We reported back in our Spring issue about the impending closure of the Canadian Treatment Action Council (CTAC). In wrapping up that organization their Board of Directors determined that any remaining moneys after all bills were paid would be distributed to organizations who worked with HIV+ clients. They chose five organizations from across the country (their board structure was based on five regions nationally), and for Atlantic Canada they chose ACNS as their recipient.

For some time now ACNS has been looking for a funding source to replace our aging office computers—which still work but have slowed down considerably in the past 18 months or so, and were no longer supporting updates to crucial office software that we use.

Despite how computer-dependent all grant applications and grant reporting are, practically no granting agency wants to pay for computers! The money from CTAC has now allowed ACNS to purchase replacement computers for staff. We're recycling the older computers to the work stations set up for volunteer and client use.

ACNS would like to thank the Board of Directors of CTAC for their generosity in supporting our work.

Street Smarts & Trauma Training*

In the new year, ACNS is re-launching two programs — both in virtual formats — building on the recent success of having adapted Totally OUTright to a virtual-only offering.

In partnership with PEI's PEERS Alliance, ACNS will be offering a five-week blended learning training program on *Trauma-Informed Care* for service providers, which will consist of four weekly webinars and a final group discussion and Q&A during the final week. This virtual program will be offered

across Nova Scotia. For more info or to register contact Dylan.

ACNS will also be re-offering our *Street Smarts* harm reduction program targeting young people who use substances to increase their knowledge and reduce harmful behaviours. This program will address ways to be safer when using substances and how to have safer sex to prevent STBBI transmission. This program will be also be offered virtually and will be available in the Halifax Regional Municipality, Truro and northern Nova Scotia, and in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. For more info or to register contact Dylan for Halifax and Truro, and Mitch for the Sydney offering.

**Both these programs are funded by a PHAC CAF grant.*

**Street
Smarts**

Home Heating Assistance Rebate

The Heating Assistance Rebate Program helps Nova Scotians with the cost of home heating. Rebates range from \$100 to \$200. Your rebate amount is based on your 2019 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
- receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) or the Allowance from Service Canada



If your personal or financial situation has changed since last year, you still may qualify. Contact the Dept. of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services to find out if you qualify.

You can apply until 31 March 2021. For more info, call 902-424-5200 or 1-800-670-4357 or see

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

Hfx STI Clinic Updates

The STI Clinic at the VG hospital is once again serving clients. Because of the need for physical distancing to prevent COVID 19 spread, they now require that clients make an appointment to be seen. The clinic is open on Mondays and Thursdays, except holidays. The clinic is located on the 5th floor of the Dickson Building - 5820 University Avenue Halifax.

Call 902-473-2272 between 1 and 3 p.m. on Monday and Thursday book same-day appointments. Appointments run from 5 to 8 p.m.

Expanded Online Outreach

One of the ways that ACNS is committed to accessible health outreach is through various web-based and app-based dating & hookup platforms. ACNS makes itself available to answer sexual health, PrEP, HIV, 2SLGBTQ+ related questions, or connect folks to services on platforms such as Squirt, Plenty of Fish, Manhunt, and Grindr. This is fully confidential and serves to put needed info into the reach of community members.



Thanks to newer app-based services, the ACNS Grindr profile will now be showing up in communities across the province! The profile will drop-in to different communities each day, so if you see ACNS on Grindr, remember to click "Favorite", so that you can always reach out. If you would like to learn more contact Mitch.

I Can Give U ...

Randy Davis is the creator of the *I Can Give U* an anti-stigma, pro-U=U (undetectable = untransmittable) campaign currently exploding on social media. "The first image was of myself..." says Davis. "everyone started asking, 'Where can I get that frame?'" People started sending Davis a photo and three words starting with H, I, and V.

ACNS's ED Chris Aucoin was one of those who volunteered to be in the now international campaign. The campaign has been featured in articles in The Body.com and Poz.com. To participate submit a photo and words about "what you CAN give" starting with H, I, and V. Send by email to randyjohndavis@gmail.com.



Assistance With Filing Taxes

Do you need assistance with filing your taxes? If your tax situation is fairly simple, we can help! We can help you to file your income taxes so that you can get your HST and other tax credits. We can file as many years as you need to file. We will file the electronically meaning a quick turn-around in getting your Notice of Assessments.

We will be able to start filing your taxes for the 2020 year beginning March 15th, 2021. You will need your Notice of Assessment from the last year you filed, income slips, receipts if you are claiming medical or educational expenses, receipts for RRSP contributions and any other forms required to file your income taxes.

We will also help you to create My Account with Canada Revenue Agency. This will give you access to your personal income tax information – all of which agencies and

government programs require from you – and simply at the tips of your fingers. No more calls and being put on hold for 30-plus minutes only to then have to "provide the amount from Line 150 on your 20[XX] income tax return" - you just login in with a username and password.



You must be present to answer questions that arise during the preparation process and to authorize filing your tax return. The process takes approximately 30-60 minutes, depending on your tax situation. This service is provided by appointment-only. All COVID-19 restrictions will be in place and any and all necessary precautions will be taken. To book an appointment, contact Ned.

The provincial government announced in November that it is taking steps to protect renters in Nova Scotia from excessive rent increases and 'renovictions' while it works on longer term solutions.

Immediate protections were ordered under the Emergency Management Act - rents will not be permitted to increase by more than 2% per year and landlords will not be able to get an eviction order for renovations. These protections for renters will be in place until Feb. 1, 2022, or until the state of emergency is lifted, whichever is sooner. The rental increase protections are also retroactive to Sept. 1, 2020.

The province also announced that it is creating the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission. It will work with experts in the public, private, non-profit and academic sectors to make recommendations about affordable housing.

If you have any questions about how this might affect you, reach out to Dylan. He will help you figure out how this applies to you and who you will need to contact.

2QTHINKS, an initiative of CBRC, will be a monthly professional development and networking group for those working in 2SLGBTQIA+ health throughout Atlantic Canada. This group is designed for people who work or volunteer in developing and delivering health programming and health services to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community members in Atlantic Canada. This can



include those who work in health care delivery, local non-profit organizations that do education and outreach, and community leaders at the community, municipal, provincial and federal levels.

If you are interested in joining 2QTHINKS, please register at <https://forms.gle/LkDDjUktRZYDpTAV9>. For more info contact Kirk at kirk.furlotte@cbrc.net.

What's Going On?

November

- Nov 22-27
AIDS Awareness Week / National HIV Testing Week

December

- Thu Dec 1
ACNS World AIDS Day Vigil
See article **page 2**
- Dec 1-5,
Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week 2019
<https://caan.ca/en/programs-projects/aboriginal-aids-awareness-week>
- Thu Dec 24 – Fri Jan 1 inclusive
ACNS Offices - CLOSED FOR HOLIDAYS
We re-open Mon Jan 4. See write up **page 1** for details

January

- All Month
Recruitment for Street Smarts virtual program
Recruitment for Trauma-Informed Care virtual program
See **page 4** for more info or contact **Dylan**

February

- Mon Feb 15 (Heritage Day) - **ACNS CLOSED**

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)
- Gov. of Canada (Emergency Community Support Fund)
- The J&W Murphy Foundation
- Nova Scotia General Employee's Union (NSGEU)
- United Way (Atlantic Compassion Fund)
- The Halifax, Dartmouth, and Chebucto West Community Health Boards (NS Health Authority)
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Main Corporate & Business Supporters

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

Staff Directory

AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

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