



# **Halifax Sexual Health Centre**

## **Annual Report**

### **2022 - 2023**

## Executive Director's Report

2022-2023 was a standout year for the Halifax Sexual Health Centre. As we have the privilege to settle into more normalcy as pandemic responses wind down, the HSHC staff and clinical team have hit the ground running with impressive service delivery, advocacy work, and collaborations.

HSHC played a key role in advocating for better gender-affirming care (GAC) access this year. We have long raised flags regarding the funneling of all GAC patients into HSHC, despite GAC being within the scope of primary care, but we hit a breaking point in May 2022. A surgeon announced that he would no longer be offering gender-affirming surgery in-province, and two specialist readiness writers were unable to take on new patients. I'm delighted to report that the Province of Nova Scotia has finally moved toward a new in-province gender-affirming surgery plan, and removed the requirement of a specialist letter to access surgery. While gender-affirming care access is far from perfect and there is much work to be done, I'm proud that HSHC could play a key role in advocating on behalf of our patients and community.

Additionally, I attended the Nova Scotia Legislature Committee on Public Accounts to advocate for better funding models for organizations and physicians providing sexual health services. We did garner some success with this, as is detailed in the Medical Director's report.

HSHC participated in amazing collaborations this year. Most notably, we partnered with the NSHA and Department of Public Health to deliver mpox (monkeypox) immunizations (Imvamune) in response to the mpox epidemic. I'd like to highlight how rewarding it was to work quickly and cooperatively with government partners to effectively deliver community-focused immunization clinics. Luckily, NS did not see any local transmission of mpox, but these clinics highlighted that non-profit community clinics play a massive role in responding to imminent health concerns, especially as it pertains to 2SLGBTQ+ community trust. As we hosted immunizers from Public Health, we wanted to be sure that HSHC standards of language and care were consistent among all immunizers. We participated in immense consultation in planning these clinics, and I thank the NSHA and Dept. of Public Health for being such forthcoming partners.

Looking to the future, I'm excited that the Board of Directors and I will be broaching a new strategic plan over the next fiscal year. With continuous growth and demand, it's key that we set sights on the possibilities for the future of what HSHC can be. I'm motivated by our community, team, and patients to strive towards our vision of improving and optimizing sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health for all.

In solidarity,



Abbey Ferguson  
Executive Director, HSHC

## Medical Director's Report

2022/2023 was a busy year at HSHC from a clinical standpoint. We onboarded new physicians bringing our physician workforce to 18 part-time clinicians. Despite having increased our physician complement, we continue to fill our appointment slots within 1-2 days of our appointment release each month. With the paucity of primary care access in our region, HSHC continues to be a main source for all primary care services related to sexual and reproductive health.

In the Medical Director's role, much of 2022/2023 was spent on advocating for fair payment models for the work we do at HSHC. In August of 2022, the Executive Director and I met with the Deputy Minister of Health and her Senior Policy Analyst to adjunct funding for our clinic. After much back and forth, we managed to secure a sessional billing scheme for the Gender Affirming Care visits that we provide at HSHC. This ensures that physicians' time spent on assessment, treatment and administrative paperwork for gender affirming care visits is accounted for and paid at a fair rate to reflect the complexity involved. Additionally, I participated in the Doctors Nova Scotia fee code committee development of new fee codes for provision of Gender Affirming Care.

Last summer saw the advent of the Monkeypox epidemic. In the early days of this epidemic, I sat on the provincial committee informing policy and infection control of the Monkeypox virus. HSHC participated in advocacy around preexposure prophylactic vaccine strategies for persons at high risk of infection. We were able to partner with the Department of Public Health in offering the Imvamune vaccine at our clinic and several of our physicians participated in administering the vaccine.

For 2023/2024 we will continue to advocate for more resources to support the work we do at HSHC and expect to continue to onboard new clinical staff as our space allows.

Best,



Dr. Hali Bauld  
Medical Director, HSHC



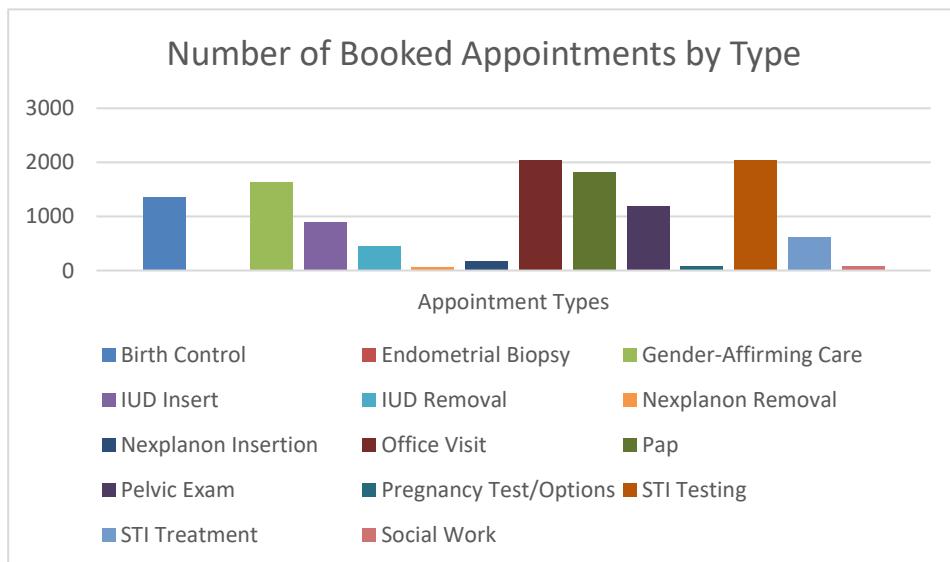
## Operations & Services

HSHC provided primary sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health care to **7,007 patients** and booked **13,474 appointments** during the 2022-23 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 112 STBBI tests (blood draws)**.

As mentioned in the Director's reports, HSHC partnered with NSHA and Department of Public Health to deliver mpox (monkeypox) immunizations (Imvamune) in response to the mpox epidemic. Through this collaboration, HSHC and Public Health staff delivered **1,424 immunizations** over only a few months. This partnership was unique and very rewarding, and will stand as a model for future cooperative efforts in responding to imminent sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care needs.

Overall, services in highest demand were Office Visits (2,033 appointments), STI Testing (2,042 appointments), Pap Testing (1,822 appointments), Gender-Affirming Care (1,635 appointments), Birth Control Options (1,360 appointments), Pelvic Exams (1,197 appointments), IUD Insertions and Removals (895 and 445 appointments respectively), and STI Treatment (618 appointments). Office Visits saw a big increase this year – an Office Visit appointment can be used to discuss all sorts of sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care services, but its main use is to discuss PrEP. Finally, we were thrilled to introduce a new service offering this year, **FREE letters of readiness/psychosocial assessments for gender-affirming care with a Social Worker.**

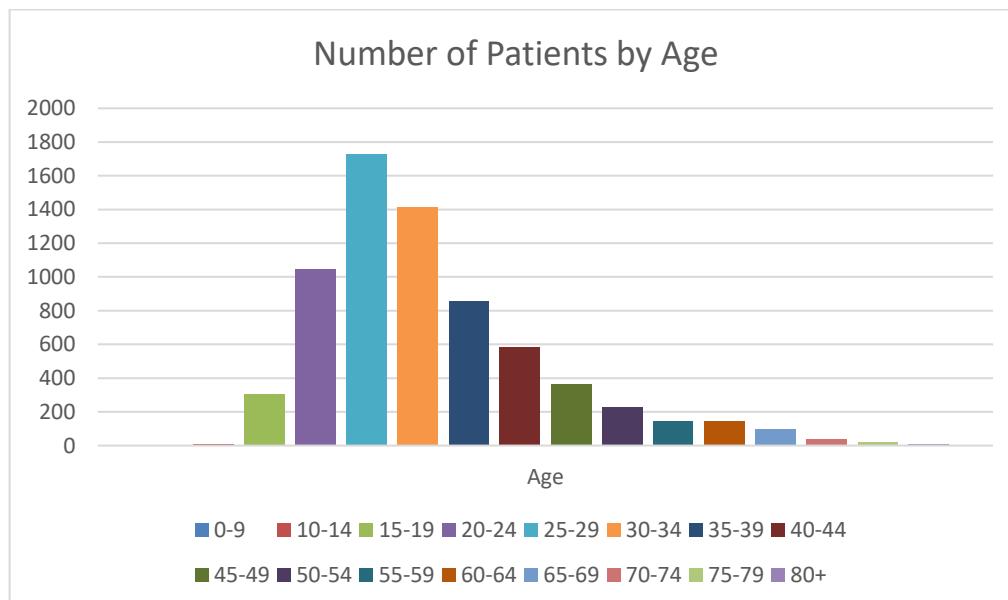




Gender-affirming care is a major focus at HSHC, with eight of our physicians offering gender-affirming health services, including hormone therapy, surgical referrals, navigational support, and post-operative care. This past year, HSHC supported **574 transgender/gender diverse patients with their gender-affirmation journeys**. We have a total roster of 1,074 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. Thanks to the generous contributions of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, we were able to hire a Masters of Social Work to help us on the transitional journey of delivering gender-affirming care through an **Informed Consent model**. We are not quite there in this fiscal year, but we are well on our way to getting this model in place at HSHC. Gender affirming care continues to be a high demand service. The current wait time for new patients is at least 12 months, which is approx. 166 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.

We are seeing an interesting upward swing in requests for Pap testing. Some of this can be accounted for by considering the volume of people seeking to pick up on their routine screenings after COVID-19 delays, but we are hearing from patients that family doctors in the community are refusing to perform this service. We will be keeping an eye on this trend as it pertains to advocacy work and opportunities for professional development for community physicians.

Of the over 7,000 clients we saw at HSHC this year, the majority were between the ages of 20 and 45 years old.



The COVID-19 pandemic did offer some positive changes in health care service provision – namely, telehealth services. We continued to provide **telehealth services** (we offered **2,593 televisits**) this fiscal year. 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. We are happy to report that lab service suspensions on STI testing, Pap testing, etc did not occur during this fiscal year, and we are back to normal in this regard.

During this fiscal year, the Halifax Sexual Health Centre was open from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and 9:00 AM – 8:00 PM on Monday and 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. This year, we were able to go in-person into the community to provide comprehensive sexual 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.



Thanks to the Community Based Research Centre (CBRC), **our Health Promotion team has grown!** We have hired a Sexual and Reproductive Health Project Coordinator, Abbie. Over the course of this two-year project, Abbie will be organizing and delivering two streams of content – community education, and provider (doctor, nurse, social work, etc) education. This past fiscal, Abbie delivered *Totally Outright!*, a program meant to instill health promotion skills to the community. She also delivered *Queering the Compass*, a day-long professional development session for providers on 2SLGBTQ+ sexual and reproductive health topics. This project has a national scale, and thanks to that, Abbie

and Abbey (Executive Director) were able to attend the CBRC Summit conference in Vancouver, British Columbia. We were able to **put HSHC on the national radar** by being on panels regarding other CBRC projects, like TestNow 2.0 and mpox response, and by meeting and learning with members of organizations from across the country.

We tabled at several volunteer and health fairs. Most notably, we had a strong presence at the Atlantic Sex Show! Along with sitting on a panel on sexual health, we tabled and **gave away over 200 rapid HIV self test kits** (thanks to CBRC TestNow 2.0), lots of FREE gender-affirming gear items like binders, packers, and gaffs (thanks to Sexual Health Nova Scotia's Transformation Closet), and safer sex supplies and resources. Our ability to give away free HIV self-test kits came at a perfect time, as Nova Scotia experienced an uptick in new HIV infections. Tabling is a valuable learning opportunity for students, and this year we were joined by our Masters of Social Work student, Madeline, and our Health Promotion Intern, Jordan.



## HALIFAX Sexual Health Centre

In the community, we provided sexual health education to thirteen classrooms and fourteen community groups. We had professional development sessions with five allied health professional offices/colleges. Some sessions were held over Zoom, but most were able to be in person this year. We marched in the Halifax Pride Parade this year! While marching, we gave away over 1000 safer sex supplies to festival goers. **We even won best theme, “Gender-Affirming Care is Primary Care!”** We were also able to table at Halifax Pride’s Health & Wellness Fair, where we gave out even more safer sex supplies and answered sex education and health navigation questions.

Some social media highlights from the year include our Instagram Takeovers by our Dalhousie Medical Service Learning students (thanks Sydney, Emma, and Grant!) and our **VIRAL post about BEYOU**

**Blähaj from Ikea Canada!** Our post about BEYOU was shared by a Twitter user, which was then viewed over 1.7 million times! Our social media reach on Facebook extended to over 59,773 people (up 53% from last year) and to 23,048 people on Instagram (an increase of 176.8% as compared to last year).

We used our Dalhousie Medicine Service Learning Students, Sydney, Emma, and Grant to help us with health promotion activities this year! They shadowed clinicians and community education sessions. They later did their own Ask Me Anything session on our Instagram, to learn about the massive role social media plays in health literacy and health information access. They created some awesome posters soon to be added on to our website that summarizes some of our lengthier pages on STIs and birth control.

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 last fiscal year. It wrapped up this year, and was a great success!



Kate Gray  
@hownottodraw

IKEA CANADA MADE A REAL TRANS FLAG BLAHAJ

AND THEY GIVE THEM OUT TO SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRES FOR PEOPLE GETTING GENDER AFFIRMING TREATMENT TO HUG 😊

source & credit Halifax Sexual Health Centre: [instagram.com/p/CnhqCK8pNEq/...](https://www.instagram.com/p/CnhqCK8pNEq/)



8:46 p.m. · 17 Jan. 23 · 1.7M Views

13.3K Retweets 1,401 Quotes 64.8K Likes

## 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. We have grown our team this year, thanks to several grants!

### **Executive Director**

Abbey Ferguson is the current Executive Director of HSHC. She is responsible for general oversight and management of the clinic and staff, as well as all of the amazing collaborations that HSHC gets to participate in. She has continued to do Health Promotion Coordination as well, and regularly gets out of the office to deliver comprehensive sexual education and professional development sessions in the community.

### **Volunteers**

We are so excited to announce that volunteers are back at HSHC, after a long suspension during COVID-19. Volunteers help with our daily operations (e.g. reception, appointment bookings and reminders, specimen management, etc.) and our fundraising initiatives. We had 22 volunteers pick up shifts this year. We are so grateful for their help, and are so excited to have folks back in.

### **Administrators**

This past fiscal, HSHC employed 1 full-time Medical Office Administrators and 3 casual Administrators. 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. We welcomed Suzanna Vietinghoff to the team this year. We'd like to wish Amy Prescott the best of luck as she returned to school for Physiotherapy! As well, a big congratulations to Maddie Clark-O'Brien, as she returns to school for Social Work this coming fall!

### **Social Work**

Thanks to the generosity of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, we were able to hire a MSW as an addition to our team. Welcome, Jey Benoit! Jey is offering FREE psychosocial/readiness letter assessments to patients for gender-affirming care. They have also been playing a program development role as HSHC shifts towards an Informed Consent model. Jey was also able to take on a MSW student, increasing our capacity even more. Social Work plays a key role in effective gender-affirming care provision, and we are so excited to add a new discipline to our team.



### **Sexual and Reproductive Health Project**

Thanks to the generous funding from the Community Based Research Centre, we were able to hire a Sexual and Reproductive Health Project Coordinator. HSHC is a member of this national-scale project to deliver professional development to providers (Queering the Compass), as well as health promotion skills to community members (Totally Outright). We originally welcomed Zac Crawford on board, who has joined the SHaG Lab at Dalhousie. We currently have Abbie MacPherson delving into the second year of this project.

### **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 and 1 part-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 nurses would be impossible. Welcome to our new RN, Emilie Fairbairn!

### **Physicians**

We have had an incredible full roaster of physicians this fiscal year. 18 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 continue to be a mainstay of HSHC.

### **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, Dr. Hali Bauld, who offers ongoing support and leadership of our clinical service offerings, policy, and resource development, and who has been instrumental in helping HSHC navigate advocacy on fair compensation. We have welcomed Chey Morris to the team as Financial Controller/Bookkeeper. Chey has been a great help in keeping our books organized and in good standing.

## Partnerships & Research

Our partnerships and networks are what make HSHC a strong player in sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care in Nova Scotia. We love and appreciate opportunities 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:

- 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.
- 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).
- Partnering with the Dalhousie Medical School to review their Case Diversification Project. We offered some baseline knowledge on 2SLGBTQ+ definitions and terms, and reviewed some individual cases for appropriateness and language.
- Partnering with a pharmacy researcher at Dalhousie for an exciting pharmacy-based project called PrEP-RX. In PrEP-RX, a pharmacist manages the PrEP prescription, while HSHC manages blood work results and any complications.
- Consulting with Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity on their new "Not Just the Tip" project – a program to train teachers on better sexual education provision!
- Developing community and provider-facing resources on mpox and mpox immunization thanks to the generous funding of the Community Based Research Centre.
- Providing letters of support for various research projects and grant proposals that would support the development of sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health knowledge and resources in Nova Scotia.
- Providing Safer Sex Supplies to several community groups such as Laing House, Out of the Cold, BGC, Mount Saint Vincent University, Elizabeth Fry Society, NSCC, and





## HALIFAX Sexual Health Centre

Party Safe with Schulich Law (Dalhousie University). We also gave supplies to several schools and Schools+ programs, 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.

- Partnering on the TestNow 2.0 research project funded by the Community Based Research Centre. We gave away over 200 HIV self-test kits at the Atlantic Sex Show!
- Offering a student placement for the Dalhousie University Masters of Social Work program. This student was an incredible benefit to HSHC as she delivered gender-affirming care intakes.
- Offering a student placement for a Political Science student from Dalhousie University. This placement focused on health promotion skills development, volunteering skills, and accessible social media captioning.
- Offering a student placement for a Health Promotion student from Dalhousie University. This placement focused on community health promotion, comprehensive sexual education, and mpox resource development.



## Our Funders

HSHC derives its revenue from a variety of sources (overhead from MSI billings, 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 Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Community Based Research Centre, the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, the 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

We are thrilled to announce HSHC raised **\$17,939.89** in support of our programs and services! The majority of these funds came directly from individual donors and those making a donation in turn for our Health Promotion program delivery, which is incredibly meaningful. We were also the recipients of a benefit concert put on by the Brigid Trio! 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.

