



HIV COMMUNITY LINK
(prevention + support + advocacy)

ANNUAL REPORT

2015/2016





Who

HIV Community Link's mission is to ensure wellness for individuals and communities affected by HIV and Hepatitis C through prevention, education and support. We work with individuals and communities using a harm reduction approach to reduce stigma and discrimination, empowering choices, engaging communities and ending transmission.

What

- Almost 10,000 people reached in 2015-2016
- 101,247 safer sex supplies and over 230,000 safer injection supplies distributed
- Over 2,200 hours of counselling and support
- 2,689 hours of volunteering efforts

When

2015-2016

Where:

Calgary, Medicine Hat, Brooks

Why

- More than 6,500 Albertans have been diagnosed with HIV
- Alberta has the third highest rate of new HIV diagnoses in Canada
- An estimated 71,500 Canadians were living with HIV at the end of 2014
- 1 in 5 people living with HIV in Canada are unaware of their status

A Word

Addressing the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and preventing transmission is no small goal. As we have learned from the changes that have occurred, it requires passion, diligence, innovation and perseverance.

This year began with a fresh perspective as HIV Community Link welcomed the leadership of our new Executive Director Leslie Hill, who joined the team in August 2015. Inspired by the movement that has occurred in HIV and the power of its collective voice, Leslie has worked with the team and the Board of Directors to revision and renew our strategy. This new strategy will guide the direction of our organization until 2020, focusing on increased engagement with the communities we serve, building our community partnerships and on our role as thought leaders.

Building on our 33 year legacy, HIV Community Link takes a welcoming, non-judgmental approach, grounded in evidence and innovation to respond to the shifting needs of our communities. The roots of our work come from HIV Community Link's harm reduction philosophy. Harm reduction is grounded in the dignity, compassion, and respect, regardless of circumstance or condition. It provides people with the information they need to make informed choices. This year, our approach positioned us to mobilize together with our partner organizations to provide provincial leadership to the fentanyl overdose crisis response in Alberta. Through the introduction of our agency's Opiate Overdose Prevention program we delivered services to individuals at risk of overdose. We also focused on building the capacity of Alberta Health Services and other service providers to deliver training across the province.

There is much to celebrate at HIV Community Link! In 2015-16 we reached almost 10,000 people through our prevention, education, and support programs. We have grown our team and further engaged with the community, increasing our presence and building stronger partnerships. We have built



relationships with the new government to help them to understand the importance of our work. We have continued tailoring our programs to prevent and reduce harm through evidence-based and promising practices in Calgary, Brooks and Medicine Hat. HIV Community Link hosted the In the Know: Splash of Red and the Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life to raise awareness and funds for our work. These events benefited from provincial ministers, MLAs and community leaders who are ending the stigma associated with HIV.

Congratulations to the staff and to all the volunteers for making 2015-1016 a successful year for HIV Community Link. Thank you to all the funders, donors and sponsors on behalf of all those who benefit from your caring!

There is so much to look forward to as we see increasing advances in biomedical technologies, new and innovative practices in prevention and support, and the continued engagement of the communities we serve.

Join us. Together we can empower choices, engage communities and end transmission!

Leslie Hill
Executive Director

Mike Peters
Board Chair

HIV Support Services

Our Calgary, Medicine Hat and Brooks teams have worked tirelessly over the past year to bring holistic, client-led support services to people living with HIV and hepatitis C. We have continued in our efforts to reduce social isolation, increase access to community supports, and increase the capacity of people living with HIV to manage their own health and wellness.

Calgary

In 2015-2016, our HIV Support Services team helped 220 unique individuals through our counselling, case management and drop in programs. These supports are essential to helping our clients to achieve their goals around their wellness, including physical and mental health, building natural social supports and addressing basic needs, along with providing general information to people living with or affected by HIV and hepatitis C. We have maintained connections with vital partners

including the Southern Alberta Clinic, Safeworks, the SHARP Foundation and CUPS in an effort to extend our services into the community. During the past year, our team provided 475 hours of individual face-to-face case management support. In addition, we provide harm reduction supplies to clients and the general public. During the past year, at our Calgary location, we provided 88,681 condoms and 546 needles and other safer injection supplies to support the prevention of HIV and hepatitis C transmission. We have reached many individuals living with HIV and hepatitis C through our counselling and nutritional programs.

531 grocery bags
52 bottles of vitamins
1,306 transit tickets

24 Friday Lunches
9 Cooking with Coral sessions
21 Coffee Connections

Medicine Hat

In 2015-2016, we provided face-to-face in-person support through counselling, outreach and drop in support at the Medicine Hat Cares Centre, and distribution of safer injection supplies. Our supportive counselling and case management offers clients who are at risk of or living with HIV one-on-one support to address addictions, and mental, physical, and emotional health concerns.

We also offer practical supports such as the provision of harm reduction supplies, nutritional support, and referrals to other community agencies. We provide harm reduction supplies to clients and the general public. Our nutritional program offers access to nutritious food through the provision of grocery bags, lunch items, and referrals to the local food bank.

230,000 safer injection
supplies

Improved access to
community programs for 831
people who use drugs

Brooks

In Brooks, HIV Community Link has offered prevention and education services focused on a variety of topics including HIV, hepatitis C, harm reduction, stigma and discrimination. We have built connections



with youth and immigrant serving organizations, focusing on community development and establishing a community advisory committee intended to help us with direction and feedback. Additionally, we have begun providing case management support and working with multiple service providers in the area to create linkages to those who need our services.

Overdose Prevention

This year, we worked with partners to lead the provincial response to the fentanyl overdose crisis, introducing our

Opiate Overdose Prevention program in Medicine Hat and Brooks. This program provides overdose prevention training to those who use opiates and distributes life-saving naloxone kits. The program also trains service providers to build their capacity to prevent overdose with their clients, and has worked closely with Alberta Health Services to ensure their teams have the knowledge to provide training and distribute kits effectively. In 9 months, **the program has trained 195 people and distributed 63 Naloxone kits.** To date, we have had reports of three overdose reversals in the program.

An HIV Story: “It’s everyone’s disease”

Ann found out she was HIV positive in 2011. It took years to figure out what was wrong, because she wasn’t considered to be in a high risk group. A couple of months later, she came to HIV Community Link. “When I got here I was treated very well, there was not judgement, no stigma”, says Ann.

Before living on the street, Ann had worked in an office for years. “I was on the street from 2004 to 2008. I can understand now how it happens. It’s very easy. They say one paycheck away is what a lot of people are at right now from living on the street,” says Ann, who is happy she doesn’t have to be worried about her basic needs anymore. She adds that HIV Community Link helped her with her Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and housing applications. But the most important part, she says, is “coming and meeting people, people that you didn’t have to be afraid to say you are HIV positive. I use the many services offered at HIVCL for people living with HIV including counselling, massage, acupuncture, food hampers, Friday lunches, laundry machines and attending conferences. This helps people to live with their condition and cope with it,” shares Ann, adding that it’s really important to educate health professionals so everybody gets tested, not just those who are considered to be at a greater risk. “HIV is everyone’s disease. Please help in the education, research, and prevention of HIV,” Ann concludes.



I am a 51 year old female and for eight long years of undergoing medical tests to diagnose my deteriorating health I asked my doctor for an HIV test. I had no idea I had HIV. I am HIV positive. At that point I was given the phone number to HIV Community Link. When I called the agency everyone there was supporting and respectful, non-judgemental and always listening with a kind ear. Please help in the education, research, and prevention of HIV.



Shift uses a harm reduction and rights based approach to support adults currently or previously involved in sex work.

Shift

Shift uses a harm reduction and rights based approach to support adults currently or previously involved in sex work. Shift employs a case management model to tailor support to the individualized needs of our clients. We serve women, men and trans-identified adults who work in indoor and outdoor sex work. Some clients may require support in obtaining basic needs, while others need support in the form of counselling, employment and life skills education.

This year, 129 unique registered clients accessed Shift for case management support, including 27 new clients. An exciting new addition to the team, the Outreach and Engagement Coordinator builds and maintains relationships with community agencies and conducts outreach on the street and in shelters. The Coordinator provides basic needs items, as well as food and safer sex supplies to Calgary's most vulnerable populations while connecting them with the appropriate resources in the community. This has enhanced Shift's presence in the community and increased our contacts with vulnerable individuals and sex workers. Shift continues to provide "Shifting Perspectives", a three-hour workshop for social service and health providers, community agencies, universities and the general public.

In 2016, Shift will be focused on launching a volunteer outreach program, continuing to provide high quality case management for clients, contributing to sex worker rights advocacy efforts on a local, provincial and national scale and building capacity as a leader for sex work-related information and education.

- 129 unique registered clients
- 86.9% women, 7.8% men, 5.4% transgender
- 33.3% identify as Indigenous, (First Nations, Inuit or Métis)
- 2,830 total contacts with high-risk individuals
- 656 counselling hours provided to clients
- 244 referrals to community agencies, programs, and partners
- 36,500 safer sex supplies distributed

Meet Marie

Marie is enrolled in Business Administration. She has been working in the sex industry for three years. "I started doing sex work when I was 18. It's completely my choice. It's your body, you should be able to do what you want with it, and you should have the choice to be who you want to be," shares Marie, adding that she found out about Shift when she first started working with an escort agency. She says it felt really good to receive non-judgmental support from Shift. "I get to discuss safety measures; I get to be up-to-date on different health things, on contraception and STIs. Shift really helps me

think clearly, makes sure I make good choices and that I keep my wellbeing. It's good to be able to talk to someone about the things I'm going through and have someone understand". Marie wants to start her own escort agency and mentor other women who are starting sex work. She thinks that agencies like HIV Community Link and programs like Shift should be a "requirement" so that the community can support the safety and inclusion of sex workers. "I feel like they do such a big I want to say benefit, to people in the sex industry because the chance to really go over things and get a neutral point of view helps so much".

Prevention and Education

The success of the Prevention and Education team lies in its population specific education, prevention, capacity building and community development programs. Our Capacity Building program offered 31 trainings to 751 unique allied professionals. The trainings focus on building the knowledge and gaining the tools needed to work effectively and ethically with people living with or at risk of HIV.

In the last year, an additional key focus for the Prevention and Education team was policy and advocacy work to build awareness of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a groundbreaking HIV prevention technology. In late February, Health Canada approved Truvada for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). PrEP is one option in a range of ways to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. In this period, we have advocated for PrEP access with community partners, decision makers and elected officials; engaged doctors and other healthcare providers to increase awareness and build a referral network for PrEP access in Calgary; worked one on one with individuals to connect with prescribing doctors and navigate insurance coverage; and discussed advances in PrEP in mainstream media.

HEAT

The HEAT program's focus remains on Gay, Bi and MSM (men who have sex with men) sexual health and wellness, HIV and STI information and testing and resources in the community through a variety of community engagement strategies. These include both online and in-person outreach strategies through social media presence and partnership with the Safeworks team and local bars and businesses to promote testing, and to offer information, resources and safer sex supplies to the community.

•171 online outreach sessions
•170 in-person outreach/education sessions
•525 referrals to services

Additionally, we have engaged in collaborative work to conduct research into MSM health and wellness through the Calgary Men's Wellness Initiative, with Alberta Health Services as Community Co-chair to AHS Gender Advisory Group, LGBTQ* lens with Calgary Domestic Violence Collective and Calgary Police Service Gender and Sexual Diversity Advisory Board.

We are very excited that the HEAT program was recognized nationally in CATIE's Prevention in Focus magazine this year and was an invited panelist at their national forum on HIV speaking to MSM health.

Strong Voices

The Strong Voices program prevents and reduces HIV-related harms by providing diverse Indigenous populations access to a continuum of healing practices in a timely, holistic, and culturally relevant manner. Program participants' movement along the path of well-being is identified through indicators including cultural identity and access to traditional practice. Since its beginnings, Strong Voices has been guided and led by and for the local community through a dedicated and passionate volunteer Advisory Committee.

In 2015-2016, the Strong Voices Program focused on client-centered support and outreach-based case management. Strong Voices worked with 31 clients this year, addressing individualized needs such as crisis support, housing, employment, access to treatment and health services, and interpersonal relationships.

During this period, the Strong Voices program partnered with Fresh Start Recovery Centre and the Salvation Army's Centre of Hope to offer clients the opportunity to participate in Sweatlodge Ceremonies. As well, Strong Voices continues to build new partnerships and raise awareness through special events and collaborations including the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, the Alberta Aboriginal HIV Strategy, the National Addictions Awareness Week Calgary Wellness Walk and the Calgary Urban Indigenous Peoples Health Domain.

“Hearing from someone who has lived through these experiences is more touching and beneficial than all the text books in the world.”

VIP

In 2015-2016, the VIP program focused on outreach, mobile case management, street-level education, support and crisis counselling and the provision of harm reduction tools. Many of the clients told us that they hadn't ever had anybody speak to them about HIV, hepatitis C, or sexuality in a matter-of-fact, sex-positive way.

The greatest strength of the VIP program is the strong relationships with service providers and clients that we have cultivated over the years. We have built strong working relationships with CUPS, the Calgary Remand Centre, Sunrise Community Link, and the Alex Youth Health Centre. An exciting new initiative this year was the opportunity for VIP to work with the Calgary Homeless Foundation's Youth Advisory Table to develop social marketing materials encouraging HIV and STI testing among teens and young adults in Calgary.

- 2099 contacts served
- 335 counselling hours
- 108 outreach sessions
- 38 HIV 101 Sessions

“Every time the VIP Worker comes to chat with us, the requests for testing are increasing. The best part is promoting healthy and safer people and practice. Everyone wins.”
(Calgary Remand Centre Staff)



African Communities Program

In 2015-2016, the African Communities Program (ACP) had **1,606 contacts among endemic African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) community members**. We delivered a total of 34 training and education sessions to **382 unique individuals** at venues including immigrant service organizations, community meeting places such as barbershops and private business, and community organizations such as cultural associations and churches. Seven new partnerships for education and outreach were developed in this period, including three faith-based organizations and four private venues/businesses serving African community members. This year the ACP was invited to act as a regional hub for the Canadian HIV/AIDS Black, African and Caribbean Network (CHABAC), a national network of organizations, individuals and other stakeholders who are dedicated to responding to issues related to HIV and AIDS in Canada's ACB communities.

Brothers Chats:

The African Communities Program began these educational forums in 2011 at Brothers Kutz, a popular ACB barbershop, when the owner of the barbershop agreed to host an informal HIV education session at his shop. Brothers Chats have become the buzz in African men's circles and have since spread to four new African barbershops. This method has proven so successful that African Communities programs in other cities have adopted it as well.

Volunteers

This past year, we benefited from over 2,698 hours of volunteering efforts from 284 gracious volunteers.

HIV Community Link has the support of many enthusiastic volunteers. Every year there are exciting new opportunities to become involved in our Board of Directors, prevention and education work, support services and fundraising events. This past year, we benefited from over 2689 hours of volunteer efforts from 284 gracious volunteers.

We are very fortunate to have the volunteer support of many individuals living with HIV. Through our embracing of the Greater and Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA/MIPA) principles, we engage people living with HIV in governance, program development and service delivery as speakers, board and advisory committee members and through outreach and peer support opportunities.

HIV Community Link is thankful to have a kind and active group of volunteers, and is always happy to grow the team!

Gerald has been actively volunteering with our organization for over three years, helping out in several capacities. He is always looking for ways to get involved and help our organization. Gerald frequently supports at our Volunteer Activity Nights, has been a great contribution to our annual AIDS Walk, casinos and our annual Splash of Red event. He is a cherished friend in our office with staff and clients. "I just like to step in whenever and wherever I am needed. I just like to help out as it does also give me a better understanding and workable knowledge of helping other people that need support", says Gerald. Thank you, Gerald!



Events

This past year, the annual Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life drew over 240 excited participants to Eau Claire Plaza. An afternoon of fun, entertainment and community spirit made it memorable for all those involved. Our walkers helped raise \$98,109 for our important programs that support people living with or affected by HIV.

Another successful awareness event organized by HIV Community Link in 2015 was the 3rd Annual fundraising benefit and art auction, In the Know: Splash of Red. This event gathered trendsetters, influencers and thought leaders wanting to reduce the stigma associated with HIV. We raised \$57,200 to support programming in Calgary, Medicine Hat and Brooks.

Fundraising events hosted on our behalf are unique and hugely impactful to the organization. Choosing HIV Community Link as a charity of choice for your event, activity or fundraiser means you are a champion in the community and, while having fun, you are helping support those living with or at risk for HIV. Thank you to all who held or participated in third party events for the HIV Community Link this year.



Brian Malkinson, MLA for Calgary-Currie, Stephanie McLean, Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women, Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood, and Michael Peters, HIV Community Link Board Chair at the 2015 Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life

In the Media

In 2015-2016, HIV Community Link had an active presence in the media with its events and because of our expertise and leadership in the non-profit sector, locally and provincially. We have been featured in the major newspapers and television to comment on HIV, hepatitis C, overdose prevention and sex worker issues. Media interviews have helped with our advocacy and education role in the community.

Website: 46,980 page views
Facebook: 122,690 page views
Twitter: 50,400 page views

New cases of HIV are rising in Alberta, but advocates believe there are many others with the disease who don't know they have it. "We know, according to data, 25 per cent of people living with HIV do not know their status," said Joshua McLeod, Support Services Team Leader for HIV Community Link in Calgary. What that means for us is that regular access to testing and regular testing for people is very, very important.

Global News, November 17, 2015

“There will come a day when it will be my turn to give back”

We partner with our community to develop a caring and compassionate society.

Recognized as one of the top 10 influential LGBTQ figures in Alberta, Dion Belanger is married and a proud father of a 24 year old son who just graduated university. He was named Mr. Gay Calgary in 1999, and has been volunteering and fundraising for local charities for over 25 years.

Coming from an Indigenous background, Dion has seen the impacts of the legacy of colonization and intergenerational trauma, and recognizes the need for supports for those who are vulnerable. Originally from Saskatchewan, he moved to Calgary with his family and quickly became involved in community work. He has been on his own since he was 16.

Dion has been organizing a World AIDS Day fundraiser on behalf of HIV Community Link for eight years with proceeds going to our nutritional programs. “I had friends that were HIV positive and they needed help, needed food. When I was traveling I was collecting soaps and shampoos to put in the big boxes to give away. It’s all about giving back,” shares Dion. He remembers how important it was to get a helping hand when he needed it. “I was a child. It was Christmas Eve; there was a knock on the door, there was a hamper and Christmas presents, and I went ‘there will come a day when it will be my turn to give back,’” adds Dion.

Coming from humble beginnings, Dion has worked hard to build his career. “My story is not the typical story. I’ve lived a life that pushes me to where I am today. I’m not educated, I don’t even have a high school diploma, and for me being a plant manager and running a \$30 million dollar business with very little education, I think I’ve done pretty well,” says



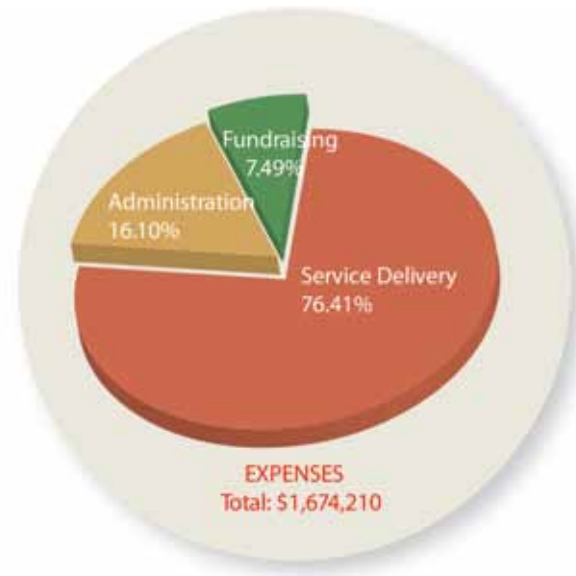
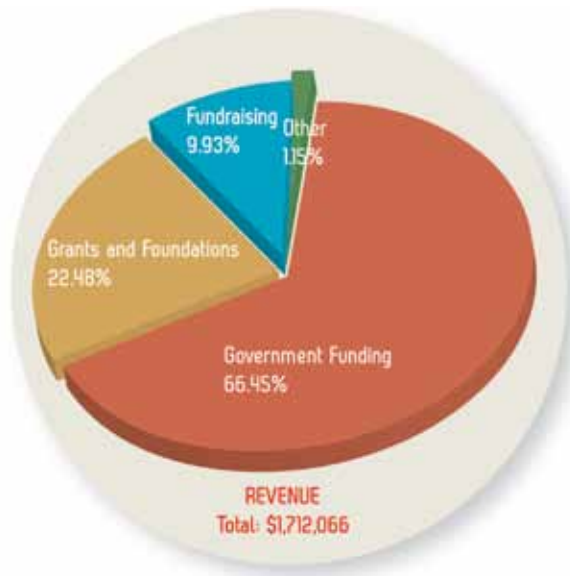
Dion at one of the fundraisers organized on behalf of HIV Community Link

Dion, who promises to continue to help and be involved in the community.

His work in the community has been focused on fundraising for charities. The Imperial Sovereign Court of the Chinook Arch, where he has served as an Emperor three times, has raised \$45,000 for charities in the last year. Dion says that HIV Community Link is one of the charities that he helps because “the money is going to a good use and a good cause, and until we find a cure for HIV there are people living with it daily and they need to be taken care of. I had a partner that passed away that was HIV positive for 20 years. It’s close to me, I’ve lost friends. There are a lot of things that bring me back to this. I’m not positive myself, but I’ve known so many people that are that it’s time to help and give back,” he says.



Financial Results



Thank You to Our Funders

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Our Vision:

Empowering choices. Engaging communities. Ending transmission.

Our Mission:

Wellness for individuals and communities affected by HIV and Hepatitis C through education, prevention and support.

HIV Community Link

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