

Serving Perth, Huron, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford Counties

COMMUNITY IN ACTION

**ANNUAL
REPORT** **2023
2024**



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

OUR MISSION

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

OUR LOCATIONS

RHAC's main administrative offices and community services are located on Queens Avenue, where we operate a shared services space with London Cares Homeless Response Services, Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy (OAHAS), St. Joe's Café, and the forthcoming addition of Thames Valley Family Health Team (TVFHT). Our John Gordon Home (JGH) program on Pall Mall Street provides supportive housing for people living with HIV/HCV. Our Counterpoint Needle and Syringe Program and Carepoint Consumption and Treatment Service are located at 446 York Street. RHAC also delivers services across multiple satellite locations.



MAIN OFFICES

201-602 Queens Ave.



JOHN GORDON HOME

596 Pall Mall St.



CAREPOINT

446 York St.

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: Chippewas 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.

OUR ACTIONS

Actions documented in this Annual Report
occurred within the fiscal period of
April 1, 2023 — March 31, 2024

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RHAC IN ACTION

A Message from Executive Director Martin McIntosh

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) has been serving our community for almost 40 years. The compassion, advocacy, and communities at the heart of the HIV movement have been motivating our organization since its earliest days as the AIDS Committee of London. Through passionate collaborations, expanding programs, and strong-willed persistence, RHAC has propelled the momentum of the HIV movement across the six counties we serve. Over time, our comprehensive responses to HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C virus (HCV) have evolved to wrap around some of the most urgent issues, including food and housing insecurity, a toxic drug crisis, and outbreaks of COVID and MPOX. However, our core values have remained steadfast after nearly 4 decades of significant growth and activity. Every action we take aims to affirm the people, principles, and shared purpose to which we remain gratefully committed. As an AIDS Service Organization (ASO), our history and mission continue to thrive.

We have dedicated this year's Annual Report to the theme of Community in Action. As an organization, we know firsthand that communities are not only the places where people belong. Community is a verb: An act that requires constant effort. It is a daily commitment to connection, equity, and care. Community is made up of actions, big and small, that create a sense of belonging, safety, and support. As we look back on this year (April 1, 2023 — March 31, 2024), RHAC is taking the opportunity to celebrate acts of community that have put our mission in motion, brought our values to life, and taken us one step closer to building healthier, supported communities — together.

This year combined careful planning with the adoption of several community-minded strategies.



More than
62,000
Canadians are living
with HIV.

Source: CATE

Continued...

Our Board of Directors embarked on a strategic planning process, ensuring the voices of people with lived and living experience were represented. These strategic directions were also guided by the *HIV Action Plan to 2030* developed by the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS. Through evidence-based and population-centred strategies, the Action Plan sets a path towards improving health outcomes and access to HIV prevention, testing, and care. RHAC is deeply committed to working with partners to put these strategies into action as we work towards ending the HIV epidemic in Ontario. In alignment with our mission and London's Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness, RHAC also remained actively engaged with local partners, interest holders, and community members in addressing the intersection of health and homelessness. Our involvement in this collaboration recognizes stable housing as a vital determinant of health, and reflects our commitment to actioning a holistic, community-wide response to these pressing issues. While supporting the health and wellness of our community, RHAC remained equally dedicated to fostering an organizational culture of wellbeing for our staff. We continued actioning recommendations from our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion assessment, while also addressing total compensation and benefits support to ensure staff enjoy an inclusive and healthful work environment.

This Annual Report reviews highlights from the past year while celebrating the dedication of our staff, volunteers, peers, and Board members. Above all, we are deeply grateful to the program participants, clients, and communities who continued to trust us with their care and support. On behalf of RHAC, thank you to every member of our community for taking action to improve the lives and wellbeing of people living with, at-risk for, and affected by HIV/AIDS/HCV.

A portrait of Matt Brown, a middle-aged man with glasses, smiling. He is wearing a blue button-down shirt with a red ribbon pinned to the collar. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

OUR BOARD IN ACTION

A Message from Board Chair Matt Brown

Periods of transition create an important opportunity for any organization. These moments can embolden us to take action in new and exciting directions. They can equally motivate us to remain committed to the longstanding values we hold closest. As a decades-old AIDS Service Organization (ASO), RHAC has been able to inspire positive change while drawing on a rich and storied history. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to report that our team has led during a period of great change. Following Martin McIntosh's appointment as Executive Director of RHAC, it has been our pleasure to support Martin as he transitioned into his role. Together, we have collaborated on a shared vision for RHAC that continues its legacy of courage, compassion, and connection.

This year, we developed and approved our new strategic plan. We conducted extensive consultations with key interest holders and people with lived and living experience. Our comprehensive plan sets forth four strategic priorities that will guide RHAC's mission forward and will deliver on the following ultimate outcomes:

- **Increasing** health equity;
- **Increasing** connection to prevention, testing, treatment, and quality of life for those living with or systemically at-risk for HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C;
- **Decreasing** transmission of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C and eliminate related stigmas; and
- **Decreasing** preventable harms and deaths.



Continued...

During this past year, the Board also worked towards aligning the organization with Ontario's Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA). Since coming into force, the Act has provided a transition period to update our governing documents in full compliance with ONCA. I am pleased to share that the Board made the necessary changes to our Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation, and Board Regulations. These changes allow us to uphold the highest standards of governance, transparency, and accountability. During this process, we also took the opportunity to fully review and update our Board nominations process, and to include RHAC's sustained hepatitis C work within our Articles of Incorporation.

The actions undertaken by the Board this year have charted a course for RHAC's continued success, guided by our collective commitment to the communities we serve. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to each of our Board members for their hard work and dedication. Special thanks to retiring Board members Megan DePutter and Nancy Griffiths for the passion, energy, and expertise they have gifted to RHAC over the years. Know that we stand on your shoulders as we move forward. Your contributions are appreciated, and they will continue to make a positive impact on RHAC and the communities we serve. We will miss you.

On behalf of the entire Board, we are incredibly grateful to RHAC's community of staff, volunteers, and supporters for entrusting us to steward the organizational health and wellbeing of RHAC.

JOHN GORDON HOME IN ACTION

RHAC's John Gordon Home (JGH) program supported a total of 15 residents as they stabilized their health towards maintaining undetectable viral loads and engaged in hepatitis C treatment. Working with Indwell and Street Level Women at Risk (SLWAR), we found supportive housing options for residents transitioning out of JGH. In partnership with Hamilton Pharmacy, we also enhanced pharmacy services to support the administration of medications and flu shot clinics. Nutrition services continued to be a critical part of residents' wellness supports, with JGH providing over 9,855 meals! This year, meals were supported with food distribution from Harvest Hands which redistributes food surplus to community organizations.

HARM REDUCTION IN ACTION

Harm reduction supports people who use substances through compassionate care and life-saving services. This year marked the first anniversary of Carepoint's relocation to 446 York Street, where people who use drugs can access vital services in a safe and supervised environment. The space welcomed 889 unique clients through a total of 18,073 visits this year! Meanwhile, our Counterpoint Needle and Syringe Program was visited over 10,232 times by 2,411 unique clients. More than numbers, these visits represent thousands of instances of trust, safety, and connections to wrap-around supports for those who use drugs. Across 28 satellite sites and via mobile outreach, our harm reduction services supported complex needs across London and the counties of Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford. Carepoint continued to save lives and prevent overdoses by expanding oxygen therapy training among our staff and using technology from SCATR Inc. to help participants check pre-obtained drugs for dangerous contents.



186
opioid
poisonings
treated



544,483
syringes safely
recovered and
disposed



1,253
naloxone kits
distributed to
reverse overdoses



VOLUNTEERING IN ACTION

Volunteers are essential to the delivery of RHAC's community events and services. This year, they contributed 5,649 volunteer hours to our mission! In March, RHAC hosted our annual appreciation event in celebration of each volunteer's dedicated service to our mission. The evening also awarded select volunteers for their outstanding contributions to our community at RHAC's Voice, Knowledge, and Hope Awards. Honourees included Ryan Ho: An RHAC volunteer and master's graduate involved in ground-breaking HIV/AIDS research at Western University, where researchers co-led by Dr. Eric Arts announced developments suggesting hopeful steps towards a potential cure for HIV. Ryan received RHAC's Knowledge Award (*pictured above*). Manny Liebau was given the Voice Award for their commitments to social justice, while Fred Lush received the Hope Award in celebration of 28 years of volunteer service!

RECONCILIATION IN ACTION

Staff convened in honour of National Day for Truth & Reconciliation to deepen our commitments to collective action through learning resources and a Community Fire. Starting in October, staff also engaged in Atlohsa Family Healing Service's Giiwitaabiwag training on Indigenous homelessness. Offering team development opportunities, such as cultural safety training, was an important and ongoing step towards building our capacity to collaborate with Indigenous communities and partners. We are grateful to partners like Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy (OAHAS) for hosting opportunities at RHAC's locations throughout the year to connect individuals to medicines and supports during Community Fires and Drum Circles.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION

In collaboration with London Cares, OAHAS and St. Joe's Cafe, our shared services space offered 1,095 unique individuals a place to belong for people experiencing homelessness and other wellness barriers. The supportive and accessible space continued connecting community members to service providers and stronger support networks, with planning underway to begin providing primary healthcare supports from TVFHT. Our services met some of the most basic needs, with free laundry and shower facilities offering participants the dignity of a fresh start. Meanwhile, the St. Joe's Café soup kitchen provided a total of 84,065 meals! The site also welcomed community partners to provide specialized care, including HCV testing in partnership with London InterCommunity Health Centre (LIHC); the introduction of HIV-linked clinical services from St. Joseph's Hospital's Infectious Disease Care Program; dental screening from Schulich Dentistry; and OAHAS's weekly drop-in for Indigenous participants to access cultural medicines and supports. The space was also a touchpoint for participants to connect with caseworkers and outreach teams. Meanwhile, weekly access to the H.O.M.E program—a mobile health unit parked outside—provided wound care, health assessments, and referrals to ongoing care. This year, 496 visits to our space included a beloved pet. Courtesy of Sana Adelaide Animal Hospital, we hosted a veterinary clinic for participants to access veterinary supports and pet supplies to take care of their furry companions. Reflecting on the space, one participant called it “a wonderful place to be,” stating, “they make you feel like you are worthy.”



25,886
visits to the
shared services
space



1,794
loads of laundry
completed for
participants



3,656
times shower
facilities were
accessed



CREATIVITY IN ACTION

On International Overdose Awareness Day, RHAC unveiled a mosaic mural at the entrance to Carepoint's York Street location. Called "In Our Midst," this public art piece was developed in collaboration with local artist Susan Day and Western University's McIntosh Gallery. Made from more than 10,000 pieces, the mosaic wall features handmade tiles from community members, people who use(d) substances, and individuals impacted by the opioid crisis. The project was made possible through generous funding from Good Foundation Ltd., as well as contributions from Pottery Supply House and Tucker's Pottery. The mural stands proudly as a gateway to Carepoint in honour of those we serve, and those we have sadly lost. Speaking at the artwork's unveiling, Kim Martin reflected on her contribution to the mural: A single tile featuring a sea turtle (*pictured above*) in loving memory of her 19-year-old daughter, Delaney:

It is important to me that she is not forgotten, even when the day comes when I am no longer able to share memories of her. I take comfort knowing she is included within this group of people, all dearly loved and intensely missed, in this space dedicated to preventing these tragic losses.

PEER SUPPORT IN ACTION

Peers are people who share life experiences similar to those we serve. Peers can be a powerful source of support to marginalized community members, people living with HIV, and individuals who use substances. Ontario's response to the HIV epidemic has long been guided by the principle of GIPA/MEPA: the Greater Involvement and Meaningful Engagement of People Living with HIV/AIDS. This principle represents our longstanding commitment to honouring the contributions made by people living with HIV to every level of our organization. In delivering our services to diverse communities, we continuously strive to build a sense of belonging and connection through peers with lived/living experience across our programs. This year, the HIV Support Services team launched an African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) peer program supported by ViiV Healthcare facilitated by two peer support workers, engaging 55 community members in program delivery! We also launched our new Peer Pathways project to empower ACB and 2SGBTQIA+ peer trainees in sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI) prevention. Meanwhile, harm reduction programs continued to enhance peer engagement and education at London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC) hospitals. Through the Addiction Medicine Consult Service (AMCS), patients experiencing addiction or substance withdrawal were able to connect with one of RHAC's harm reduction workers as a peer support. Peers from RHAC also contributed to LHSC's Health Equity and Ecosystem Development (HEED) project to educate frontline clinical staff in the development of a harm reduction strategy. Peers further supported harm reduction programming by assembling a total of 23,463 harm reduction kits!

PREVENTION IN ACTION

RHAC remained committed to making HIV and HCV prevention options accessible with the help of community partners. In partnership with LIHC, the collaborative HCV team (inclusive of six peers) served 379 clients and delivered 117 hepatitis C testing events. Meanwhile, RHAC implemented its HIV self-test kit program to connect individuals to the confidential, safe, and accessible option of self-testing for HIV. We also continued to run our PrEP Clinic in collaboration with SpecialtyRX, enhancing access to the daily pill that can prevent HIV.



14,284
condoms
distributed for
safer sex



56
hepatitis C
treatments
completed



65+
HIV self-
testing kits
distributed



A TASTE FOR LIFE IN ACTION

In April 2023, RHAC celebrated the 20th anniversary of A Taste for Life (ATFL) in London-area. Every year, ATFL invites hundreds of community members to dine at participating restaurants in support of RHAC's client programs and services. Thanks to the generous donations of community members and those who dined across 19 participating restaurants, we raised \$31,665.23! We are deeply thankful to our 2023 presenting sponsor TD Bank Group, and supporting sponsor Kim Mullan, Broker Sutton Group Select Realty Inc., Brokerage. For two decades, the restauranteurs, sponsors, and supporters who make ATFL possible have been heartfelt reminders of how community shows up for our mission and the people we serve. Given the persistent stigma affecting people living with HIV, it is heartwarming to see so many restaurants open their doors and community members come to the table in solidarity, support, and compassion for those we serve.

EDUCATION IN ACTION

Collaborating with community partners, our Education team created spaces where people can connect with relevant resources and each other. This year, we collaborated with Black Youth Connect, OAHAS, and the London-based queer arts and culture collective Late Bloomers. In collaboration with Youth Opportunities Unlimited, we relaunched in-person sessions of our Open Closet program for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, which also received support from a Westminster College Foundation grant. In celebration of International Women's Day, we engaged 40 women in health and wellness sessions, and self-care activities. In partnership with Type Diabeat-it, our Multicultural Health and Wellness Fair made diabetes and HIV screening resources more accessible to racialized communities. We also repositioned our annual Pride presence in 2023, moving from a traditional parade route towards community events that allowed for deeper exchanges and meaningful connections. Our Pride programming featured Drag Queen Bingo, a harm reduction booth that shared over 1,100 health and wellness resources, and a community panel discussion. The panel explored topics on queer solidarity with over 30 community members. Reflecting on this event, one attendee shared:

“ The panel was a much needed reminder that there are people in London committed to building communities where people can feel safe to be themselves, where they don't have to look over their shoulders and they can be loved for exactly who they are. ”

LEARNING IN ACTION

This year, RHAC was proud to share what we do with students and trainees, inviting tomorrow's leaders to connect with the communities we serve. Future first responders gained familiarity with our harm reduction programs through tours and learning opportunities for newly-recruited London Police Service officers, as well as a collaboration with Fanshawe College that welcomed more than 60 first-year paramedic students to our Carepoint program. Local students continued making valuable community service commitments to our mission with student volunteers assembling harm reduction kits, and dental clinics conducted by Schulich Dentistry students meeting the underserved oral health needs of vulnerable clients. April 2023 also saw the return of *Tachycardia*: A long-held tradition and musical stage production organized by Schulich medical students, with proceeds proudly supporting RHAC.



OUTREACH IN ACTION

Our HIV Support Services team engaged clients in social supports including women's and peer support groups, a holiday dinner, and opportunities for clients to meet the HIV team and RHAC's Executive Director. Meanwhile, our Country Cupboard program ran 12 times during the year, supporting food security and access among people living with HIV. In honour of World Hepatitis Day, RHAC co-organized a Wellness Fair in partnership with LIHC (pictured above). The event included Chapman's Pharmacy, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, London Cares, Middlesex-London Health Unit, OAHAS, and St. Joe's Café. Event partners hosted engaging activities and insightful discussions to raise awareness around hepatitis C testing, treatment, and prevention. With an impressive turnout of approximately 140 participants, the event was a successful opportunity to foster community connections and wellness. In collaboration with SLWAR and SafeSpace London, our Sex Work Initiative for Safety and Health (SWISH) served 362 unique individuals through 1,643 service interactions. This ongoing peer-informed initiative helped reach people engaged in sex work and connect them to health and wellness supports, including a total of 45 testing clinics throughout the year.



RED SCARF IN ACTION

RHAC's annual Red Scarf campaign returned to raise awareness and stop the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. Leading up to our annual World AIDS Day vigil and the recognition of Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week, we hosted our Red Scarf benefit concert sponsored by Computdata in proud support of RHAC's client programs and services. Special musical guests CHOIR! CHOIR! CHOIR! made this year's concert more interactive than ever, leading a sing-along to the music of Queen that took place two days ahead of the 32nd anniversary honouring Queen frontman Freddie Mercury's passing from AIDS-related illness. This special evening raised \$49,485.98 in support of RHAC's clients and brought hundreds of community members together in solidarity with those living with HIV (*pictured right*).



LIVE
LONG
AND
HAVE
GREAT
SEX



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection



EVERYDAY PRIDE IN ACTION

In June and July, RHAC celebrated Pride in St. Mary's, Stratford, and Wortley Village (*pictured above*). But Pride is more than a month of celebration. This year was marked by a harmful and disheartening increase in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ policies and rhetoric. Driven by our values, RHAC raised its voice against hate and discrimination to affirm local community members and stand proudly with queer and trans communities everywhere. In 2023, RHAC was compelled by events abroad and at-home to release a public statement in defence of drag artists targeted by discrimination. Less than a month later, our Board of Directors penned an open letter urging a local municipality to reverse its decision to ban the Pride flag on civic property. As an organization, advocating for safe and equitable spaces in our community is a crucial aspect of supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. We commit to being loudly proud, year-round.

THANK YOU

FUNDERS

Public Health Agency of Canada
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Ontario Health West
Employment and Social Development Canada
Middlesex-London Health Unit
City of London
London Health Sciences Centre
London InterCommunity Health Centre
Southwestern Public Health

GRANTORS

Community Foundations of Canada
Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
Lawson Foundation
London Community Foundation
Thames Valley Family Health Team
United Way Elgin Middlesex
ViiV Healthcare ULC
Westminster College Foundation

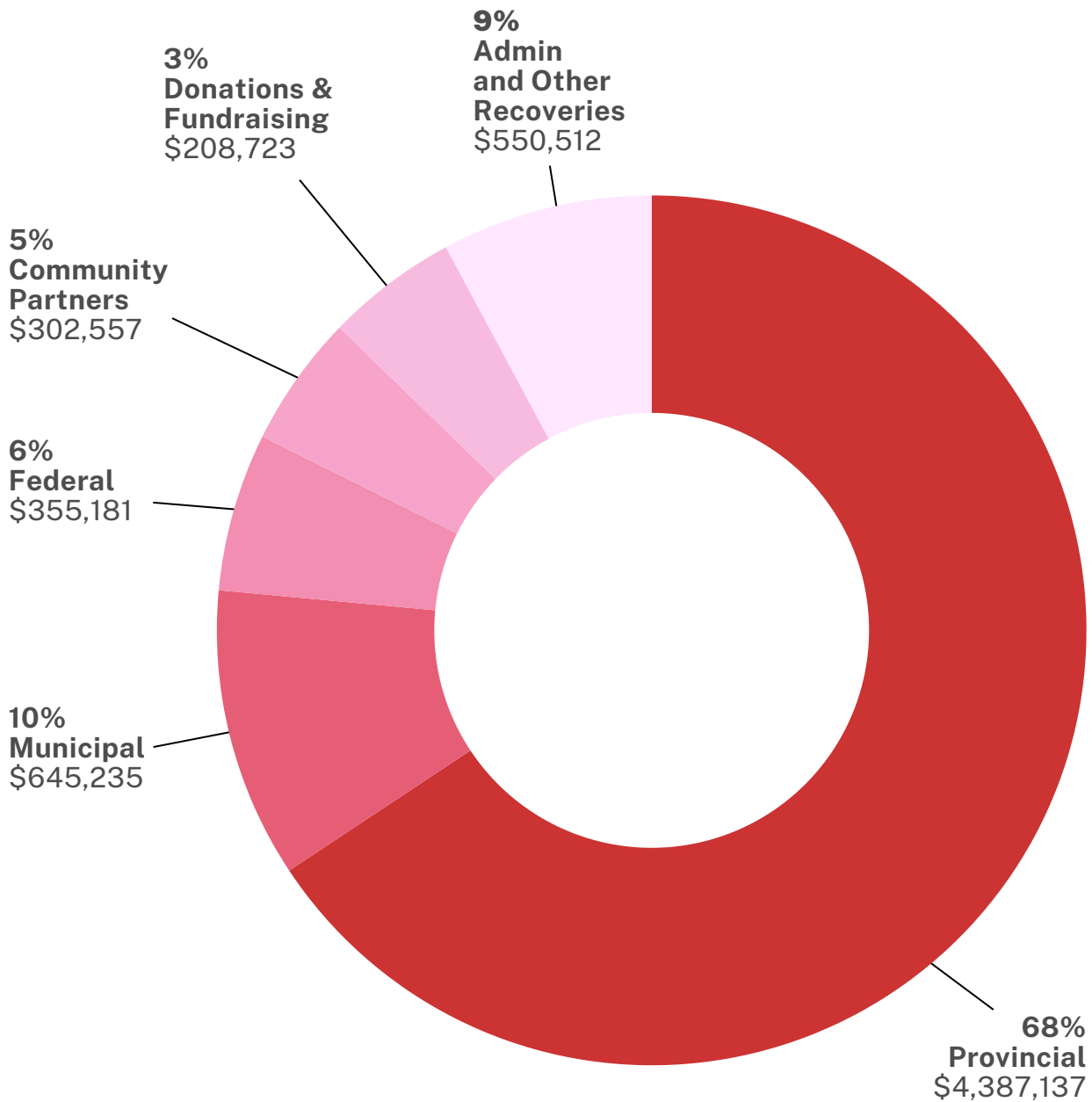
**A special thank you to the Bray family
and all of our third-party fundraisers.**

PHOTO:

The audience at Red Scarf 2023 lights up London Music Hall in honour of World AIDS Day.

FINANCIALS

April 1, 2023 — March 31, 2024

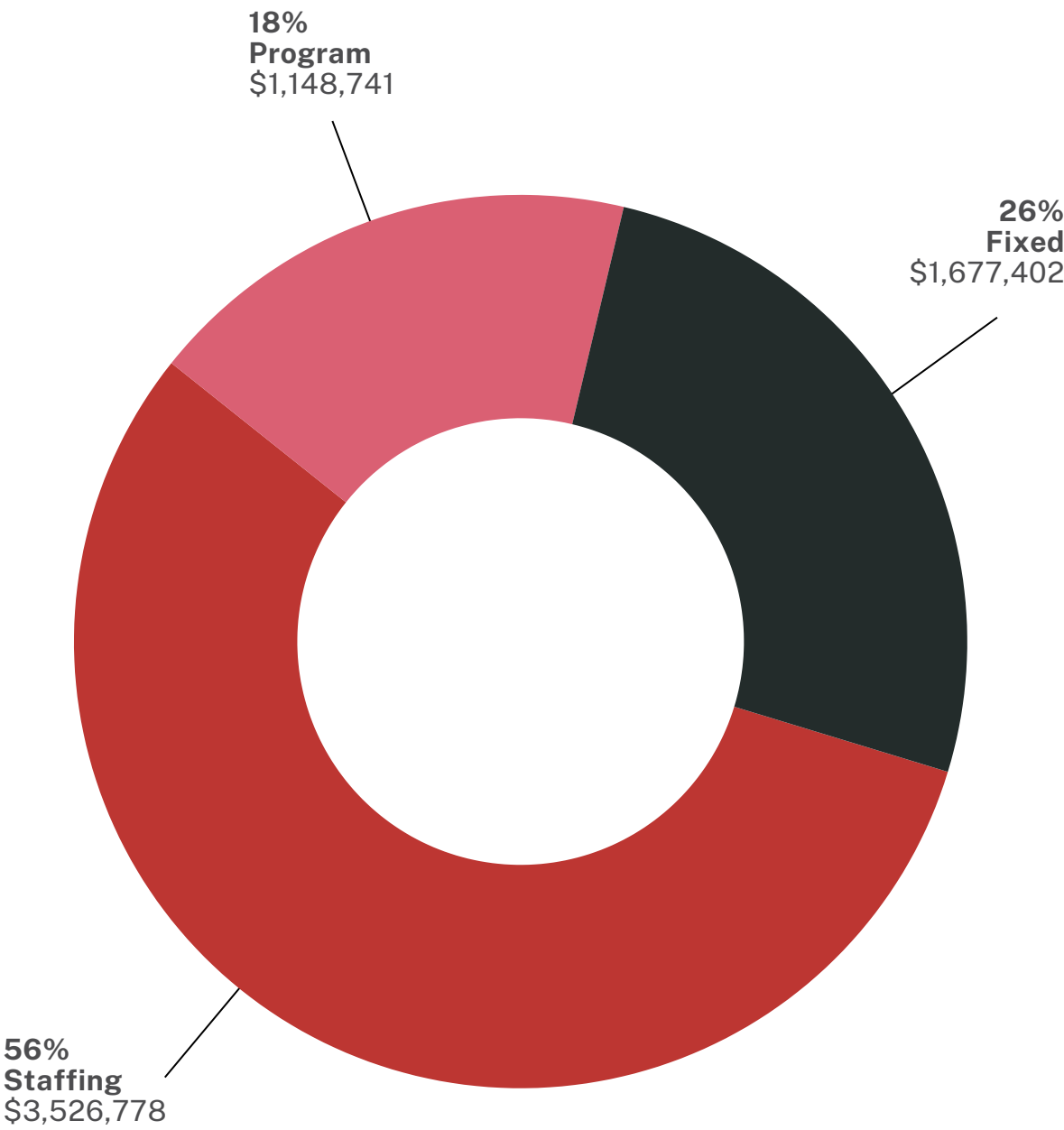


REVENUE
\$6,449,345

Totals do not include
in-kind donated materials.

FINANCIALS


April 1, 2023 — March 31, 2024



Totals do not include
in-kind donated materials

EXPENSES
\$6,352,921





2023-24 BOARD

Matt Brown, **Board Chair**
Megan DePutter, **Vice Chair**
Saleha Khan, **Treasurer**
Erica Lawson, **Secretary**
Alexa Duggan
Matt Gleeson
Nancy Griffiths
Lindsay Lake
Sydney Miller

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