

**AIDS**  
**COALITION**  
of Nova Scotia



ANNUAL REPORT  
2012-2013

**SUPPORT**  
**EDUCATION**  
**EMPOWERMENT**

## Message from the Board Chair, Al McNutt

This term of 2012-13 has been one of excitement, energy, growth and change. I first want to express my appreciation to my fellow board members and the staff at the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) for their support and encouragement. It takes team-work within an organization to provide high quality programs and services and the team at ACNS is one of phenomenal skill and passion.

The Greater More Meaningful Involvement of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA) continues to be a core value of the organization and encourages PHA engagement at all levels. The organization strives to ensure that the Board composition is representative of persons living with HIV as well as other priority groups that we work with. ACNS participated in a research project “Promising Practices” to address PHA engagement and possible barriers as I was a member of the planning team. This project was lead by Thomson Rivers University, Dalhousie and University of New Brunswick as part of gaining new information on how to create better engagement.

The past year has been one of hard work and perseverance for both the members of the Board and the Staff team in achieving our goals. I would like to express a very special thank you to all staff for their continued dedication and commitment. I would also like to share that Maria MacIntosh, our Executive Director, continues to show tremendous skill and leadership in NS and the Atlantic, a very special thank you to Maria for an outstanding performance.

The organization continues to offer skills development sessions to the Board in relation to legal responsibilities, insurance as well as voting and the meaning of consensus. The committees within the structure of the Board of ACNS that met over the past year is the Executive, Finance, Strategic Planning & Policy Committee and the Membership and Board Development Committee. These committees continue to work diligently on the review of policies and practices of the organization while supporting the development of structures to ensure the leadership of the society.

ACNS continues to utilize board recruitment activities as a means of engaging new individuals with the necessary skills with the organization in moving us forward and to meet the changing needs of the non-profit world and our membership. ACNS is very fortunate to have both board and staff members that represent a wide diversity of skills and capacities that the organization draws on to be successful.

I would also like to highlight the fact that we are saying ‘good bye’ to Michael Sangster who has been a board member of this organization since back before 2002, past chairperson, recipient of our Annual Leadership Award and has given a great deal of his time and commitment to this organization, thank you for your years of service and we wish you well in your future endeavours.

I would like my final words to be of thanks to the board members for giving their time, expertise and in many cases other resources to ACNS and I look forward to working with you.

## Who We Are

### Staff Team

Chris Aucoin, Gay Men’s Health Coordinator  
Michelle Evans, Program Coordinator  
Maria Mac Intosh, Executive Director  
Ned MacInnis, Program Support  
Laura Toole, Support Services Coordinator  
Kenda Riles, Fund Development Coordinator

### Board of Directors

Al McNutt, Chairperson  
Russell Westhaver, Treasurer  
Ed Savage, Secretary  
Scott Estabrooks  
Margaret Lapointe  
Rene Corbett  
Kyle Warkentin  
Amanda Wright  
Deanna Sharpe  
Suzanne Kennedy

## Thank You

There are two ways of spreading light - to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.

~ Edith Wharton, Vesalius in [Zante](#)



Our volunteers are the mirrors reflecting the light of our work,. They are the backbone of our work and our success...thank you!!

We would also like to thank all individual, business and corporate donors. We could not do what we do without you.

## Board Committee Reports

### **Finance: Chairperson, Russell Westhaver**

Over the past year, the Finance Committee tackled two major challenges. The first involved bringing the salaries of staff at ACNS in line with regional and national averages as a first step forward. ACNS is committed to ensuring that our clients and members receive the best possible information, programming, support and care--and one means to this end is to ensure that the salaries we are able to offer our great staff team are competitive and that we offer other options for compensation. Working in close consultation with the Executive Director, we were able to bring increase salaries without impacting the programming or the level of service our clients and members have come to expect. We see this as a win-win situation, where clients and members will continue to receive the support they need while at the same time ensuring that we retain one of the organizations most important resources: it's committed and well-trained staff.

Our second task involved modifying board level financial reporting to ensure that the organization's financial activity remains transparent for board members, staff, clients, and our wider membership. The Finance Committee wishes to extend its thanks to the staff--and in particular the Executive Director--for their support and guidance in helping us sort through these issues. We look forward to working closely with staff in the future as we continue to ensure the long term viability of the organization.

### **Strategic Planning & Policy Committee: Chairperson: Ed Savage, Chairperson**

The 'Strategic Planning & Policy Committee' formally known as the Policy & Personnel Committee began this year by reaching out to our membership to hold a Special General Meeting on May 11th, 2012 to make numerous amendments to our longstanding By-Laws. The committee embarked on this endeavor to revise by-laws that were no longer useful, to better reflect the values of the society and in an effort to make our organizational plans more clear to our membership. All of the amendments requested were approved by membership; the papers have been filed with the Joint Stocks Company and thus are now in place. This was a significant piece of work and special thanks go out to the board and all of the members who participated in the meeting.

The remainder of our work this past year involved striking up the new committee with a new Terms of Reference that focuses on the higher level goals of the society and the need for policy development across various areas of ACNS' work. We have also been successful in gaining support from Pam Flight, a long time ACNS volunteer with policy development expertise, to assist us in moving some of our organizational policy forward this year and we look forward to working with her next year.

## Message from the Executive Director, Maria Mac Intosh

After ten years at ACNS, I wanted to start by sharing my overall reflections. We are strong, daring, committed, passionate and most of all, we are resilient. Despite the many challenges we have faced, we continue to work hard together effectively and to make a difference while standing behind what matters most.

Over the past year we worked with individuals, groups and partner organizations to accomplish shared goals including providing support services to those living with HIV/AIDS, delivering population specific prevention programs, awareness campaigns, fund development events and building capacity in other groups and communities to respond to HIV. The challenges and successes we realize are not solely based on the numbers we count; they are a reflection of our value and commitment to working collaboratively.

Our main program is the Nova Scotia HIV/AIDS Knowledge Exchange & Health Promotion Forum (Forum), formally known as the Ceilidh, which offers those working in the field and PHAs an opportunity for three days of sharing, networking and skills building. The event evaluations showed that the forum was a success in providing opportunities for learning, skills building and networking. We were also able to secure a partnership with CATIE to align last years' Forum with their regional skills building opportunity that allowed representatives from across the Atlantic to attend.

We held AIDS Awareness Week events and participated in panels on Criminalization along with hosting our Annual AIDS Vigil Ceremony on December 1<sup>st</sup> to remember and celebrate those we have lost. We entered into a partnership with the Canadian Public Health Association to host the Halifax site National HIV-STBBI consultations with the Nova Scotia Advisory Commission on AIDS. It allowed us the opportunity to work with priority populations and those working in the field across many sectors to discuss concepts of an integrated HIV-STBBI framework. We also received additional funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada this year to work with partners across Nova Scotia to revise an existing prevention poster campaign from ACCHO in Ontario that highlights the need to talk more openly about HIV within the African, Black and Caribbean Communities .

We increased our fund development activities over the last year to offset the challenge we faced not reaching our fundraising goals. We introduced 'HairCARES', an event where we were worked with local hair salons to raise funds. We launched another new event entitled 'Queen for a Night' which is scheduled to take place early next year. Along with our new initiatives, we continued to hold our traditional events: the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life, the Amazing Challenge for AIDS, the Tour Tech East Party Post XMAS Party and the BMO Financial Group Bid for Life Dinner & Auction. The Board, Staff and Volunteers of ACNS have demonstrated their ongoing dedication to raise the funds needed to support our programs and services.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all of our volunteers on behalf of the board and staff as well to our many partners participate on our planning committees and offer their expertise. We would not be able operate without all of you. Thank you for your time and support of our work.

I thank the staff team for their enthusiasm, perseverance and ongoing commitment. Our success is a result of the high level of skill and meaningful consideration the staff team. I also thank Al McNutt - our Chairperson - and the entire board team who have provided me with ongoing support over the past year.

# Programming Highlights

## Support Services

Early in 2013 we developed and distributed a 'Support Services Questionnaire' for those accessing our programs and services to tell us about how we are doing and what other areas of programming we need to be thinking more about. We asked questions about our Health Fund program, supportive counselling options, health promotion programs, referrals and the types of resources we make available while delivering services. We received a record number of surveys back and we are presently compiling the data and plan to share what we learned with you in our next Positive Dispatch newsletter.

On March 9, 2012 ACNS partnered with the Dalhousie University in the area of Health and Human Performance, NS College of Art & Design and the Nova Scotia Commission on AIDS to celebrate International Women's Day. This event explored the impact of criminalization of non-disclosure of HIV on women through a viewing of the film 'Positive Women: Exposing Injustice' followed by a community discussion event. ACNS reached out to connect women living with HIV with a local artist named Miro Davis to jointly create an art piece that was representative of their journey-- their stories about diagnosis, despair, strength and hope were shared. Miro created a moving art piece entitled 'Ravaged Resilience' which captures the powerful emotions associated with the journey for the women.

'Ravaged Resilience': the leaves represent life before diagnosis. The ravens highlight the pain of diagnosis and all the changes that are associated. The pain and fear of disclosure, rejection, stigmatization and discrimination are constantly plucking away at the already dying tree. Through personal strength and the HIV/AIDS community taking women under their wing; something wonderful began to happen. A nest was built providing hope for the future. The tree began to grow again and the garden began sprouting. This represents a rebirth in the journey, enabling a breaking away of the shell that society casts for HIV positive women. It was agreed by the women and the artist that the piece would be displayed indefinitely at the ACNS office.

## Gay Men's Health Project

Gay Men & Their Bodies: We are taking on a new direction to deliver a unique and innovative program that has already been administered in twelve cities across London and Wales with great success. We call it 'Ass Class' which focuses on teaching gay men about their physiology and the biology of transmission in a fun, sex positive manner that will facilitate increased understanding of HIV risk and that of other blood borne and sexually transmitted infections and we plan to share this program with other organizations working with gay men. Key informants for ACNS in the revision of this program will involve prideHealth, Halifax Sexual Health Centre, LGBT Youth Project and the NS Rainbow Action Project.

'We Recommend' is this year's Pride Week Gay Men's Health Campaign wasn't planned to have (public) deliverables until Summer 2013, however for Halifax Pride 2012 (July) we decided to launch a smaller / advance piece along the same overall core theme of encouraging MSM to get tested for HIV and other STIs. Look for our revised and much larger campaign in July of 2013.

HIV & Stigma Panel: For AIDS Awareness Week (Nov. 2012) the Gay Men's Health Project organized a panel discussion along with partner's prideHealth and the NS Rainbow Action Project. The topic: "(is) HIV STIGMA (fuelling new HIV infections amongst) & GAY/BI MEN (?)" Then panellist initiated a great discussion around the complexities of doing prevention work with gay/bi men and how stigmatization remains a prevalent theme and barrier to our work.

## Positive Living Program

ACNS is excited to be working on a new program for PHAs that will seek to address four key areas that have been identified: (1) living longer; (2) the who, what, where and when of the health system; (3) exploring opportunities for building coping skills in the face of new challenges and, (4) looking at what the broader community has to offer. We have held initial meetings with PHAs for input in the design of the program as well as, identified PHAs who will continue to be involved in guiding the program on the program planning committee. We are excited to reach out to various community partners to make this program a success in HRM and the Truro area.

## HIV & Women

This past year, ACNS had the opportunity to participate in the planning and delivery of a community panel on HIV Criminalization for Non-Disclosure: Implications for Women on November 30th, in partnership with the Health Promotion Division of the School of Health and Human Performance, the Nova Scotia Advisory Commission on AIDS, and the Health Law Institute.

On November 22nd, ACNS held our first Women's Movie Night, where we screened the powerful film 'Positive Women: Exposing Injustice' a film developed by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network.

In the last year, our Women's HIV Prevention Workshop was delivered in Middleton and presented in Halifax later on in the year as well as presenting at the NS Sexual Health Associations Conference. The workshops were well attended by those working with women at risk across NS and it focuses on the need to develop skills, share resources around HIV with respect to women and the need for us to adopt 'meet people where they are at' practices when talking about sexual health options while recognizing the determinants of health and the role they play in the lives of women.