

COURAGE ON THE MOVE

ANNUAL REPORT
2021-22



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

SERVING PERTH, HURON, LAMBTON, ELGIN, MIDDLESEX AND OXFORD COUNTIES

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) is community-inspired and dedicated to positively impacting the lives of individuals and diverse communities living with, at risk for, and affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.



With great respect, we acknowledge the regions we serve as the traditional territory of the Algonquin, Anishinaabe, Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, and Leni-Lunaape Peoples. The three First Nations communities closest in proximity to this agency are: Chippewa of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee-Delaware Nation. We are grateful to collaborate with Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge as we foster healing together.



CONTENTS

1	EXECUTIVE MESSAGE	01
2	HIV/HCV SUPPORT SERVICES	03
3	HARM REDUCTION	07
4	COMMUNITY RELATIONS & EDUCATION	11
5	FINANCIALS	15
6	THANK YOU	17

This annual report covers the activities of Regional HIV/AIDS Connection during the fiscal year of April 1, 2021—March 31, 2022.

COURAGE ON THE MOVE



RHAC's mission for fiscal 21/22 exemplified *courage on the move* in multiple ways. Our long sought-out effort to move from our 186 King Street location crystallized with RHAC partially moving in December 2021 to our new home at 602 Queens Avenue. This set the stage for *Carepoint* and *Counterpoint* programs to follow with a relocation plan approximately 6 months later. When fully completed, 602 Queens will offer the opportunity to deliver services in a truly integrated way as the anchor tenants—*London Cares* and *Sisters of St Joseph Café*—envision creating a community hub that offers a range of services to truly meet the complex needs of

individuals. Once completed, the Carepoint program at 446 York Street, while a work in progress, will provide a well-designed and modern service delivery space for those living with addiction and at risk of overdose, HIV/HCV and other health vulnerabilities. The new site will increase our capacity to offer vital wrap-around supports through the engagement of many community collaborators. These new locations represent a welcome and positive transition for staff and volunteers, while offering the opportunity to move in new and exciting directions as we work to address HIV/HCV prevention, provide support to diverse populations, and address the pervasive overdose crisis in London.

As the pandemic ebbed and flowed throughout this year, services at *John Gordon Home* continued without interruption as each resident received quality care and support in their individual journeys to better health. The HIV/HCV support department found ways to connect and serve individuals throughout the

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE

pandemic with a key goal to reduce isolation. Many expressed appreciation for our outreach efforts and opportunities for social connection. Community Relations continued to successfully source grants to help RHAC meet its mission objectives during a time when traditional fund development approaches were limited by the realities of the pandemic. Valued volunteers engaged with RHAC through remote strategies to support our harm reduction programming. The Education team remained focused on reaching priority populations at risk for HIV across our region with an eye toward launching two new 5-year prevention initiatives funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

A vital piece of work for RHAC this year involved our commitment to ensure we create a workforce that truly reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. RHAC's Board of Directors fully embraced this effort and, over the course of winter and spring 2022, we utilized the skills of a consulting partnership to complete an assessment of our workforce composition and review our policies and practices. The final report, soon to be available on our website, offers a host of recommendations to advance our efforts to create a more welcoming space for

members of Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) communities. We are fully committed to actioning these recommendations and will report on our progress as we move forward.

A commitment to serving diverse communities and creating welcoming spaces for all who need us is central to our mission. With the talented RHAC team and the committed Board of Directors, we are on the move to strengthen our impact across our region.

Thank you for being there with us!



**Brian
Lester**
Executive
Director



**Chris
Moss**
Board
Chair

HIV/HCV SUPPORT SERVICES



JGH: The Home with a Heart

This year, 17 residents received care at RHAC's supportive housing program, *John Gordon Home* (JGH). For the second year in a row, we successfully transitioned a resident to *Cheshire Independent Living Services*. Residents were also able to receive their COVID-19 vaccines and boosters at our on-site clinics throughout the year.



9,000+ home-made meals served at JGH

Feeding the Needs of Clients

RHAC continued to address food security needs with support from the *London Community Foundation*. This year, our *Country Cupboard* food bank was accessed 682 times! We also hand-delivered our annual Holiday Client Dinner, gifting 120 meals and 20 toys for children among clients living with and affected by HIV. JGH's Nutrition Services Coordinator, Mary Mann-McCavitt proudly released *Home Cooked*, a cookbook containing residents' favourite recipes, food security resources, and nutritional information. Staff also served 150 lunches and provided free HIV testing to clients at our *Meet the HIV Team* events throughout the year.

Preventing Hepatitis C Virus

The Hep C Team served 2,024 client interactions, providing 200 hepatitis C tests during the year. On World Hepatitis Day, staff handed out over 200 prevention resources through community outreach.



46 Hepatitis C treatment starts

Connecting Clients to Support

The HIV Support team served 137 clients this year. Collaborative support meetings with Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), London InterCommunity Health Centre (LIHC) and St. Joseph's Infectious Diseases Care Program (IDCP) strengthened connections to wrap-around care for clients living with HIV. Our Case Managers continued to connect clients experiencing homelessness and intimate partner violence to the *WISH to be Home* program, increasing access to housing supports and leading to better health outcomes.



3,423 HIV Support sessions delivered

Retaining Care in the Regions

A regional transportation budget provided clients with transportation from Chatham, St. Thomas, Tillsonburg, Sarnia, and Muncey to stay connected to HIV care in London.

Storytelling to Stop the Stigma

12 individuals living with HIV took part in a 6-week project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, producing short anti-stigma videos to share their stories and experiences. These videos demonstrated the strength and resilience of people living with HIV and how HIV-related stigma impacts the people we serve. We are so proud of the participants who shared their truth and journeys with us. As one participant said:

"One day, the voice I've become so accustomed to silencing will find its stage. I will hide in the shadows no more..."

Moving Forward with Community Partners

This year, RHAC was pleased to announce our newest location at 602 Queens Avenue as part of a new community service hub shared with *London Cares Homeless Response Services* and the *Sisters of St. Joseph Café*. Together, we are working to create a safe, welcoming space aimed at addressing housing, basic needs, healthcare, and psycho-social wellness needs built on the core values of dignity, hospitality, inclusive community, social justice, persistence, and hope.

Nourishing Community Needs

RHAC staff accepts donations of food and personal hygiene products to our *Country Cupboard* food bank from TD Bank Group.



HARM REDUCTION



Meeting Increasing Demand

RHAC continued responding to increased needs amid the COVID pandemic, opioid epidemic and housing crisis. This year, we supported 14,505 client visits to the *Carepoint Consumption and Treatment Service* and a total of 26,786 visits to the *Counterpoint Needle and Syringe Program*. As COVID restrictions lifted, our services witnessed a dramatic increase in visits to *Carepoint* with 70-90 visits per day in March 2022 and an increased uptake of naloxone alongside our continued case management referrals to treatment, mental health and housing supports. This year, planning was also underway for the moving of *Carepoint* to a permanent location.

 **1,959,923 sterile syringes distributed**

An Award-Winning H.O.M.E.

The H.O.M.E program continued delivering primary healthcare and mobile harm reduction supports to London's most marginalized community members by bus. The program received the 2021 *Pillar Community Innovation Award for Community Collaboration*. RHAC is proud to be a partner in this collaboration with LIHC, *Middlesex-London Paramedic Service*, *Addiction Services of Thames Valley* and *London Cares Homeless Response Services*.

Harm Reduction in Hospitals

In partnership with *London Health Sciences Centre* and *Lawson Research Institute*, RHAC has been developing harm reduction supports in hospital for in-patient care and education.

Preventing Deaths and Overdose

Our services distributed 97,540 harm reduction kits this year. Strategies, including *International Overdose Awareness Day* events, assisted us in providing 1,865 naloxone training sessions to community members.

 **186 opioid poisonings & overdoses reversed**

 **3,848 naloxone kits distributed in community**

The Important Power of Peers

This year, our outreach teams welcomed new peers to assist with the safe disposal of syringes in London. Our *Harm Reduction Peer Empowerment COVID Recovery Project* funded by *London Community Foundation* was a continued success, engaging 17 peer workers to prepare 22,081 harm reduction kits. Peers were paid hourly and offered a safe and social space to connect with community.

Providing Wrap-Around Supports

RHAC continued connecting Harm Reduction clients to the following community supports and services:

 **3,123 addiction and treatment referrals**

 **5,345 food security and housing referrals**

 **8,704 mental health support referrals**

 **4,425 medical and healthcare referrals**

**"I feel
accepted
and part of a
group that
understands
me and
doesn't
judge me."**

*— Participant of Harm Reduction Peer
Empowerment COVID Recovery Project*



Ending Overdose

Harm Reduction team members raise awareness about opioid poisoning and overdose on International Overdose Awareness Day.



COMMUNITY RELATIONS & EDUCATION

Advancing Testing and Prevention

In collaboration with *sagecomm* and *Kovacs Group Inc.*, RHAC completed a five-year campaign called *Find Your Reason*, successfully engaging 766 African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) community members and 553 LGBTQ+ guys and gender diverse people in HIV/HCV testing and prevention. The online campaign reached 14,154 unique individuals and generated a total of 1,685,189 ad impressions. Through our partnership with *SpecialityRX*, the *PrEP Clinic* continued connecting clients to pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV. RHAC also distributed 35 HIV self-testing kits on behalf of the *I'm Ready* research project.



73 PrEP Clinic visits



10,241 condoms distributed in community

Community Collaboration and Culturally Relevant Outreach

Collaborative events continued to build meaningful and culturally safe connections to community. In 2021, we sponsored a community forum on COVID-19 vaccination hosted by the Black Gay Men's Network (BGMN). Our recognition of International Women's Day marked the launch of an ACB Women's Health & Fitness Group engaging over 20 women. We also consulted up to 40 additional women to inform provincial HIV strategies. Meanwhile, support from *United Way Elgin Middlesex* allowed us to provide essential food and winter clothes to migrant workers, and financial support to 6 international students accessing HIV treatment.

Raising Change in Community

Amid the challenges of COVID, we invited community to dine at-home and donate online for our annual *A Taste for Life* fundraising event presented by *TD Bank Group*, raising \$28,195! Our virtual World AIDS Day vigil, featuring *Pride Men's Chorus*, brought community together to remember those we have lost.



1,174 community engagements

Reorienting our Volunteers

Volunteers adapted to COVID restrictions with a total of 38 volunteers pivoting to assembling 28,000 harm reduction kits. We also proudly celebrated 4 long-time volunteers at the *Ontario Volunteer Service Awards*. In honour of RHAC's annual *Red Scarf* campaign, volunteers handcrafted more than 800 red scarves for HIV awareness.

Queer-Affirmative Connections

Meetings with *Yotuni Charitable Initiative* explored outreach opportunities for Indigiqueer and 2SLGBTQ+ community members while group sessions for LGBTQ+ guys and gender diverse people saw as many as 36 participants in 1 month! Virtual Pride events hosted in collaboration with *TRANS* London*, *Queer Events* and community leaders helped to create safer Pride spaces for racialized communities and people with disabilities. We also continued offering our *Open Closet* program for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth virtually.



27 2SLGBTQIA+ youth attended Open Closet



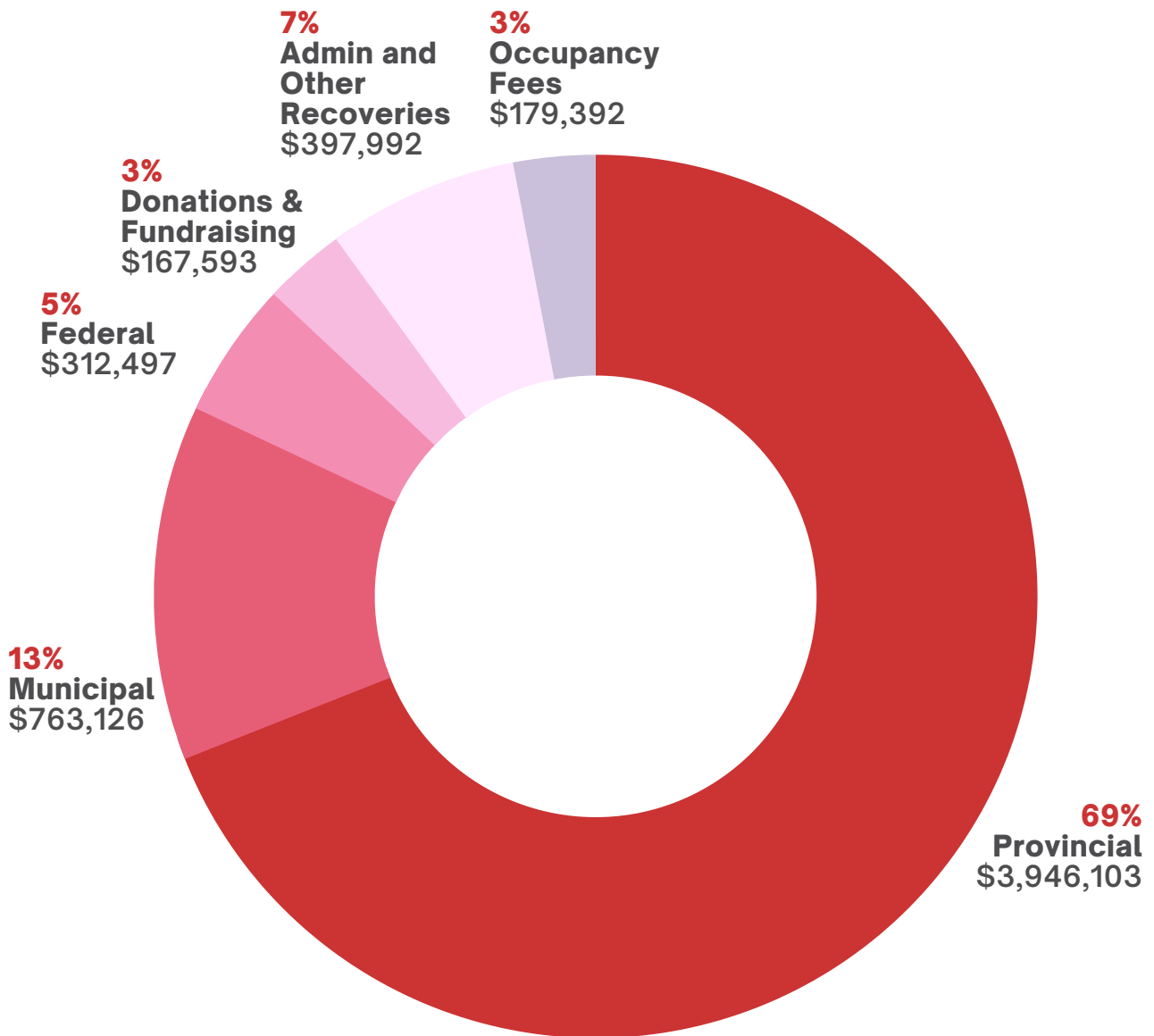
Truth and Reconciliation

On September 30, 2021, staff gathered to honour *Orange Shirt Day* and the first-ever *National Day for Truth and Reconciliation*.



FINANCIALS

2021-22

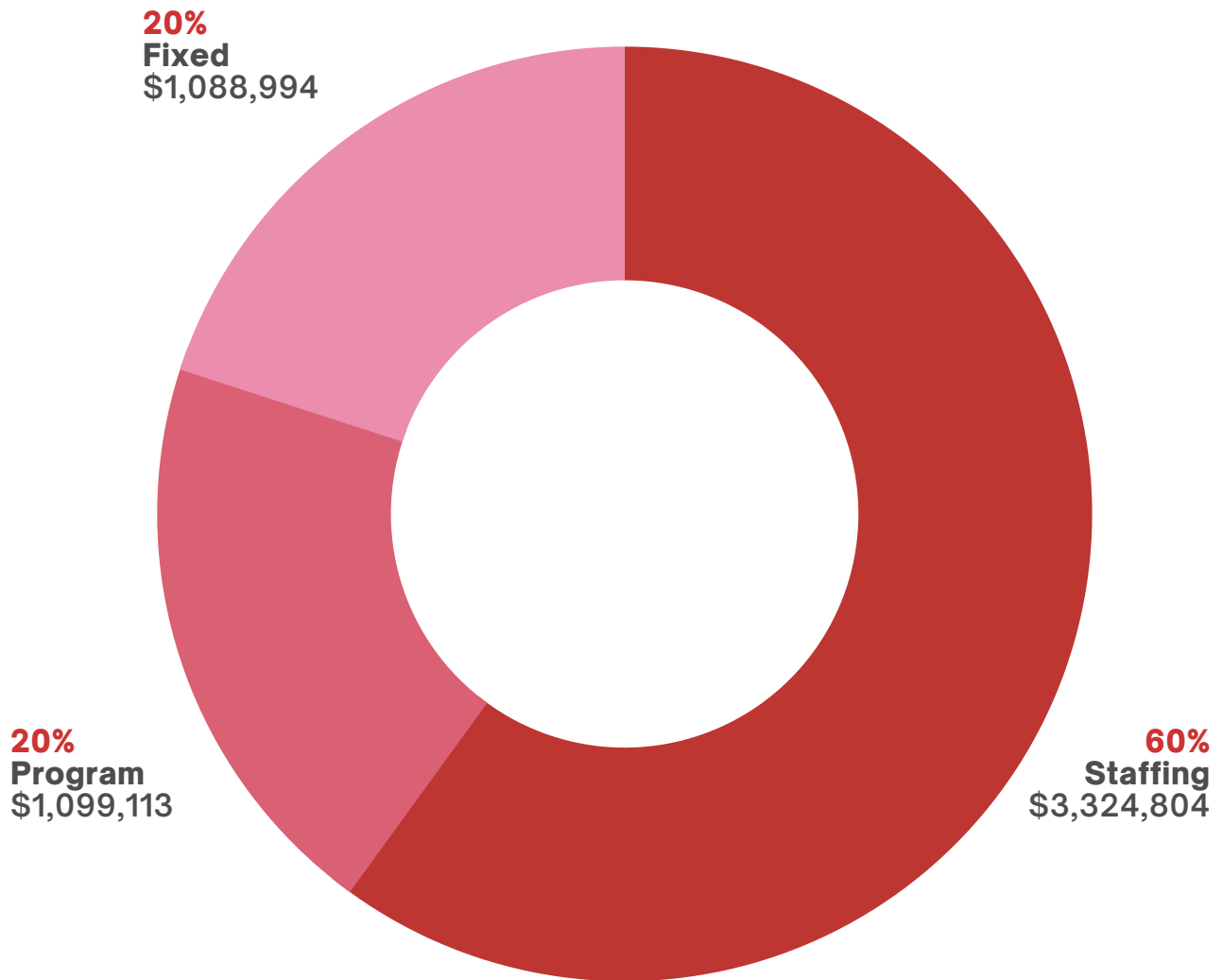


REVENUE
\$5,766,703

TOTALS DO NOT INCLUDE
IN-KIND DONATED
MATERIALS.

FINANCIALS

2021-22



TOTALS DO NOT INCLUDE
IN-KIND DONATED
MATERIALS.

EXPENSES
\$5,512,911

**THANK
YOU**

FUNDERS

Public Health Agency of Canada
AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Housing, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Ontario Health West
Employment and Social Development Canada
Middlesex-London Health Unit
City of London

GRANTORS

Johansen Larsen Foundation
London Community Foundation - Emergency Community Support
Fund (ECSF) and the COVID-19 Response Fund
Ontario Trillium Foundation
Sisters of St. Joseph
United Way Elgin Middlesex - ECSF and Love in a Global Crisis Fund

THANK YOU

OUR 2021-22 BOARD

Chris Moss, Board Chair

Nancy Griffiths, Vice Chair

Hamza Serdah, Treasurer

Kelsey Adams, Secretary

Kelly Muhsin

Alexa Duggin

Matt Brown

Dylan Dubois

Lindsay Lake

Megan DePutter

Tina Ranta, Ex Officio

On behalf of our staff and Board, RHAC would like to express our deepest gratitude to each and every one of our community partners, sponsors and supporters. Thank you to the people we serve, our dedicated volunteers, and the sponsors, donors, grantors and funders who help to make our free client programs and services possible.

**SERVING PERTH, HURON, LAMBTON, ELGIN,
MIDDLESEX AND OXFORD COUNTIES**



**Know HIV
No stigma**



redscarf.ca

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection
201-602 Queens Avenue
London, Ontario
N6B 1Y8

hivaidsconnection.ca



**Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection**