



# **Halifax Sexual Health Centre's Annual Report 2021 - 2022**



2021-22 was another year of adaptations and transitions! The COVID-19 pandemic continued to considerably impact HSHC. There were large portions of the year in which lab services for STI testing was suspended. The HSHC team has done an exemplary job in navigating the back-and-forth changes of service provision, screening questions, and PPE standards. While our physician team has grown and our clinical capacity has expanded, we have not had any slowdown in demand for our services. In fact, demand only continues to increase, well beyond our capacity.

Even having a year of pandemic living behind us, the challenges our clients face in accessing sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health care continue to worsen. As a province, we are nowhere near caught up to the backlogs in testing and wait times for specialist services. HSHC continues to play its part in offering high quality primary care services, while looking to the government and medical system as a whole for improvements. We have plans in motion to punch up HSHC's role in advocacy – for ourselves and our requests for appropriate funding, and for our community and their right to equitable and accessible sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health care.

In some ways, adapting to COVID-19 has almost become old hat – the biggest adjustment this year was our staff transitions. Our leadership has greatly shifted. This year, we said goodbye to Kate Calnan (Executive Director), Athena Koros (Controller), and Dr. Joyce Curtis (Medical Director). This team was imperative in the success of HSHC, and we thank them for their years of dedicated work. The new team has some old faces, and some new! Dr. Hali Bauld has taken over as Medical Director, and myself, previously the Medical Office Administrator and Health Promotion Coordinator have taken over as Executive Director. We welcome Tracey Courtney as our new Controller. We have also had two long-time supporters of the clinic leave the Board of Directors this year (Heather McPeake and Dr. Todd Hatchette). We thank them for the time and efforts they invested into the clinic over the years. Leadership transitions can be stressful – I thank our incredible staff and physicians for maintaining a consistently excellent clinical environment for patients during this process.

Looking to the future, I look forward to taking a beat and settling into my role as Executive Director. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to continue my career at the Centre along with its incredible team of physicians and staff. I'm consistently inspired by our team, our work, and our patients as I lead the Centre towards its vision of improving and optimizing the sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health of all members of our community. I eagerly anticipate the work ahead.

In solidarity,

Abbey Ferguson  
Executive Director, HSHC

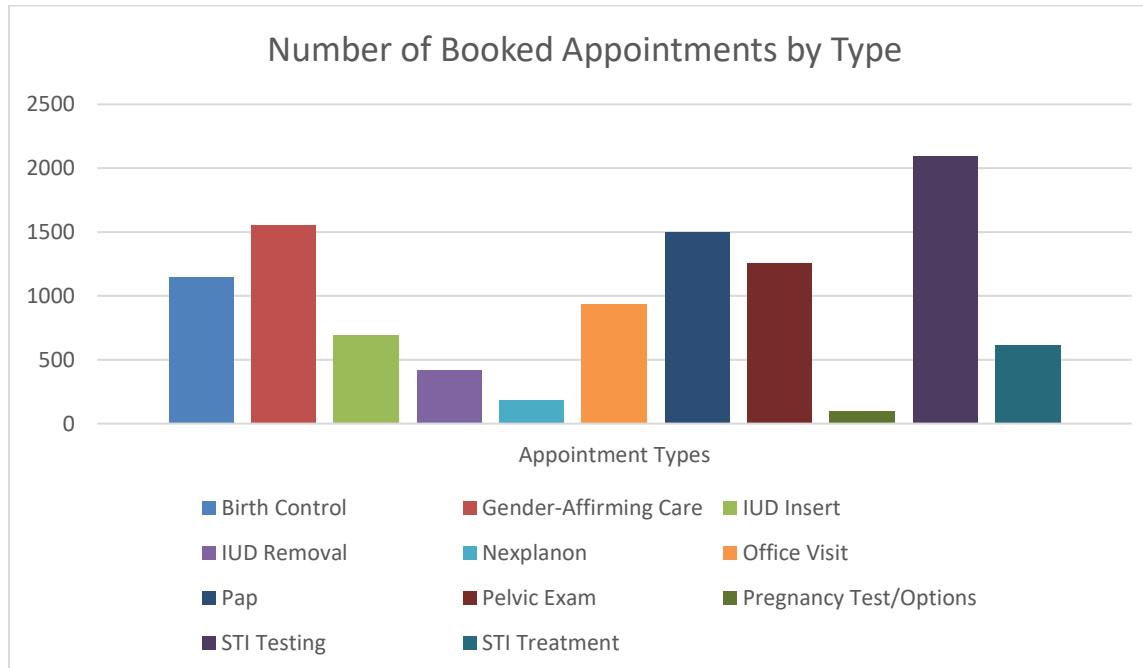


## Operations & Services

HSHC provided primary sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health care to **5,877 patients** and booked **11,464 appointments** during the 2021-22 fiscal year (not including STBBI testing). We are not a walk-in clinic as we require an appointment for all physician and nurse visits (except for requests for emergency contraceptives).

In addition to our primary care services with our physician team, we offer nurse run anonymous and non-nominal HIV/STBBI (sexually transmitted and blood borne infections) testing. This fiscal we performed **over 110 STBBI tests (blood draws)**. This number is a little lower than usual, but we had a month of Friday snow storms this year! We unfortunately primarily draw blood on Fridays. There were also two months in which STBBI draws were restricted by NSHA Laboratory Services.

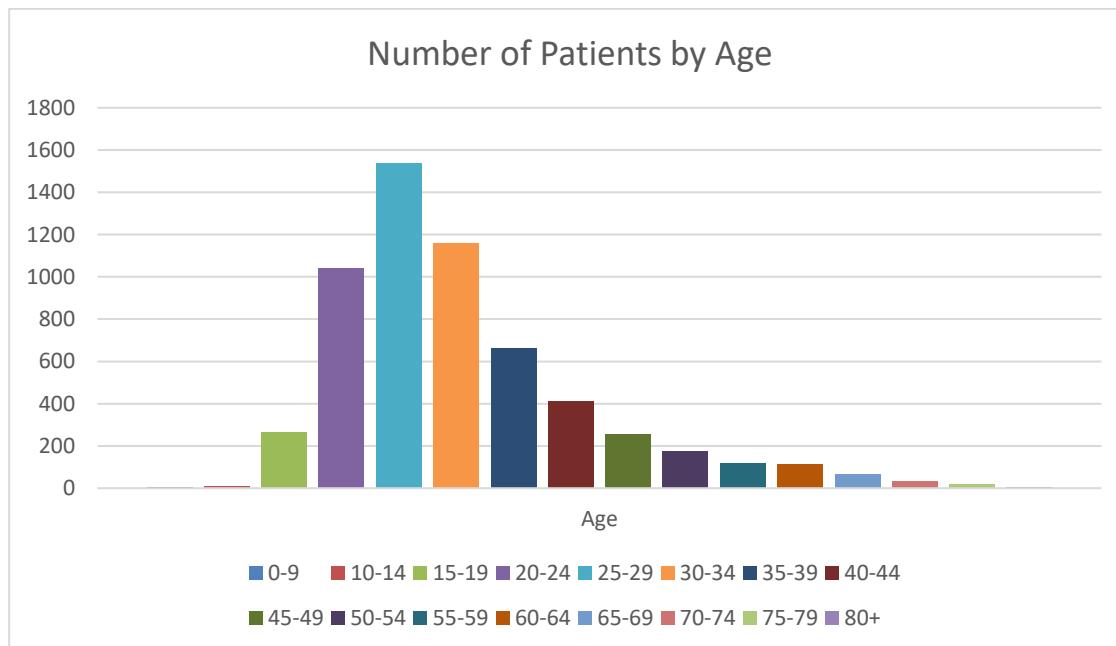
Overall, services in highest demand were STI Testing (2,094 appointments), Gender-Affirming Care (1,553 appointments), Pap Testing (1,502 appointments), Pelvic Exams (1,258 appointments), Birth Control Options (1,150 appointments), Office Visits (937 appointments), IUD Insertions and Removals (693 and 421 appointments respectively), and STI Treatment (613 appointments). Finally, we were thrilled to introduce a new service offering this year, **endometrial biopsies**.





Gender-affirming care is a major focus at HSHC, with seven of our physicians offering gender-affirming health services, including hormone therapy, surgical referrals, navigational support, and post-operative care. This past year, HSHC supported **507 transgender/gender diverse patients with their gender-affirmation journeys**. We have a total roster of 849 patients who see us for gender-affirming care. These numbers do not account for patients who may be trans/gender diverse but only see us for general sexual and reproductive care. This patient roster suggests that **at HSHC we see at least 21.5% of the gender diverse population in Nova Scotia**, according to the 2021 Census. Gender affirming care continues to be a high demand service, second only to STI testing. The current wait time for new patients is 11 months, which is approx. 55 individuals. We have seen a significant increase in patients seeking to continue their gender-affirming care with HSHC after having recently moved to Nova Scotia during the provinces' population boom.

Of the over 5000 clients we saw at HSHC this year, the majority were between the ages of 20 and 45 years old.



The COVID-19 pandemic continued to change the way we provide care at HSHC. We continued to provide **telehealth services** (we offered **3,103 televisits**). Patients and providers both enjoy this as a service option and it will continue as an available service at HSHC. It provides great accessibility to services like gender-affirming care, PrEP management, and contraceptive prescriptions to those who live outside of Central Zone and unfortunately must look to Halifax for their sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care needs. The NSHA Laboratories did have STI testing, STBBI testing, and smears for yeast and bacterial vaginosis suspended for



approx. four months of this past fiscal year. Our amazing medical team adapted, offering STI treatment as prophylaxis to those with the appropriate risk factors. Patients were always welcome to book a televisit to discuss their concerns, rather than being outright denied an appointment. Despite the suspended lab services, STI testing was still our most requested appointment.

During this fiscal year, the Halifax Sexual Health Centre was open from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM on Tuesday. Our average wait time for an in-person appointment throughout the year was approximately 5 weeks, however, televisit appointments were often offered within 1 – 2 weeks of the appointment request. Our clinical schedule, released monthly, takes on average 2 days – 1 week to fill during the past year. We have on average 870-924 appointments available in a month. That means that every other caller looking to make an appointment during the rest of the month is a request for a service beyond our capacity to fulfill.

While tracking appointment and patient data is one way to demonstrate our service reach, we would be remiss to not mention the immense volume of phone calls that we receive. Due to the nature of HSHC's services and the sheer volume of calls we receive, we are unable to track the specific number of unique client contacts and individual requests for information and services beyond our capacity. Our admin team answers hundreds of calls a week (sometimes even hundreds a day) from people looking for medical services beyond our capacity, substantial healthcare navigation, sexual health education, general support, etc. over the phone. The rate of this type of contact and assistance is consistently high.



## Health Promotion

Health Promotion is a priority at HSHC and we've been working hard to improve our workshops, resources, and online content. During certain periods of the year, we were able to make it in-person into the community to provide sex education and professional development sessions. We had several opportunities to speak to the media about sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health topics and to promote and advocate for HSHC and our services. We also continued to produce online content for social media.

Some social media highlights from the year include our genital anatomy series using the very exciting silicone models from SEX-ED+ Montreal (purchased thanks to a generous donation from 100 Women Who Care at the very end of the 2020-21 fiscal year), an Instagram takeover with our volunteer Danika and Kelly Carrington, a Black male birth doula, and a series on pelvic pain. Our social media reach on Facebook extended to over 41,111 people (up 184.9% from last year) and to 10,292 people on Instagram (an increase of 25.6% as compared to last year).

In the community, we provided sexual health education to five classrooms and seven community groups. We had professional development sessions with four allied health professional offices/colleges. Some sessions were held over Zoom, while others were able to be in person. We were also able to table at Halifax Pride's Health & Wellness Fair. We partnered with TestNow, a research study through CBRC, and were able to hand out 100 self-test HIV kits (as well as pamphlets and general sexual health information) through tabling in front of the Halifax Central Library.

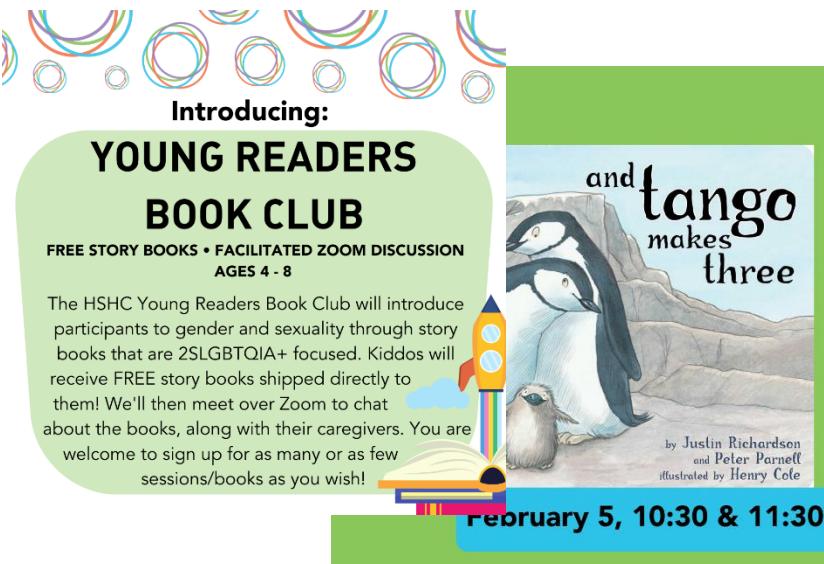


This year we partnered with CBRC and prideHealth to create online courses that physicians and other health professionals could take for free to learn about providing gender-affirming surgical care and STBBI testing for 2SLGBTQ+ patients. These courses were Mainpro+ accredited to be used for continuing education credits. It's important to HSHC that other physicians and practitioners get the opportunity to learn more about the types of services we provide and feel



empowered to provide it themselves, so that sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming healthcare access is improved for all.

Thanks to a project grant from the Department of Community Services Sexualized Violence Prevention Program, we were able to launch our Young Readers Book Club program! In this program, we wanted to help shape early attitudes to be more inclusive, understanding, and empathetic. The HSHC Young Readers Book Club introduced participants to gender and sexuality through bestselling story books that are 2SLGBTQIA+ focused. We gave away 170 FREE books to families. Facilitator-lead discussions at Book Club encouraged safe and open dialogue among children peer-to-peer and between children and caregivers. The books were geared for ages 4 - 8. This program will finish in the 2022-23 fiscal year.



We used our Dalhousie Medicine Service Learning Student to help us with health promotion activities this year! Meghan, our student, shadowed our Health Promotion Coordinator to a presentation with a dental practice to learn about making safer clinical spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ patients and to better understand interprofessional education. She later did her own Ask Me Anything session on our Instagram, to learn about the massive role social media plays in health literacy and health information access. She also was able to do a clinical shadow shift and shadowed a board meeting to get a full picture understanding of the functions of a non-profit clinic.

## The Team

At the heart of everything HSHC does is our dedicated team of professionals who work hard to ensure HSHC offers the best quality care and service to all of our clients. Without our multidisciplinary team, HSHC would not be able to meet the clinical or educational sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health needs of our community.

### **Executive Director**

We had a change up in leadership this year! This year we said goodbye to Kate Calnan, as she moved into an incredible new role as a consultant. Kate was pivotal in creating financial stability for HSHC, and weathered us through many storms, like moving, a new medical records system, the pandemic, and more. We thank Kate for her many years of leadership, dedication, and mentorship. One of our Medical Office Administrators/Health Promotion Coordinator has since taken on the role of Executive Director, and will continue to do Health Promotion Coordination as well.

### **Volunteers**

We are very grateful to our current and past volunteers who help with our daily operations (e.g. reception, appointment bookings and reminders, specimen management, etc.) and our fundraising initiatives. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to welcome our volunteers into the clinic nearly as often this year. It was imperative that we keep staff and client numbers low and limit in person interactions wherever possible. We started the conversation of bringing volunteers back to HSHC right at this end of this fiscal year.

### **Administrators**

This past fiscal, HSHC employed 2 full-time Medical Office Administrators and 2 casual Administrators. One of our administrators also works as our Health Promotion Coordinator. She has since moved into the role of Executive Director. We thank our casual admins for stepping up and filling hours as well as our full-time admin for managing such a smooth transition. Our admins are the front-line contact for our patients and do so much more than book appointments. We thank them endlessly for their skills in healthcare navigation, clinical management, and being the supportive voice on the line for so many community members.

### **Health Promotion**

The Health Promotion Coordinator has been a split role at HSHC. Previously split with an admin, the Executive Director is now taking over those duties. The Health Promotion Coordinator is responsible for organizing educational presentations and workshops (such as sexual education in schools and professional development sessions for allied health professionals) and developing resources for physicians, staff, and clients.



### **Nurses**

This fiscal, HSHC employed 1 full-time RN. Nursing is an integral part of our service model and proved invaluable this past year. Our nurse provides critical follow-up of all urgent issues, runs the STBBI testing and treatment program, works closely with our gender-affirming care patients to initiate new assessments and provide injection teaching, and is available to answer clients' questions by phone on a daily basis. Managing the clinic without our nurse would be impossible, especially during the pandemic.

### **Physicians**

We have had an incredible full roaster of physicians this fiscal year. 20 physicians practiced with us over the course of this year, and we are ending with a team of 17. In addition to seeing patients, our physician team also works hard to facilitate practical learning opportunities in our specialized primary care setting. They frequently train medical residents, medical students, pharmacy students, and registered nursing students in gender affirming care and other sexual and reproductive health specialties. Learner opportunities continued throughout the pandemic with many learners getting a mix of in-person and telemedicine experience.

### **Contracts**

In addition to our core team, HSHC also relies on several contracted workers to ensure our operation runs smoothly. Very special thanks to our Medical Director, who offers ongoing support and leadership of our clinical service offerings, policy, and resource development, and who has been instrumental in helping HSHC navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Joyce Curtis was in this role until her retirement in July 2021. We so appreciate her spending so many years with HSHC and wish her a very happy retirement. Dr. Hali Bauld has since stepped into the role, and has continued to be an incredible asset to the team. Special thanks also to Athena Koros, our Financial Controller/ Bookkeeper, who ended her term with HSHC this year. Athena was an essential player in creating financial stability at HSHC, as well as providing coverage for when the Executive Director was on parental leave. We have since welcomed Tracey Courtney to the team as Financial Controller/Bookkeeper.



## Our Funders

HSHC derives its revenue from a variety of sources (MSI, fundraising, private donations, etc.) but without support from government, small grants, and community partners we would not be able to sustain our operations.

Special thanks to the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, Sexual Health Nova Scotia, The Plum Foundation, and United Way for supporting HSHC.

Huge thanks to our private donors for your many contributions big and small that have an equally important impact. This past year more than ever, every donation made a huge difference!



## Fundraising & Donations

Staff transitions and the pandemic significantly impacted our ability to fundraise over the past year. With limited in-person events virtual fundraising initiatives were all that was possible. Despite the added challenges caused by the pandemic we are thrilled to announce HSHC raised **\$24,300** in support of our programs and services! The majority of these funds came directly from individual donors, which is incredibly meaningful. We received an uptick in donations after news and social media stories broke regarding the prevalence of crisis pregnancy centres and our advocacy regarding gender-affirming care. We are so grateful to our community of donors, we would not be able to offer the same services and level of care without your support!





## Partnerships & Research

Although many projects slowed down or were paused due to the pandemic, HSHC still had the opportunity to partner with a variety of professionals, community groups, researchers, and national organizations over the past year to continue the hard work of advancing sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health. Some of the projects we've participated in throughout the year include:

- Being a community partner for the Dalhousie Medical School Service Learning program. This year's project focused on health promotion.
- Participating in the Halifax Queer Health Programmers networking group. We meet monthly and discuss ongoing initiatives and partnership opportunities. The group is comprised of organizational leaders from various local non-profits (e.g. ACNS, Pride Health, CBRC).
- Participating in 2QTHINKS, an Atlantic-wide queer health networking group. We meet monthly and discuss ongoing initiatives and partnership opportunities. The group is comprised of organizational leaders from various non-profits in Atlantic Canada (e.g. Planned Parenthood Newfoundland and Labrador, PEERS Alliance, Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance).
- Tabling at the Halifax Pride Health & Wellness Fair to give out safer sex supplies and answer sex education and health navigation questions.
- Working with CBRC and prideHealth to create two free Mainpro+ accredited online courses for health care providers on gender-affirming surgical referrals and post-operative care and on STBBI testing and treatment.
- Partnering on the TestNow research project funded by CBRC. We gave away 100 HIV self-test kits!
- Providing Safer Sex Supplies to several community groups such as Laing House, Avalon, Metro Community Housing Association, Schools Plus, Mount Saint Vincent University Student Union and Pride Centre, and Party Safe with Schulich Law (Dalhousie University). We also gave supplies to several schools who lost their access to supplies due to the redeployment of Youth Health Centre Public Health nurses from schools to COVID-19 related work. Free safer sex supplies are also given out at every in-person Health Promotion workshop.
- Working with Dalhousie University and other post-secondary institutions across Canada to provide clinical residency rotations to all family doctor residents and opportunities for clinical shadowing for pharmacy students and medical students.
- Offering a student placement for the Dalhousie University Bachelor of Social Work program.

