



**2017 - 2018
YEAR IN REVIEW**



In memory of those we lost in 2017

David

Rene



Report from the Chair

As many of you know, the past few years have been full of challenges for ACNS; the staff, our Board, and for the communities we serve. I want to start off by thanking everyone for their patience through these transitions. We started this year with a (mostly) fresh, new Board. While our historical board members brought a wealth of knowledge, they have moved on to new challenges and opportunities over the past few years. We are fortunate enough to maintain relationships with many of them, allowing us to tap into their history and perspective as needed. In addition, our new members bring a fresh outlook and energy to the Board.

While some funding decisions came through for ACNS, we continued to have challenges with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) with our "Hooking Up" Alliance project. Even though our alliance was successful in the first round of the application process, several members of the alliance later broke off on their own. These groups had more of a focus on large, urban centres. Rather than honour the existing framework, letters of intent and budgets already finalized by the alliance, PHAC decided to restart the process. All previous work was considered null and void, and a new competition was created for funding instead (only open to those of us in the original alliance). This pitted the large urban centres against the rest of us servicing smaller urban centres and rural communities across Canada. The result for ACNS was a large hole in our future funding, as the large urban centre alliance was successful.

The way PHAC moved forward with this process was very concerning for those of us involved. There was a lack of communication, a lack of accountability, and a lack of consistency through the entire process. Worst of all, there was absolutely no transparency from PHAC. ACNS and our alliance members were left in the dark as to the reasoning behind the final decision. We were made to believe we had nothing to worry about regarding funding until the day we were told that our alliance was not successful. Our alliance sent a joint letter to the Federal Minister of Health outlining our concerns. The response was that the feedback would be passed on the PHAC.

While we were given a year of transition funding, it was communicated to us in March that it would not be provided until the 2018-2019 fiscal year. This left us with a large gap for the 2017-2018 fiscal year, as a substantial portion of our funding was not there. We have continued to make tough decisions to keep our costs as low as possible without impacting our programs and services. These have included both staffing decisions and office locations.

While things may look grave, we must now focus on our future. With the uncertainty behind us, ACNS can now focus on what's next. The Board will be holding a strategic planning session in the first six months of the 2018-2019 year so we can prioritize our focus and chart a path forwards. We are taking this situation as an opportunity to no longer rely so strongly on government funding for our survival. This will allow us to have more autonomy on our programs and services, and to be more adaptable to the communities we serve.

Thank you to all of the staff at ACNS, new and former. You've had a roller coaster these past few years, but you kept your head held high and focused on the mission in front of you. Thank you especially to Dena Simon. We brought you on with a very different situation in mind, but you kept your cool as we threw you into the fire. Your knowledge and experience has been invaluable through this challenging year. Finally, thank you to all of the members of the Board. You have shown passion, patience and courage through this wild ride. Each of you brings a unique perspective and I look forward to what we can achieve in 2018!

Dave St. Laurent
Chair, Board of Directors

Report from the Executive Director

It's been a busy year; and as you read through this Annual Report for 2017-2018, you will see just how much was done by a small organization with limited resources. We should be proud of what we have accomplished and how we have served our members, clients and the public.

It's been a challenging year; and whereas we made some progress in our fund raising activities and in donations from the community, the primary funder of ACNS has also been the source of our significant deficit. And we need to talk about that.

The primary funder of ACNS for the past twenty years has the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). We have received in the range of \$250,000 per year for programs and operations. In the most recent funding cycle, PHAC changed the priorities for funding and as a result we changed how we applied for those critical funds by joining two alliances of organizations. The first alliance was with PEERS (formerly AIDS PEI) and the second was a combination of AIDS Service Organizations (ASO), Gay Men's Health Collectives (GMHC), the Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC) and CATIE. Twelve organizations in total stretching from the east coast to the west coast of Canada. The alliance with PEERS received funding approval in May of 2017 with ACNS receiving \$697,000 which is approximately \$139,400 a year for five years; however, the alliance of twelve – called Hooking Up – did not have such a direct path.

After months of drafting and redrafting five-year budgets and work plans for PHAC, the Hooking Up alliance fell apart at the end of May 2017 just as we were nearing the finish line. The division was based on large urban centres vs small urban centres/rural areas and ASOs vs GMHCs. CATIE aligned with the ASOs and the CBRC aligned with the Collectives. Much of June was spent trying to rebuild the alliance and save the project, but ultimately, that was not to be. PHAC rejected the proposal and restarted the process on an expedited basis in the middle of July with a submission deadline of August 8, 2017.

ACNS along with four other ASOs and CATIE redrafted the Hooking Up submission, which maintained the focus on gay men's health, and submitted it to PHAC on August 4, 2017. Two months passed with no communication from PHAC.

On October 10, 2017, PHAC informed us that our Hooking Up proposal was not recommended for funding. The expected \$585,000 over five years was not going to materialize. We were promised by PHAC that ACNS would receive reimbursement for the amounts expended from April to mid-August 2017 on the project; and in addition, we were promised \$110,000 in Transition Funding to be distributed for five months in 2017-2018 (\$40,000) and for seven months in 2018-2019 (\$70,000). The reimbursement of \$43,485 along with the Transition Funding of approximately \$40,000 would be paid to ACNS in fiscal 2017-2018.

We again redrafted the budgets and work plans to include the reimbursement and Transition Funding and submitted the documents to PHAC in the middle of November. Two more months passed with no communication from PHAC.

In mid-January 2018, after several attempts to get information, we were informed that everything was fine with the November submission and that ACNS should expect the reimbursement and the Transition Funding contract within a week. Armed with this information and the expectation of \$83,485 to be received before the end of the fiscal year, the ACNS Board of Directors was finally able to approve an operating budget for fiscal 2017-2018. This budget included an expected deficit of approximately \$20,000.

In March, after hearing nothing for over six weeks, we repeatedly contacted PHAC again to find out when we could expect the contract; and on March 9, 2018, we heard from them that the reimbursement would be allocated to 2017-2018 but that the full amount of the Transition Funding would be moved to 2018-2019. With fewer than 15 business days left in the fiscal year, we were informed that \$40,000 in funding was not going to arrive. This amount had to be added directly to our expected deficit leaving ACNS with no recovery time.

We had already begun cost-saving measures before we received this news. In August when our Program Coordinator moved to a new organization, we did not refill the vacancy. In October when we learned that the Hooking Up alliance was not going to be funded, some staff members were reduced to 80% rather than full-time employment. And finally we were able to renegotiate our lease and have moved to smaller, less expensive space within the same building. These measures had some impact on the 2017-2018 fiscal year, but the full impact of the over \$85,000 in savings will be realized in 2018-2019.

It's been a surprising yet fulfilling year.

Dena Simon
Executive Director

Report from Program and Support Services

Highlights

- Five new clients were added this year; a significant increase as only one or two new clients per year is typical for the past few years. Through ACNS they were able to obtain necessary information, referrals, and assistance with system navigation to help them transition into living with HIV in Nova Scotia
- Provided 1,500 one-on-one support sessions to PHAs throughout Nova Scotia
- Provided 450 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 nearly a thousand dollars worth of food via our drop-in program
- Provided over a thousand free condoms and lubricant packages to PHAs
- Provided telephone and television service for several PHAs while they were in the hospital
- Distributed 400 copies of our quarterly newsletter-Positive Dispatch-to PHAs and community partners
- Attended 10 community events and established new partnerships with organizations
- Sent out 100 questionnaires to PHAs for program feedback and suggestions

Programs

The well-being of clients remains of paramount importance, so we are happy to be continuing with services of the Complementary and Alternative Treatments Program (CATS). Osteopathy treatments were provided by our volunteer practitioner, Martha, who often speaks about how much she enjoys volunteering at ACNS. She visits the office once per month and sees two patients each time. Our massage therapist, Alexandra has been volunteering with us for almost twenty years and is continuing to provide services to our clients as well. The continued demand for CATS demonstrates its value and the positive comments from our clients have shown the health benefits of accessing these free services.

Poz Gay Guys social group continued to meet for supper and conversation on a monthly basis over the past year. The Annual Open House was on December 7th and featured a baking contest for PHAs and community partners.

The Annual Christmas program assisted seven people living with HIV and their families (fifteen people in total) with festive parcels of hygiene products, gift certificates, winter clothes, and other presents. Many of the donations were from Rockingham United Church. ACNS participated in an information and fundraising project facilitated by Rockingham United Church for ACNS and four other community-based organizations. A strong supporter of ACNS for many years, it has donated thousands of dollars in cash donations as well as in hygiene products for our Making Ends Meet program. We also spoke at the Atlantic School of Theology where members of the congregation raised several hundred dollars for ACNS and donated over one hundred dollars worth of hygiene products for our Making Ends Meet program.

In March, a letter of support was submitted on behalf of the Peer Outreach Support Services and Education project in rural Nova Scotia. The proposal consisted of a project focusing on harm reduction for youth who use drugs. Since this is directly related to the work ACNS is engaging in, it was considered a valuable opportunity to show our support for the project. At the same time, it was an opportunity to form a new relationship as well as exchange knowledge as ACNS' PHAC project involves harm reduction education for youth.

In the Public Health Agency of Canada project, there are two objectives that fall under general Programs. The first involves the development of Trauma Informed training for service providers and the second is the development of an education program for youth who use drugs.

Trauma-Informed Training for Service Providers

- An advisory committee of nine people from Nova Scotia and PEI was formed
- Environmental scan mapping out relevant existing resources completed
- A listing of available resources is coming to completion and will be put on the website
- Next steps include developing the project, its format, etc.

STBBI Prevention for People Who Use Drugs

- An advisory committee of seven people from Nova Scotia was formed including individuals with lived experience
- An environmental scan mapping out relevant existing resources was completed
- A listing of available resources is coming to completion and will be put on the website
- Next steps include recruiting a group of youth to inform content of the project

AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day

ACNS participated in the Voices for World AIDS Day media campaign with CANFAR for the week. The campaign involved nine AIDS service organizations from British Columbia to Newfoundland & Labrador and received enormous attention (around 30 million views for Twitter alone). We intend to partner with them again in 2018. The Annual AIDS Vigil Ceremony on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2017, brought together approximately sixty people to mark the occasion. Global News Atlantic featured the ceremony during their evening newscast.

Learning and Knowledge Exchange Activities

- Participated in an advisory committee for Sexual Health Nova Scotia's "AFFIRMATIVE Project" to offer insight on HIV for the project's content.
- Attended a Peer Support Community Engagement Session coordinated by Mental Health Innovations as they were looking for input from community stakeholders to further develop a province-wide peer support program.
- Interviewed by two Dalhousie Dental Hygiene students on ACNS's health promotion work so that the students could develop and present about our organization to other students.
- Interviewed for Positive Side magazine in which information on our services for newcomers to Canada was the focus.
- Participated in a two-day course entitled "Doing it Better" focusing on enhancing skills in providing sexual health information to PHAs.
- Received an informative talk from Khalid Janmohamed, a lawyer from HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, on HIV non-disclosure – a topic that has been increasingly important among PHAs.

Advocacy

Advocating for better policies that affect our clients continues to be a priority. This work is carried out by ongoing participation in seven community groups involving main issues impacting PHAs who access our services, including advocacy around: poverty, accessing to affordable housing, addiction and mental health services, and issues surrounding the Department of Community Services. The Child Support Claw-back Committee, raised awareness of the unfairness of the provincial government's current policies surrounding child support payments. This was achieved through obtaining signatures on a petition as well as a march. We were successful as the provincial government stated that the claw-back will be removed August of this year. This means single parents on Income Assistance will receive child support paid by the non-custodial parent, rather than it being confiscated by the provincial government, which was previously the case. Greater financial support leads to better outcomes and opportunities for children as well as parents involved.

Lori O'Brien

Program Coordinator

Report from the Gay Men's Health Program

Totally OUTright

In February 2017, ACNS completed a very successful four-day pilot run of our adaption of Totally OUTright. This was the first ever rural-inclusive, and province-wide, adaption of this highly-regarded Canadian program. The feedback from the pilot program participants and staff, including an external evaluation was very positive and informative. Based on that collective information a presentation on the lessons learned from that pilot was given by the Gay Men's Health Coordinator at the National Gay Men's Health Summit in Vancouver in November, and plans for Totally OUTright 2018 were well underway by year's end. Moving forward, this planned offering for May 2018 is a joint program with our PHAC Alliance funding partner the PEERS Alliance.

In preparation for the May 2018 program, early in the new calendar year two Peer Recruiters were hired for Nova Scotia (and one by the PEERS Alliance for PEI), and participant recruitment got underway. Also in preparation for the May program, additional funding was secured from three Community Health Board grants as well as a Nova Scotia Department of Community Services Sexual Violence Strategy grant. These additional monies were to further expand the number of Nova Scotia participants we could bring in from across the province for the program, and also allowed the addition of a fifth day to the program schedule. For more on ACNS' Totally OUTright program, go to: acns.ns.ca/progs-services/totally-outright

PrEP

Major developments regarding Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), for HIV prevention continue to be made. In the summer of 2017 the patent on Truvada expired – the very expensive, but only approved medication. That opened up the door to the quick approval of four generic equivalents in Canada. The price of those generics varies across the country, but in Halifax the generic price is about \$500/month. Truvada is \$1000/month; however, a mail-order pharmacy in Toronto can provide a generic PrEP for \$250/month. As well by late November the long-awaited recommended Canadian guidelines regarding PrEP, along with a non-occupational Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), were finally released providing a clear research overview, along with clear science-based protocols, and recommendations for key at-risk populations.

With these ongoing developments, and ongoing requests for information, ACNS organized a public PrEP information session in January at the Halifax Central Public Library. This two-hour event was also live-streamed to YouTube for access across the Atlantic region. That session was very well attended and received. The video of the 2-hour event can be viewed on the ACNS PrEP web page, along with updates on the various PrEP information pieces as that information becomes available.

ACNS continues to take part in the Nova Scotia PrEP Working Group, primarily as an information broker. The group is working to overcome obstacles to accessing PrEP in Nova Scotia. Other than the library event, which was a joint project with the Working Group, and continuing to provide information about PrEP in various formats, ACNS is also part of plans to do a physician survey of family doctors across Nova Scotia to assess their knowledge of PrEP and related issues. Some other members of the Working Group are lobbying government to get PrEP on the Nova Scotia formulary, and others have branched off to start organizing for more public forms of activism surrounding PrEP access that are expected to go public this summer at Halifax Pride. For details and updates on PrEP including the library event video, see the ACNS web page at: acns.ns.ca/info-resources/prep.html

Information and Training

ACNS organized other informational and trainings including hosting Khalid Janmohamed from the HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario who presented on Criminalization of HIV Non-Disclosure. ACNS, PEERS Alliance, and sixteen other service providers, were provided training on trauma-informed care by Dale Gruchy and Associates Consulting. ACNS has also partnered with CATIE to bring a blended-learning program to Nova Scotia.

Consultation on National Materials Development

ACNS participated in providing feedback on the development of two CATIE produced informational items this past year: updated external and internal condom information inserts; and a newly created information pamphlet about PrEP for gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM).

New Duties

With the reorganizing of how several pieces of work were to be done in the aftermath of not getting the long-delayed second PHAC federal grant in October, the GMH Coordinator has been assisting with some aspects of the People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) program planning. To date this has included general advice and direction on the "Working with Vulnerable Populations" component of the work, referring advisory panel members, organizing March's trauma-informed staff training, etc. The GMH Coordinator has also taken over responsibility for producing the ACNS quarterly newsletter.

Chris Aucoin

Gay Men's Health Coordinator

Report from Operations

The only constant in AIDS work is change.

In my last report, I spoke of "...some mild turbulence"; unbeknownst to us at the time, it was about to result in a scene from Shakespeare's, *The Tempest*. The 2017-2018 fiscal year saw unprecedented change as a result of the catastrophic loss of funding through the Public Health Agency of Canada. We have experienced changes in funding strategies several times in the past. In my 24 years of employment here, the funding process has always been one that is transparent and we have always been made aware of changes well ahead of time so that we could adjust accordingly. Our experience in this year is unparalleled. We will survive.

Having maintained a strong financial position in the past, it was through that and through strong fiscal management that we were able to sustain our efforts to the end of the fiscal year. We cut all unnecessary spending, combined staff roles and made concerted efforts to maximize our existing resources. We have signed an agreement to move to a new space in our current building which not only reduced our rent in the last fiscal quarter but will result in over \$23,000 per year in savings in the future. We are also carrying a decent investment into the new fiscal year.

We continue to maintain solid working relationships with governments and other funders with an eye to developing new ones. We are refreshing our fund development efforts. Financial management will continue to be a concentration. We are tough, resilient and resourceful. We have experienced new opportunities coming as a result of others ending. One of our greatest resources is our volunteer base. Our achievements come as a direct result of their perseverance. Their contributions of time, energy and dedication play a significant role in keeping ACNS afloat. We are grateful and thank them for their dedication to making a difference in the lives of those we serve.

We have long held an excellent working relationship with Jain & Company, Chartered Professional Accountants. On January 1, 2018, Jain & Company joined with Collins Barrow Nova Scotia, the province's largest, locally-owned accounting firm. We recognize their expertise and commitment to assisting charitable organizations and look forward to working with Collins Barrow into the future. Our audit this year was conducted by Jessica Bulmer. We greatly appreciate her hard work.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, or the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."
~ Charles Darwin.

Despite uncertainty, we remain steadfast as we strive to create greater security. From the beginning in the early 1980's, we experienced change; we responded, we adapted and we survived. We are responding. We are adapting.

We will survive.

Ned MacInnis

Program Support

Report from Fund Development

In the fiscal year of 2017-2018, ACNS held four special event fund raising activities. It was the first year where a reduced number of fundraising events was introduced to ensure a more focused approach to fundraising. Here are some of the highlights from the past fiscal year.

The Scotiabank AIDS Walk was held on September 24, 2017 on the Halifax Central Commons at the Pavilion. The event brought over 100 people together for an afternoon of fun. Led by the Canadian AIDS Society (CAS), the Scotiabank AIDS Walk is a peer-to-peer fundraiser where individuals and teams raise money through pledges. Early in 2018 Scotiabank decided not to renew its national title sponsorship with CAS. We extend our thanks to Scotiabank for its years of support and for the tireless work of the Scotiabank employees who volunteered their time to organize and host the Walk event.

A plan needed to be made to replace the AIDS Walk and so the Red Ribbon Rally was born. This event will be similar to the Walk in that it will be a pledged event for individuals and teams to raise money using an online portal. The RRR will include a human Red Ribbon on the hills of the Urban Roots Farm. Watch for details as they unfold.

Gross income for the 2017 Scotiabank AIDS Walk was \$28,562 with expenses of \$3,212 for a net of \$25,350.

Scotiabank Brunch with Neville & David 2017, in its 3rd year edition was a very successful event with a great turnout. It was also the first year for Scotiabank to own the title sponsorship which contributed ultimately to an increase in the revenues. As a novelty for 2017 edition, a silent auction was introduced with approximately thirty items. As always, the Brunch was very popular and was fun to attend. Neville MacKay and David Macpherson always thrill their audience. They make you feel welcomed, they make you laugh and they make you feel part of their family.

Gross income for the 2017 Brunch with Neville and David was \$20,247 with expenses of \$4,000 for a net of \$16,245.

The calendar year ended with the Krispy Kreme Christmas campaign. Doughnut sales opened on November 16 and the orders were available for pick-up on December 20. The campaign fell short of expectations but approximately 500 dozen doughnuts were sold in pre-orders and on-the-day purchases from a booth in Scotia Square Mall.

Gross income for the 2017 Krispy Kreme Christmas Campaign was \$7,520 with expenses of \$3,617 for a net of \$3,903.

The BMO Bid for Life Dinner & Auction was held on March 24, 2018 at the Atlantica Hotel. The event was a success, with a new theme and new entertainment. Ted Morris, a well-known Toronto based stand-up comedian hosted the evening and also performed a comedy set. The BMO Bid for Life is the oldest and most prestigious of our fundraising events and in 2018, we breathed new life into the event with more games of chance – including balloon popping fun – along with the silent and live auctions. The event did not meet revenue goals. Table and ticket sales were lower than expected and due to having fewer people at the event, the night-of revenues were also lower than expectation. We must say, however, that those people who attended were very generous with their participation and had a wonderful time popping balloons, winning prizes and bidding on auction items.

Our thanks go to Bank of Montreal for their continued support as the title sponsor and to the BMO volunteers who make the night a great success.

Gross revenue for the 2018 BMO Bid for Life Dinner & Auction was \$24,433 with expenses of \$7,162 for a net of \$17,271.

Elena Fodor
Fund Development

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
Human Resources & Skills Development Canada

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Event Sponsors



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Ian McKinnon	Board Member

Our Staff (June 2018)

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

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