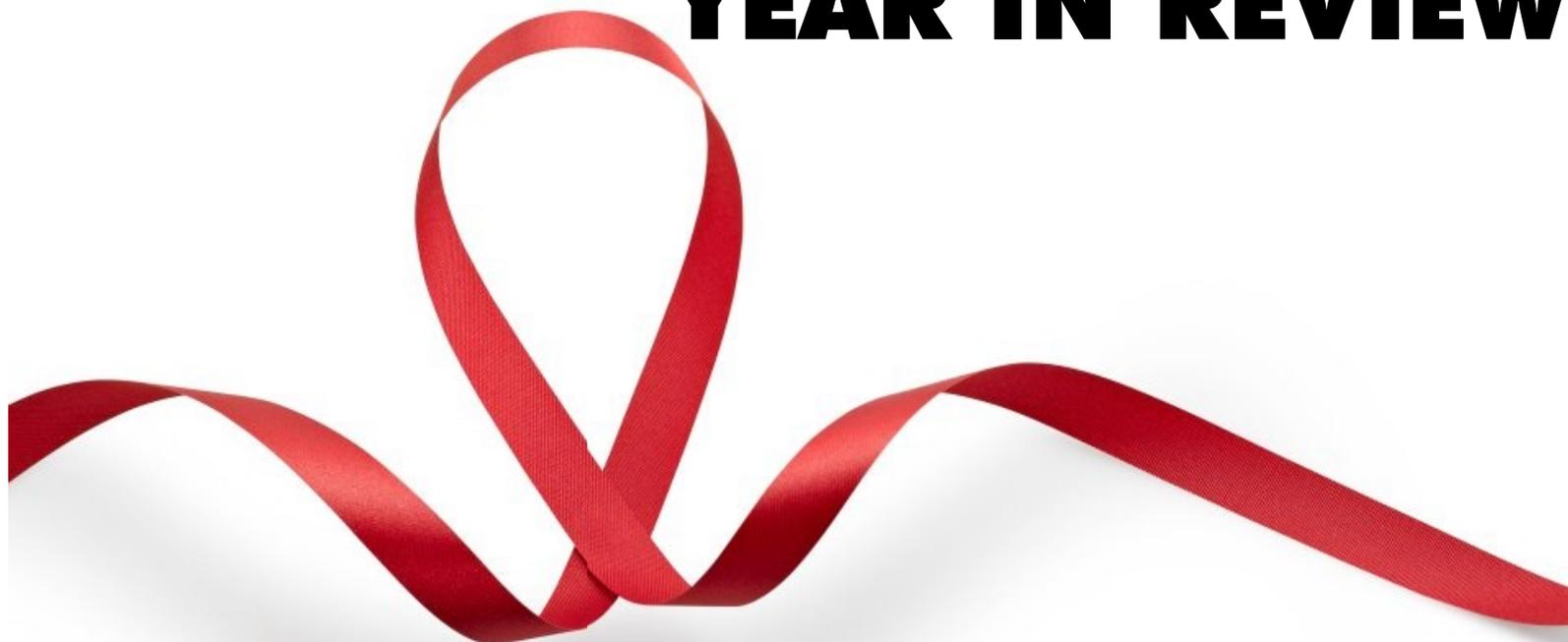


2015 - 2016

**YEAR IN REVIEW**





In memory of those we lost in 2016

Earl

Jim

Dale



### Event Sponsors



**We would like to extend our gratitude to the following funders, sponsors and supporters:**

### **Funders**

Public Health Agency of Canada  
Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness  
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services  
Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia  
Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union (NSGEU)  
Human Resources & Skills Development Canada

### **Supporters**

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CTV Atlantic  
West Jet  
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD)  
Krispy Kreme, Quebec  
Budget Car Rental  
Pacifico Night Club

### **Report from the Chair**

The past two years have provided a number of challenges for both the operation of the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia and the functions of the Board of Directors. The uncertainty regarding funding and changes in staffing continued from late 2015 to just recently in 2017.

The first stage of the application for the new five year funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) was completed prior to the AGM last year (Letters of Intent). The expectation was that ACNS would hear prior to the summertime that it had been approved to move to the second stage of the application process. Unfortunately, that approval was not released until the fall, and by then, there were time pressures to complete the applications within the PHAC deadlines. Due to the volume of work required, ACNS engaged Maria Mac Intosh on a contract basis to assist in the process.

All documents were submitted to PHAC however, final approval was not provided by the end of the fiscal year. As a result, ACNS has not received any funds from PHAC since the end of March. ACNS now has to use funds from its reserves to cover current expenses. In spite of the difficulties, we are moving forward in an alliance with AIDS PEI to deliver new programming over the next five years.

In June 2016, there were three vacant staff positions. Since then, two new staff members have been hired for the positions of Fund Development Coordinator and Support Services Coordinator. Sections of the Program Coordinator position were divided up amongst staff until that employee returns to work in June of this year. The leadership of ACNS has changed as well. After the departure of Shannon Pringle, Dena Simon started as the Executive Director on April 3, 2017.

The main focus of the Board over the past ten months has been to monitor the operations and financial status of ACNS and provide support and advice to the previous Executive Director and the staff.

The funding from PHAC covers over half of ACNS expenses for operations. This funding must be used for the specific programs and services that PHAC approves. Due to uncertainty in the amount of potential funding from PHAC

and the types of programs and services that must be funded, the Board did not pursue its strategic planning activities for the year. The strategic direction the organization will take depends heavily on the priorities of PHAC. The remainder of the funding for ACNS comes from the provincial government, other small grants and fundraising activities. Fundraising dollars for certain events have been decreasing over the years and as a result the Board has assisted in providing some direction regarding fund development efforts.

On a positive note, the leadership of ACNS has now been assumed by Dena Simon a very experienced Executive Director who has quickly and skillfully taken on the running of the organization. In addition, we have a very diverse and knowledgeable slate of candidates for the Board of Directors. The candidates come from many different areas of the province and possess a wide variety of skills and experience. The thing they all share in common is their commitment to the values and mandate of the ACNS.

I would like to express my appreciation to my fellow Board members and the staff (past and present). As in last year's report, I would like to thank Maria Mac Intosh for her ongoing commitment to ACNS in providing support, time and resources that go above and beyond. I also acknowledge the contributions made by the Board members who resigned during this year (Megan Longley and Jonathon Berg), those that are finishing their term (Mike Sangster, Chester Goloch, and Tara LaPointe) and to those staying on. And last but not least to thank the members of the Executive: Dave St. Laurent (Vice Chair), Tara LaPointe (Secretary) and Sandra Quesnel (Treasurer) for supporting me during these challenging times.

**Suzanne L. Kennedy**  
**Chair, Board of Directors**

### **Our Board**

Suzanne Kennedy	Chairperson
David St. Laurent	Vice Chairperson
Sandra Quesnel	Treasurer
Tara Lapointe	Secretary
Alexander Gallant	Board Member
Dave Gaskin	Board Member
Chester Goluch	Board Member
Mike Sangster	Board Member
Ugochukwu Ochonogor	Board Member

### **Our Staff**

Dena Simon	Executive Director
Michelle Johnson	Program Coordinator
Chris Aucoin	Gay Men's Health Coordinator
Lori O'Brien	Support Services Coordinator
Ned MacInnis	Program Support Assistant
Elena Fodor	Fund Development Coordinator

## **Fund Development**

In the fiscal year of 2016-2017, ACNS held six special event fund raising activities. Our fundraising income did not meet our expectations. Plans going forward include a more strategic approach with fewer events. Here are some of the highlights from the past fiscal year.

Queen for a Night was held on May 6, 2016, at the Pacifico Night Club and was presented by LifeQuest Financial. It's a highly entertaining evening filled with acts from local celebrity Queens and includes pole dancing, shopping, games, photo ops with performers, and lots of great surprises.

The Scotiabank AIDS Walk brought over 100 people together on September 25, 2016. Led by the Canadian AIDS Society, the Scotiabank AIDS Walk is a peer-to-peer fundraiser where individuals and teams raise money through pledges.

The Wearable Art & Performance Night Show, October 28, 2016, was an event organized by NSCAD students in support of ACNS. Held since 1990, the event shows Haligonians the imaginative expression of creativity at NSCAD.

Brunch with Neville was held on November 20, 2016 at the Atlantica Hotel. It is a fun-filled flower arrangement demonstration hosted by Neville MacKay from My Mother's Bloomers. Neville is one of the most talented florists in Halifax and is regularly featured in TV appearances on CTV and CBC. He is very well known in the community for his unique personality, as a talented entertainer and as a person who is generous to many causes.

Doughnuts anyone? Put on the coffee pot! The Circle of Life - our Krispy Kreme doughnut campaign is the newest among ACNS events. Doughnuts are purchased online starting in November with a one-day pick-up in the middle of December. If you order enough, we'll even deliver them to your office.

The BMO Bank of Montreal Bid for Life Dinner & Auction was held on March 30, 2017 at the Atlantica Hotel. It was a Broadway themed event. Attendees dined on an exquisite dinner, made bids in the silent and live auctions, and enjoyed live music and local entertainers.

**Elena Fodor**

**Fund Development**

## **Report from the Executive Director**

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Dena Simon and I am the new Executive Director of the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia. I have worked in the not-for-profit sector for the past thirty years in the areas of arts & culture, science and health. In 1986, I had my first job as an Executive Director with the Nova Scotia Choral Federation; and our office was at 5516 Spring Garden Road...exactly where I am today with ACNS! I feel like I've come home.

The past few years have been challenging for ACNS and I think the next few years may be equally as challenging. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to put the organization on a secure footing and I feel confident that the Board Members, the volunteers, the staff and the community are up to the task.

The beginning years of the epidemic were crushingly difficult and it was almost impossible to imagine a future where HIV/AIDS could be manageable. But there has been an evolution of understanding and of treatment so that today a diagnosis of HIV has a very different path to follow; a path that has hope.

We are looking to an even greater future...one without HIV/AIDS. And over the next several years, we will be building a community that better understands how to live a full life that is safe, healthy and happy.

I am looking forward to being a part of that future.

**Dena Simon**

**Executive Director**

## Support Services Highlights

- Provided 1,500 one-on-one support sessions to PHAs throughout NS
- Provided 400 referrals to programs, health services, community organizations, and government services for people living with HIV/AIDS
- Distributed hundreds of hygiene items through our Making Ends Meet program amounting to over a thousand dollars
- Distributed hundreds of dollars worth of food via our drop-in program
- Provided hundreds of free condoms and lubricant packages to PHAs
- Provided telephone and television service for PHAs in hospital
- Facilitated scholarships for PHAs in Nova Scotia to attend Canadian AIDS Society People Living with HIV/AIDS Forum in Regina, Saskatchewan
- Continued our Complimentary and Alternative Therapies (CATS) program which provided PHAs with free massage and osteopathy sessions. Our osteopath recently committed to another 6 months.
- Poz Gay Guys social group continued to meet monthly over the past year
- Held an annual AIDS Vigil Ceremony, December 1, 2016
- Distributed 400 copies of our quarterly newsletter - Positive Dispatch - to PHAs and community partners
- Continued to participate in Benefits Reform Action Group which entailed advocating for improved Employment Support and Income Assistance benefits (as many of our clients are ESIA recipients)
- Attended dozens of community events and established new partnerships with organizations
- Identified main issues impacting PHAs who access our services, including poverty, access to affordable housing, addictions, access to mental health services, stigma and HIV & aging
- Continued education by attending webinars, workshops, and conferences relating to HIV/AIDS

Offered a two-part workshop called Advocacy in Healthcare. An established partnership among practitioners and their patients, (and their families, when appropriate), ensure that decisions respect patients' wants, needs, and preferences carried out and that patients have the education and support they need to make decisions and participate in their own care.

The purpose was to create a conversation about PHAs being their own advocates within the healthcare system, while getting a better understanding

We recognize the long-time working relationship we have with Jain & Company Chartered Professional Accountants. Jain & Company have been providing audit and consultancy services to ACNS for many years. Their expertise and commitment to ACNS has been invaluable and guided us through the many incarnations this organization has experienced. Our audit this year was conducted by Brittany Latreille. We greatly appreciate their hard work and continued assistance.

We have maintained a strong financial position, notwithstanding the constant flux in staff over the last 17 months. We continue to maintain solid working relationships with government and other funders. We are reviewing current agreements, developing new ones and revising our fund development opportunities so that they remain fresh and exciting. Irrespective of some mild turbulence, we have managed to maintain the status quo by sustaining current supports and identifying new opportunities. We have been tested and we have proven that the organization is tough, resilient and resourceful. We can't hold on to things forever, no matter how firmly we fix our grasp. We can, however, remember one simple, undeniable reality: new opportunities will come from the ending of others.

In moving forward, we maintain our balance and poise and create a greater sense of security. We are excited to enter into a new funding agreement with the Public Health Agency of Canada which promises to bring new ideas and a re-focus in programming. In the words of H.G. Wells, The Time Machine: "We should strive to welcome change and challenges, because they are what help us grow...We need to constantly be challenging ourselves in order to strengthen our character and increase our intelligence."

## Ned MacInnis

### Program Support

## **Operations**

ACNS has a long history of volunteer involvement and it's the contribution of our volunteers, which makes our community stronger, safer and healthier. A volunteer is like a stone thrown in a lake: its effect has a direct impact. Like ripples - volunteer efforts reach out far and wide to improve communities. You are role models; you give hope and friendship to those in need. We thank you for the time and energy you devote to ACNS; our collective achievements are possible because of your dedication and commitment. Our community is a better place thanks to your tireless efforts.

With respect to infrastructure, our office is working well, providing the necessary space needed to carry on business and provide programming. Our program room continues to serve as a community space that several groups have used to carry out meetings and activities.

Technology has become both an asset and a liability. It allows us to process information and expedites our work. On the other hand, it becomes a necessary part of our infrastructure, bringing with it the expense to maintain, repair and replace it. Our current telephone system is relatively new yet the phone sets we have are old and there are no more spares. Our computers are no longer under warranty; we have made small repairs to some. Replacement equipment is inevitable.

We have adopted electronic banking practices. This is far more convenient, allowing for timely payments, access to self-serve online banking options and up-to-date reporting. While this does not eliminate the use of cheques and other forms of payment, it significantly reduces the amount of time spent in administration.

The only constant in AIDS work is change. This fiscal year saw a great deal of that, both in staff turn-over and an end to funding within the Public Health Agency of Canada's old funding strategy. Regarding staff: we saw the hiring of a new Executive Director in March 2016; a new Fund Development Coordinator was hired in June 2016; our Program Coordinator went on parental leave in June 2016; we hired a new Support Services Coordinator in August 2016; and we replaced the Executive Director in March 2017.

of how the system works. It included information and encouraged individuals to share experiences and learn from each other.

Topics consisted of:

- ◇ Basic Rights when accessing healthcare
- ◇ Patient rights for people living with HIV
- ◇ Getting Access to Healthcare
- ◇ Your relationship with your doctor
- ◇ Being involved in your healthcare
- ◇ Healthcare system in Nova Scotia
- ◇ Money Matters
- ◇ Stigma and Discrimination
- ◇ Treatment Information
- ◇ What can you do?
- ◇ Resources

We have also partnered with the 'Carnation Clinic', a massage clinic offering low-cost massages to PHAs and their partners, family and friends. The Clinic will be opening in the fall, offered through Canadian College of Massage and Hydrotherapy. Alexandra Lynch, our volunteer massage therapist for the past 17 years, leads the project and will be supervising the operations. The Clinic is designed as a way to provide affordable massage therapy to people with HIV/AIDS. In light of the recognition that HIV/AIDS affects more than just the individual, services are open to partners and family members as well. Client confidentiality is very important and so the Carnation Clinic will be in a location with other clinics that have clients who are not HIV positive.

**Lori O'Brien**

**Support Services**

## **Report from the Gay Men's Health Project**

The highlight of the Gay Men's Health project work this past year was the pilot offering of our adaption of the long-delayed (and highly regarded) Totally OUTright program. This was a pilot in several ways: the first offering in Nova Scotia, and the first offering – anywhere in the country – of a province-wide version of a traditionally urban-specific program. The delays in offering the pilot were due to challenges in acquiring sufficient funding to implement this resource-intensive four-day program. We finally did secure funding from the M.A.C AIDS Fund, the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services Sexual Violence Strategy, and the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia.

Making Totally OUTright in Nova Scotia truly province-wide was no small undertaking. Despite the significant challenges that were entailed, we were very successful at connecting with our target audience of young (aged 18-29) Gay / Bi / 2-Spirit / Trans\* / Queer (GB2STQ\*) men from across Nova Scotia; and from under-served populations within our target audience as well. We had 18 participants, including those from rural areas, transgender\*, men of colour, and those would identified as disabled / health challenges. Initial feedback is very solid, and now that we have secured PHAC funding to continue offering the program moving forward.

The major biomedical development this past year was the approval, by Health Canada, of the combination drug Truvada as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention. ACNS is exploring the best way to support this new, but powerful HIV prevention option, and has been part of both national and provincial working groups exploring the challenges surrounding making PrEP available to those who could most benefit from it. This work is ongoing, but a first publicly visible piece was the creation of a PrEP information web page on the ACNS site for both the general public, and for health care providers (see: [www.acns.ns.ca/prep](http://www.acns.ns.ca/prep)).

Many people have not yet heard of PrEP, or if they have, are not sure what to make of it. People seeking PrEP have reported resistance when asking their physicians about it. Despite overwhelming evidence that PrEP is more effective in preventing HIV than condoms, many healthcare providers are unaware of PrEP, or unsure of how to proceed when there is still not a formal PrEP protocol in Canada.

There are still many obstacles to making PrEP accessible to those who would benefit most (including uninformed and/or resistant healthcare providers, cost of the medication, formal Canadian guidelines for administering PrEP are still in development, etc.), however educating healthcare providers is a crucial first step. The web page launch was timed to coincide with a brief article (submitted by the Nova Scotia PrEP Working Group which ACNS is a part of) introducing PrEP to family physicians that was published in the April 2017 issue of the provincial newsletter doctorsNS, and listing the ACNS web page as the key local PrEP information resource. There is yet more to do.

For more than a year, ACNS has been party to plans for Pan-Canadian "Gay Men's Health" Alliance - a national "Gay Men's Health" project, and developing a national "Alliance" proposal (with eleven other organizations across the country) for PHAC funding for the next five years. The scale and scope of the project is considerable, and will expand our capacity to do gay / bi / transgender\* and other "men who have sex with men" (gbtMSM) related work.

This project will focus on two key goals. The first is increasing access to health care by gbtMSM through capacity development with service providers (both community-based organizations and formal healthcare workers) in working with gbtMSM clients. The second is increasing uptake by gbtMSM of healthcare and other health promotion services (testing, sexual health promotion, treatment, etc.). While those are the two arms of the project structure, the work overall will be a "combination prevention" framework making use of the broader array of prevention tools now available to us: combining behavioural (e.g. sexual health promotion, risk and harm reduction approaches), biomedical (e.g. PrEP, condoms) as well as social and structural (e.g., anti-stigma education about HIV and LGBTQ, health care access) interventions.

As in previous years we continued to offer workshops targeting either gbtMSM (e.g. the Ass Class workshop on more enjoyable AND safer anal sex), and health service providers (e.g. an introductory session on LGBTQ Cultural Competency for health professionals and other front line health workers).

**Chris Aucoin**  
**Gay Men's Health Coordinator**