
Canadian AIDS Society

2012-13 ANNUAL REPORT

Governance

The Canadian AIDS Society is governed by a Board of Directors made up of thirteen individuals, representing people living with HIV/AIDS and directors representing AIDS Service Organizations. There are also two Director at Large seats and a Youth Director's position, for a HIV positive youth representative.

Throughout the year the Board meets by teleconference and for two face to face meetings. During these meetings, the Board makes important decisions about the direction of the Canadian AIDS Society and works in subcommittee to address specific issues impacting the Board.

The Membership and Communication Committee has had the difficult task of reviewing the by-laws and objects of incorporation to ensure that the Society continues to operate in a legal and transparent way. The shift to an integrated approach from our funders, and members, has called for this review, along with the need to ensure that the bylaws are meeting federal standards, with compliance required by October 2014. This committee also looks after new membership applications, ensuring that new members are ready to be presented at the upcoming Annual General Meeting.

The HIV Committee is made up of all directors who represent people living with HIV/AIDS. Throughout the year this committee works on the issues raised at the People Living with HIV/AIDS Forum during the open spaces session. These are priority issues raised by people living with HIV that guide the work of the entire Society. This committee is also responsible for the planning of the annual People Living with HIV/AIDS Forum, a part of our Annual General Meeting where people living with HIV/AIDS meet to discuss issues that have a national impact for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Planning and Priority Committee acts in concert with the HIV Committee to plan the Annual General Meeting. Working through the scholarship process, planning the annual agenda and hosting the open spaces session for the Annual General Meeting are all a part of the work of this very busy committee.

The Executive Committee is made up of the Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Board with the CEO as an *ex officio* member. Beyond setting the agenda for the work of the board, this committee examines emerging issues and sets the Society's response to these issues.

The Public Policy Engagement Committee of the Board faces the daily challenge of determining how to best represent the members of the Canadian AIDS Society on specific policy issues. The priority for this committee is the community funding allocated through the Federal Government and changes to service delivery models being proposed by this major funder of the community-based AIDS movement. They also provided guidance on the issues of the 5 year deferral for gay men to give blood and the payment of donors for blood plasma.

Annually, the Canadian AIDS Society host the People Living with HIV/AIDS Forum and Annual General Meeting. This is the most important part of our governance - as it is a gathering of our members, with the opportunities to examine the work carried out in the past year, set priorities for the coming year and provide an opportunity to review the operations and activities of CAS.

Government Relations

Government relations is one of the most important and nebulous functions of the Canadian AIDS Society. As the voice of the community-based AIDS movement at the national level, the Canadian AIDS Society researches and responds to a myriad of issues throughout the year.

Yet we are constantly aware that the most significant issue affecting our member groups, and the AIDS movement in general, are the changes coming to us through our common funder - the Public Health Agency of Canada. At the Canadian AIDS Society we never let an opportunity pass to present ourselves as champions of the Federal Initiative, ensuring that the principles set out in the Federal Initiative are adhered to through this time of change. This means ensuring that the HIV/AIDS model of community involvement and leadership is honoured. This means protecting the funding committed to HIV and AIDS through the Federal Initiative. Most of all this means this means protecting the values and principles that have been taught to us by our friends and leaders who are no longer with us. This means never forgetting.

The Canadian AIDS Society has learned to work in this complex environment through its many years of advocacy at the national level. With a clear message from our members, our job is to protect the existing funding, ensuring that community-based organizations are supported through adequate and timely funding processes. This is a consistent message that is delivered through a number of communication vehicles throughout the year, along with daily efforts to build relationships in the Minister of Health's office, senior officials at the Public Health Agency of Canada and other related government departments.

So much of this work is developing personal relationships through a variety of venues. The CEO of the Canadian AIDS Society is a respected member of the Government Relations community in Ottawa, with friends in every political party, and a common message being delivered to all she meets - don't touch the community AIDS funding!

The Canadian AIDS Society hosts two significant events each year that allow us to deliver this message to diverse and influential officials: the Red Ribbon on the Hill Event and the annual World AIDS Day Gala.

Red Ribbon on the Hill

For six years now, CAS has been working with elected officials in Ottawa to host a Red Ribbon event, where Members of Parliament and Senators are invited to

meet with the CEO and Chair for a photo opportunity and to share a few words about what is going on in communities across Canada with respect to HIV and AIDS. Over the years we have developed good relationships with many elected officials who come back year after year for their red ribbon and a chat. So much so that now we find ourselves having to continue conversations throughout the year, as there are so many people in attendance at this event. This all party event gives the Canadian AIDS Society the opportunity to meet with elected officials and senators from across Canada and discuss issues of importance to responding to HIV and AIDS in our communities.

Gala 2012

Since its inception the Gala has been a sell-out every year in Ottawa and with each passing year, it has gained the reputation as an event to attend among politicians and their followers. In 2012 we were honoured to have the Minister of Health, Leona Aglukkaq offer opening words. Assistant Deputy Minister Dr. Rainer Engelhart was also in attendance for the entire event, along with many members of parliament. This year we were honoured to be able to count among our attendees 25 winners of the Queen's Jubilee Award for excellence in service of the community. The awards were given out at the Gala by Colin Carrie, Member of Parliament for Oshawa and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Member Engagement

Throughout all of its work in Government Relations, CAS remains aware of the need to ensure that members are informed and engaged in these discussions. Throughout the year, the CEO and Board have made it a priority to attend regional meetings, and hold calls with our members to share information about what we have learned and where we have influenced the process. We are aware that many of our members have relationships with their own elected leaders and we work with these members to inform and build influence where possible.

National advocacy regarding funding issues

Not all of the work of the CEO is done in formal dress. Day to day the message of protecting the community AIDS funding is delivered in a variety of forums. Through meetings with senior public health officials, we have been able to ensure that the community-based funding is not lost through the transformation process. More importantly, we are working to ensure that the Federal Government upholds its entire commitment to the AIDS Strategy, particularly during this time of change and upheaval. We have asked for clauses to protect community-based groups and their funding as the Public Health Agency of Canada works to change its funding structure and demanded a revised time frame that would allow organizations and regions to prepare for the upcoming changes.

Public Awareness

Throughout the year the Canadian AIDS Society seeks to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS in Canada through several public events.

World AIDS Day

Each year for World AIDS Day the Canadian AIDS Society selects a national theme and develops a print and social-media based campaign during the weeks leading up to December 01. This year the theme was Learn. Protect. Care. with an emphasis on reaching youth through FaceBook and Twitter. The print campaign featured a three-part poster, offering up the equation: Learn + Protect + Care = An AIDS Free Generation. Posters were distributed across Canada to over one thousand schools, colleges and universities, public health centres, and HIV/AIDS organizations. A contest for people to Tweet about the campaign or to Like us on Facebook brought hundreds of visitors to our pages.

Scotiabank AIDS Walk for Life

Every year CAS, in partnership with the AIDS Committee of Toronto and Positive Living BC brings together between 40-45 local walks as a national fundraising initiative that raises close to 2 million dollars for AIDS Service Organizations across the country. We have worked diligently to provide a simple format fundraiser that can be adapted for community purposes. In 2012 we had everything from a candlelit vigil to Zumba dancing in the street. National coordination of online giving platforms, web pages, print, media and social media all help to reduce the work involved for groups across Canada to host their own Walks.

Mother's Day

For the first time in 2012, the Canadian AIDS Society developed an awareness campaign around women and families - asking people to give 15 minutes to share a message of protection and love on Mother's Day. With an accompanying contest, participants were asked to deliver an awareness message to or from Mom with 15 words. We had entries from across the country.

AIDS 2012

The Canadian AIDS Society was selected to present the Canada Booth at the bi-annual International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2012). This year the conference was in Washington and once again the Canada Booth was a huge success. The booth was set up to resemble a class-room, with tables and a presentation theatre where Canadians were invited to present their research and other work. A video featuring a timeline of events in Canada over the 30 years of the AIDS epidemic played on video screens, while volunteers greeted international participants and shared resources from across Canada on a USB drive. A highlight at the booth was a visit by the Canadian Minister of Health and her delegation, where she chatted with passersby and met with volunteers working at the booth.

AIDS Golf 2012

Raising awareness in the community can sometimes involve a little fun - and this year's golf tournament involved a lot of fun as a diverse group of CAS supporters (including government officials, lobbyists and CAS supporters) came together for a day of fun in the sun and good eats to follow. Started as a third party fundraiser, this has become one of CAS' signature events, working with the tireless Andrew Horsefield, and his team of amazing hotels, this fund-raiser is building a network of allies in the business community.

Policy and Research

The Canadian AIDS Society has a small team of programs consultants working to address the many issues that intersect with HIV and AIDS - from evolving prevention resources, to understanding the impact of homophobia on policy decisions, this mighty group can take on any issue and often, they are asked to do just that. Witness the diversity of issues we have worked on in 2012.

Canadian Blood Services

The Canadian AIDS Society has been advocating for a change to the lifetime blood donation deferral policy for gay men, and over the past year have provided guidance through participation in a number of stakeholder meetings hosted by Canada Blood Services. Finally, after all the research was reviewed, Canada Blood Services agreed to put forward a 5 year deferral period, a move CAS saw as being in the right direction. In the fall of 2012 CAS lent its support to the Canada Blood Services Submission to Health Canada, asking for regulatory approval of the change. This was provided with the understanding that this is only a step in the right direction of moving towards behaviour based deferrals.

Gathering of Spirit: Women's Research Agenda

This research collaborative on women, trans people, and girls and HIV continues to work towards strengthening a coordinated approach to research with, for and about women, trans people, girls and HIV/AIDS in Canada by creating opportunities for a national dialogue among multiple and diverse stakeholders. Beginning the year with a meeting at CAHR 2012, efforts this year were focussed on the development of a consensus statement on research needs. Developed by a small working group, this statement will be presented at the 2013 ancillary event at the Canadian Association of HIV Researchers Conference for comment and revision. A revised version will be put forward for ratification by national HIV, girls, trans people and women's organizations.

GIPA Training Toolkits

In 2012 CAS released two new volumes in its highly successful GIPA Training Toolkit: One Foot Forward – One on Youth and the other on Treatment Options. The *Can we Talk, Treatment and Options, A New Dialogue* module was the subject of a national promotional campaign, as well as the theme for several presentations made at conferences for people living with HIV/AIDS.

One Foot Forward: HIV and Aging

Another in our highly successful series of GIPA Training Toolkits, this edition looks at Aging - from stay involved to making decisions about health and housing. Working with an advisory committee of people living with HIV/AIDS, this module examines some of the real concerns faced by people living with HIV and AIDS as they age.

HIV Transmission: Biological Factors of Risk Paper

There is no doubt about it, our understanding of risk has evolved a lot in the past five years. Hardened harm reduction advocates who never left home without a stock of condoms to hand out are talking about safe, unprotected sex again. And always there is caution, careful study of research findings, provisos, demands for more information on specific risk groups, but there is enough information to piece together a road map to understanding these changes, and the Canadian AIDS Society has done it with this carefully researched, reviewed and scrutinized paper.

These are the guidelines for the new age of AIDS. Educators and Counsellors have a quick reference to the most recent research and analysis provided by some of the top community workers in this field. Biological risk and risk reduction practices such as pre-exposure prophylaxis and the impact of viral load on transmission are examined in this paper.

Medical Marijuana

The year proved to be a busy one on this file, with new changes being proposed to the programs regulating medical marijuana access in Canada. The Canadian AIDS Society prepared a response to these proposed changes that was supported by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and HALCO.

The Canadian AIDS Society remains concerned about the barriers to access to cannabis for medical purposes for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHIV/AIDS) following the Ontario Court of Appeals decision to overturn a lower court decision in R v. Mernagh – a case that we were involved in.

Mabior and DC decisions

The Canadian AIDS Society acted as a co-intervenor in these Supreme Court of Canada cases. By adding the requirement of a low viral load to the use of condoms, the decisions in these cases have made things all the more complex for the lives of people living with HIV. The Canadian AIDS Society is committed to pursuing measures that will help define acceptable risk and remove the onus on people living with HIV/AIDS to act as the only responsible party in negotiating safe sex.

Trans Needs Assessment

This needs assessment was planned during 2012 to be released in 2013, it is currently undergoing ethics review. The complexity of issues facing trans people

and the narrow focus of this survey - looking at services offered by AIDS Service Organizations - made for a lot of work for the research team. Look forward to the delivery of this survey in 2013.

Harm Reduction in Rural Communities

Working with an advisory committee from across the country, we have planned the delivery of a special stream of presentations at the Alberta Harm Reduction Conference in May of 2013. Each of these workshops will be made available via teletraining as well.

Partnerships and Committees

With all of the experience of the community-based sector available through CAS, we are often asked to participate in various national committees for research and for policy issues of relevance to our membership. During 2012 we were active on a number of REACH committees – on Capacity Building, Aboriginal Health Program of Research and Aging. Our partnership with SRC brought Monique to Montreal where she presented on the research findings of a national attitudinal survey conducted by SRC and CANFAR. We are also involved in the National HIV and Housing Collaborative, where we are helping to lead a call for a national housing strategy.