

AIDS Coalition 20  
of Nova Scotia YEARS

# ANNUAL REPORT

2015-2016

## Report from the Chair

The term of 2015 – 2016 has been a challenging one for the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) as there have been significant changes in leadership and staffing within the organization.

The Executive Director, Maria Mac Intosh resigned in November 2015 and the search to find the right person for the position took approximately four months and two rounds of advertising / recruitment. The hiring committee, comprised of 4 Board members, were heavily involved at all stages of the process with the final decision made by the full Board. During the time ACNS was without an Executive Director, the Chair and Vice-Chair offered guidance, advice and assistance to the staff – often on a weekly basis.

The intent after last year's AGM was for the Board to move into a new cycle of strategic planning for the organization – including a name change, new logo and expansion of mandate into PEI. However, upon hearing of Maria's decision to resign, it was decided to place all that on hold until we had a new Executive Director who could be involved from the beginning of the process.

Shannon Pringle was offered the position of Executive Director on March 1st and started on March 21st of this year. Just before she started, the two stage application process for five-year funding cycle from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) was commencing. PHAC provides about half the income for ACNS and it was vitally important to the success of the organization to secure that funding. As current staff did not have the expertise and/or time, two individuals with experience in writing letters of intent were contracted to work with the staff to prepare the necessary documents for stage one. With the commitment and help of the staff, the documents were submitted on time.

In the last few months, two more staff members have resigned and a third has commenced maternity leave. One new staff person has been hired and a part time person's hours have been increased. Shannon has been working closely with staff, the Chair and also with Maria to ensure that the programs, services, and fund raising events have continued during this time of change.

The main focus of the Board over the past 6-7 months have been to monitor the operations and financial status of ACNS and provide support to Shannon



In memory of those we lost last year

Scott  
Robyn  
Christopher



**Our Board**

Chairperson	Suzanne Kennedy
Vice Chairperson	Megan Longley
Treasurer	David St. Laurent
Secretary	Tara Lapointe
Board Member	Eric Ross
Board Member	Alexander Gallant
Board Member	Mike Sangster
Board Member	Chester Goluch

**Our Staff (June 2016)**

Executive Director	Shannon Pringle
Program Coordinator	Michelle Johnson
Support Services Coordinator	
Fund Development Coordinator	Elena Fodor
Gay Men's Health Coordinator	Chris Aucoin
Program Support Assistant	Ned MacInnis

and the staff. As you will see in this Annual Report, despite the number of significant changes in a short time frame, ACNS has not wavered in its mission, vision or provision of programs and services – thanks to the hard work and dedication of Shannon and the staff (past and present).

While change has led to challenges for the staff and Board of ACNS, with change comes opportunity – the opportunity for new direction and a fresh look at the organization on a go-forward basis. Building on the experiences of current staff and board members and a new Executive Director, new staff and new board members, determination of the future direction of ACNS will be undertaken.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to my fellow Board members, the staff (past and present) and Shannon. I would like to thank Maria Mac Intosh for her ongoing commitment to ACNS in providing support to both Shannon and me.

I also acknowledge the contributions made by two long standing Board members who resigned during this year – Al McNutt and Augie Westhaver. And last but not least to thank Eric Ross who has been involved with ACNS for many years and is finishing his term on the Board.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne L. Kennedy

Chair, Board of Directors

## **Report from the Executive Director**

Thank you to the Board, Staff, Members and Volunteers of ACNS for such a warm welcome! While I have only been in the position for three months, I have had the great pleasure of meeting many people who contribute to the success of the organization and I look forward to meeting many more. I am hopeful and optimistic for the future as we move forward, continuing to provide support and advocacy for Persons Living with HIV (PHAs), reducing new cases of infection with prevention initiatives and delivering integrated (HIV-STBBI) programs.

It has been a year of great transition at ACNS and I am inspired by the dedication, team work, resiliency and accomplishments amidst so many significant changes.

In addition to the changes in leadership, staff and board members over the past year, as referenced in the Chair of ACNS Board of Director's report, ACNS moved to our new location on Spring Garden Road in August 2015. The new space is centrally located on major bus routes, bright, welcoming, fully accessible, and features a large meeting space. ACNS has embraced the new office and extended the meeting space to community groups looking for an accessible location to hold workshops and meetings. We look forward to hosting more of these events in the future.

Highlights in programming this year include the 2015 HIV-STBBI Knowledge Exchange & Health Promotion Forum, which explored the concept of integration (HIV-STBBI) and its application to our collective work, and our new LGBTQ Cultural Competency sessions for health professionals. Highlights in fundraising include the successful launch of Brunch with Neville, along with the popular return of the highly entraining Bid for Life and Queen for a Night.

I would like to express my gratitude to Suzanne Kennedy, Chair of ACNS Board of Directors, for her support and guidance, to the ACNS Board of Directors, for their expertise and dedication, and to Maria Mac Intosh for her leadership and mentorship. I would also like to express my gratitude to the staff team, both past and present, for helping me navigate multiple transitions with their wealth of knowledge, grace and humor, to our members from whom I learn immeasurable wisdom each day, to the Fund Development Committee for

## New Programming Developments

### **Totally Outright**

The Totally Outright training program for young gay / bi / trans\* men recently received funding from the Department of Community Services *Sexual Violence Strategy Prevention Innovation Fund*, and we are continuing to pursue other funding sources to offer this program this fiscal year.

### **Transgender Sexual Health Checklist**

Modelled on the *Check Me Out* template, the Transgender Sexual Health Checklist is presently under development with community partners and members of the transgender community. This piece of work will be launched later this year.

## Support Services Highlights

- Our Poz Guys group continued to meet monthly over the past year
- Provided 300 referrals to programs and health services for people living with HIV (PHAs)
- Provided 1,400 one-on-one support sessions in PHAs in Nova Scotia
- Distributed hundreds of hygiene items through our Making Ends Meet program
- Provided scholarships for PHAs to attend our annual Knowledge Exchange and Health Promotion Forum
- Expanded our Complimentary and Alternative Therapies (CATS) Program to include Osteopathy
- Held an annual AIDS Vigil Ceremony, December 1, 2016
- Main issues impacting PHAs who access our services are: poverty, access to affordable housing
- Provided people with assistance in the areas of addictions, access to mental health services, stigma and HIV & aging

### ***HIV Prevention is Different Now***

Our workshop on Gay Men's Health and the rapidly evolving nature of HIV prevention approaches (including Treatment as Prevention (TasP) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)) has been given in Halifax and Sydney to health professionals and other front-line service providers. Also a much abbreviated session focusing on the new prevention technologies (using *Check Me Out* campaign as an example of the TasP approach) was also given to family physicians at the Dalhousie Department of Family Practice 2015 Spring Forum.

### **LGBTQ Cultural Competency**

This past year we also began offering an introductory session on LGBTQ Cultural Competency for health professionals and other front line health workers. The need for this training was highlighted in the development of the *Check Me Out* campaign: the lack of adequate LGBTQ cultural competency, in both clinical and front-line health care workers, was identified as a key obstacle to gay and bi men getting STI testing. However, the topic has obviously struck a chord with health care providers and professors too. As a result of the planned (public) offerings of these LGBTQ Cultural Competency sessions, we were invited to do additional sessions with particular departments within formal health care, and classes of medical, nursing, and other health program students, and we are accepting these requests where capacity allows.

### ***Ass Class***

Ass Class is a program that seeks to teach gay, bi, bi-curious and trans men about their physiology and the biology of HIV-STBBI transmission, continues to be offered in Halifax, and with a planned session in Sydney scheduled for later this month. Men from across mainland Nova Scotia (and even from New Brunswick) travel to Halifax for this class.

their tireless commitment to keeping our events on track as we rebuild the staff team, to our dedicated volunteers who help ACNS achieve its goals, to our community partners for their knowledge sharing and collaboration and to our corporate sponsors and businesses, whose support goes towards our programs and services.

Respectfully,

Shannon Pringle

Executive Director

## Programs & Services: Key Highlights

### 2015 HIV- STBBI Knowledge Exchange & Health Promotion Forum

“The 2015 Knowledge Exchange and Health Promotion Forum was held from June 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Halifax. The forum is retreat style knowledge exchange event that brings together people living with HIV, HCV and other STBBIs, staff, volunteers and board members of community based organizations (CBOs), health care providers, social service workers and anyone else who has a stake in the future of HIV, HCV, and STBBIs in the Atlantic. Eligibility for attendance is determined through an application and scholarship process, though which ACNS prioritizes people living with HIV/AIDS, HCV and other STBBI’s and local community based service providers working in related fields. The forum is also open to and attended by local public health representatives, medical professionals and para-professionals, educators, and key community stakeholders.

The 2015 KEHPF provided the opportunity for individuals to meet, conduct knowledge exchange and skills building in a variety of settings, and share successful programming models that have been implemented across the province of Nova Scotia. Through the creation of a safer space, participants were able to learn from one another and to address the challenges that we face in preventing the spread of HIV, HCV, and STBBI’s while responding to the needs of people in our collective communities.

This year our theme, “Silos to Synergy: Connection and Integration”, intended to explore how we can take the concept of integration and apply it to our collective work in a way that facilitates a community based approach. Building on the idea, “Every door is the right door”, participants were encouraged to explore and reflect on how a collaborative and mutually guided approach to service provision and programming can further enhance the quality of support, programming, and policy building that happens in our region. The focus on integration has been woven into the conference over the past three years, and continues to be an important focus for participants given our current social climate and direction in which our field of work continues to advance.

Through hosting the annual KEHPF, ACNS is able to provide a space where public health officials, community based organizations, and people living with HIV,

HCV, and STBBIs can explore and understand how an integrated approach to our work can look and feel in our province. This process of exploration and discovery lead by a diverse but united group has lead to several meaningful dialogues and provided opportunities for groups to expand on future partnership and alliances across sectors and communities in our region.

We were excited to partner with CTAC this year to offer a workshop on mental health specifically for folks living with HIV and front line service providers. The workshop explored the need for better mental health services for PHAs, national trends in mental health access and care, and explored the Nova Scotia ‘Together we Can’ mental health strategy in relation to PHA needs.”

### References

AIDS Coalition Nova Scotia. (2015). *Evaluation report 2015 knowledge exchange and health promotion forum: “Silos to synergy: Connection and integration.”* Halifax, NS.

### Transition House Training Support

The first of the Transition House Training Support workshops took place with Juniper House in February 2015 and was well received by the 12 staff and board members present for the training. We are currently planning the dates of other workshops with the rest of the chosen sights across Nova Scotia.

### Gay Men’s Health & LGBTQ Programming

**Check Me Out OUTcomes**---at the 2015 Halifax Pride, ACNS’s Gay Men’s Health Project released the *Check Me Out OUTcomes* infographic containing the summary results of the *Check Me Out* evaluation survey completed by well over 300 men. Key summary findings included that men noticed the campaign (66%), liked it (87% found it “appealing” or “very appealing”), learned more about sexual health (33%), and were motivated by the campaign to get tested for HIV and / or STIs (22% got tested, an additional 17% said they were still considering getting tested). We shall be using some of the survey findings, along with responding to survey comment feedback, to encourage community engagement around sexual health through a social media campaign this summer (launching at Pride) and fall.