



AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia 20 YEARS

ANNUAL REPORT

2014-2015

Report from the Chair

This term of 2014-15 has been once again an exciting year for the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS). I first want to express my appreciation to my fellow board members and the staff at the ACNS for their support and encouragement. The entire team at ACNS is one of strength and dedication. This is also a time to applaud the success of ACNS in celebrating a 20 year milestone.

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 of the society.

The organization continues to offer skills development sessions to the Board in relation to legal responsibilities, fiduciary responsibilities and insurance concerns. The committees within the structure of the Board of ACNS are Executive, Strategic Planning & Policy and Board Development & Membership. These committees have worked diligently in the areas of board recruitment, name change development, expansion of mandate for ACNS and organizational policies over the past year.

This past year has been one of significant change, with the discontinuation of the Health Fund, but I assure members that the organization will continue to serve those most vulnerable in the best way possible.

There have been other challenges with the changing landscape ahead of us, with significant changes coming down from the Public Health Agency of Canada in reference to how the work gets accomplished and how organizations will work together. This has been a time for change and with change comes the opportunity to redefine what the organization does and what a broader mandate will look like. As the organization celebrates twenty years, it is the hope of the Board and Staff that you will join us in moving the organization forward in these times of change.



Our Board

Chairperson	Al McNutt
Vice Chairperson; Chairperson of the Strategic Planning & Policy Committee	Suzanne Kennedy
Treasurer	Augie Westhaver
Executive Member-at-Large	Dave St. Laurent
Board Member; Chairperson of the Board Development & Membership Committee	Eric Ross
Board Member	Megan Longley
Board Member	Margaret Lapointe
Board Member	Kristen O'Keefe

Our Staff

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



trans, queer and two-spirit men from across Nova Scotia who are interested in being informed, peer community leaders. Totally Outright is a four day leadership / life-skills training program developed on the notion that providing training to youth peer leaders on up-to-date safer sex and harm reduction practices, LGBTQ community history, advocacy, community development, relationship skills and various other areas will have ripple effects (re health and overall wellbeing) on their friends, partners, peers and communities. These "young leaders" will participate in interactive, thought provoking presentations from local community leaders and experts in GBT2S men's health early next year. The ultimate goal is to create better informed and healthier community members (especially re mental health and sexual health) - building on existing strengths and resiliencies.

Support Services Program Highlights

- Poz Guyz group met monthly over the past year
- Provided more than 130 referrals to programs and health services for people living with HIV (PHA)
- Provided more than 750 one on one support sessions either in-person or over the phone.
- Distributed hundreds of hygiene items through our 'Making Ends Meet' program
- Provided scholarships for PHAs to attend our annual KEHPF
- Main issues impacting PHAs who access our services are: poverty, access to housing, drug use, access to mental health services and stigma

I personally can remember the time when ACNS did not exist and the merging of AIDS Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition. These were challenging times and with the formation of what we know as ACNS the organization soared forward creating positive change.

I have served in many capacities with the organization throughout the years and am extremely excited with the new directions.

Once again I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my fellow Board members, Maria Mac Intosh, the Executive Director, and the staff team for a dynamic and productive year. I would also like to thank those Board members who have fulfilled their term with the organization and acknowledge the great contribution they have given.

Respectfully,

Albert McNutt

Report from the Executive Director

This past year has been filled with opportunities to take stock of where we have come from, and to look towards our future as we approach our 20 year anniversary in July. While the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) was formed in 1995, our history dates back to the early 80's with the beginning of Gay Men's Health response.

In 1984 the Metro Area Committee on AIDS (MACAIDS) was formed from the earlier Gay Men's Health response; later known as AIDS Nova Scotia (ANS). In 1988, the Nova Scotia Persons With AIDS Coalition (NSPWAC) was formed to address the needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS. In 1993, the Federal Government announced that only one organization addressing HIV/AIDS would be funded within the province of NS with a provincial mandate. It was at this time that ANS and NSPWAC joined together and formed ACNS. Since our inception, ACNS has been committed to the mandates that came from both organizations. ACNS has a longstanding history of providing support and advocacy for persons living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) along with a commitment to prevent new cases of HIV through the development programs and partnership activities.

As we mark the 20 year milestone, which includes more than 30 years of history, we are embarking on yet another shift in the movement and in our work. Once again, the Federal Government is making changes to the current funding model structure. There is a request for increased alignment of our work to include HCV and other STIs, where appropriate, and for community organizations to increase our capacity for collaboration and coordination. While ACNS is committed to defining where HIV exceptionality is warranted, we also recognize that delivering integrated programs will benefit those in need, including PHAs. The next two years will be both challenging and exciting. The shift is not new for most AIDS Service Organizations, as integration has been a part of program delivery for many years now.

This past year has been filled with transition, change and development. The ACNS team completed the beginning phase of a larger Strategic Planning process by taking a look at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in

Ass Class which is a program that seeks to teach gay, bi, bi-curious and trans men about their physiology and the biology of HIV-STBBI transmission, originally run in Europe, continues to generate moderate but steady interest (and solid feedback), and has had people from as far away as Fredericton come and participate in the program. We are tweaking and improving it on an ongoing basis and presently have a young gay medical student reviewing the anatomy section (a core and unique component of the class) for possible improvements. We are also exploring doing a transgender-only presentation in the fall with a Trans co-presenter as a lead-up to the national CPATH Transgender Health conference that takes place in Halifax in early October of 2015. Eighty-five percent of participants indicated improved awareness/knowledge of HIV, HCV and other STIs after attending the class.

Check Me Out is a campaign that was re-launched again this past year at Hali-



fax Pride with a new "group shot" poster, and updated checklists for gay / bi / bi-curious men re their sexual health maintenance (actually three versions of the men's list as we now have one each for Halifax, Sydney, and the rest of NS as location options for getting HIV / STI testing done vary considerably). As well, plans for releasing the campaign's outcomes (based on the over 300 feedback surveys) are underway for release this summer to tell "Guys" what they told us, as well as remind them again re

the core messages of the campaign (life-long sexual health maintenance). Also of note is that there has been interest in adapting our campaign for all of Ontario by the province's Gay Men's Sexual Health network (GMSH), and CATIE is exploring making a version of our materials available as well on a national basis. 23% of those who participated in an online survey about the campaign indicated improved awareness/knowledge about HIV, HCV and other STBBIs after viewing some portion of the campaign. There were: 1,146 unique web views; 450 hard copy checklists received; and 327 evaluation surveys were received.

New Programming Developments

We have begun (jointly with community partners) the process of adapting the Totally Outright Program (developed originally in BC a decade ago, and gradually spreading across the country to solid acclaim) to offer it to young gay, bi,

Transition House Training Support

Planning and program development is underway for upcoming training sessions with the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia. ACNS has convened a provincial planning committee, to gain feedback and expertise around training session development from our partners. ACNS with the support of our partners will offer full day training sessions to housing staff and volunteers across NS in the coming months. Through our partnership with the Transition House Association, we have also encouraged a small committee comprised of staff members working in various houses across the province to help us assess training needs, and captured feedback from their perspective on what they would like to gain from the training sessions.

Social Media

This past year, ACNS ran its first social media awareness campaign during AIDS Awareness Week. Through consultation with provincial AIDS service organizations, we developed the types of messaging we wanted to share with our wider audience via Facebook and twitter, and delivered seven key awareness messages about HIV and target populations. We reached 1,500 of our followers and the content is still accessible. Look for us on Instagram early in 2016!

A New Website

We have worked tirelessly over the past year contributing to the development of a new website architecture that encompasses the needs of persons living with HIV, as well as providing information about HCV and other STIs. Our overarching goal with the new site was to create a safe place for learning and engagement that is both current and sex positive. It will also offer ease of access to learn more about HIV, the work we do and how you can become more involved. Look for the new website early in July.

Gay Men's Health & LGBTQ Programming

Gay Men's Health Workshops were held targeting men who have sex with men, LGBTQ leaders and health professionals. Eighty-eight percent of participants reported improved awareness/knowledge of HIV prevention and the services available in Nova Scotia. Seventy percent service providers reported an intention to improve practices around stigma & discrimination after participating in the sessions.

preparation for 2021. As part of our efforts to address the need to look towards the future we worked with key stakeholders in a re-naming process with the help of 'Docaitta Design.' In addition to this, the ACNS staff team took on the large responsibility of reframing our website architecture and developing new content and resources which we hope to launch in July of 2015.

Our main highlights in the area of programming over the last year would be the continued success of our Knowledge Exchange & Health Promotion Forum last May/June, the re-launch of the 'Check Me Out' campaign, and our first ever 'social media' AIDS Awareness Week campaign. We said good bye to Laura Toole, who was with us in one capacity or another for more than 7 years, and we welcomed Liz Harrop-Archibald in the position of Support Services Coordinator, the newest addition to our team.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the dedicated, skilled staff team at ACNS who go beyond what is asked of them and are large part of the organization's success. I am also thankful for guidance and support provided by Al McNutt, our Board Chairperson, as well as the contributions of expertise, insight and time from the board team in providing leadership to the organization. I can't say begin convey my thanks or the importance of the more than 150 volunteers who have also given their time and shared their expertise with us, without you we could not achieve our goals. It takes an immeasurable amount of support to create change in communities.

In the face of the changes ahead of us, it's my hope that we can further explore the depth of experience that has come from the AIDS movement and people living with HIV and implement the tools and markers used by those before us to further social change, and to help us inform our future.

Respectfully,

Maria Mac Intosh

Programs & Services: Key Highlights

The 2014 HIV-STBBI Knowledge Exchange & Health Promotion Forum

The 2014 HIV-STBBI Knowledge Exchange & Health Promotion Forum (KEHPF) provided an opportunity for individuals and groups to meet through knowledge exchange and skills building activities in a variety of settings. A main component of this program is to share successful programming models so that other groups and communities can utilize them in their respective areas. The overall program provides a safe space for participants to learn from one another and to address the challenges that we face in supporting people living with HIV/HCV and in preventing new cases of HIV, HCV, and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (STIBBs).

We were excited to continue with the focus on resilience from the previous year. Building upon what was already learned with the theme, “Making Connections” which delved further into the topic of resilience and integration within our communities, what it looks like and what it means.

We were excited to partner with CTAC this year to offer a Positive Sex workshop the day before the conference began. Attended mainly by a small group of people living with HIV, the positive sex workshop focused on providing an environment for people living with HIV to practice disclosure for the purposes of talking with sex partners about HIV. The workshop focuses on negotiating disclosure styles by practicing various disclosure scenarios, building disclosure skills and confidence, and learning ways of externalizing stigma-based negative responses through various role play and theatre based activities. The small nature of the group allowed for comfort, and for participants to share and discuss issues many PHA’s face when considering disclosure in their own lives.

KEHPF Performance Markers:

- 92% of respondents reported that they will use/apply the knowledge gained at this education conference in their paid or volunteer work
- 85% of respondents reported that the conference sessions and/or plenary increased their knowledge of HIV
- 92% of respondents thought the forum provided an opportunity to network with others doing similar work

- 100% of respondents thought the forum sessions and/or plenary increased their knowledge and understanding of the issues around HIV/AIDS, HCV, and STBBI
- 100% of respondents felt they had learned new strategies that will help to build resiliency in their life, work and community around HIV/AIDS

The continued inclusion of a strengths based focus, and resilience focus in the subject matter delivered resulted in an encouraging and engaging atmosphere where participants stated that they felt safe to share their personal experience, as well as explore new and unfamiliar content in the workshops.

The Positive Living Program

We held two Positive Living Program series in the past fiscal year. In the spring, we held a session specifically for women, as the feedback we received from positive women around their interest in the program would grow if it was ‘women only.’ Through this group, we were able to reach women who had been living with HIV for 20+ years, and connected them with women who were more recently diagnosed. Beside the delivery of the program content, we were able to provide a space for these women to share their experiences, and learn from one another.

In the winter, we held a session in the Truro area. Although we had a small turn out for the group, we were able to make connections with some PHA’s who are feeling isolated living more rurally. We also received important feedback from the program participants that will be valuable for the future development of the series.

Positive Living Program Performance Markers:

- 83% of participants reported increased access to care, treatment and support after participating in the project series
- 83% of participants reported increased capacity to manage their health after attending the project series