

**Halifax Sexual Health Centre
Annual Report
2023 - 2024**

Executive Director's Report

Wow, what a busy year 2023-2024 was at Halifax Sexual Health Centre! We took time this year to celebrate our milestones and forge ahead with planning for the future. As always, I am continually impressed by the dedication, passion, and skills demonstrated by our staff, clinicians, and volunteers.

Our 50 year anniversary as an organization passed us by during the peak of the pandemic in 2021. HSHC was officially founded in 1971 as the Metro Family Planning Association, evolving into the Planned Parenthood Metro Clinic, and eventually, Halifax Sexual Health Centre. I'm pleased to report that we decided that it's never too late to celebrate! We had a beautiful mural entitled "Connection" by Shannon Long (@shannon.long.art on Instagram) and assisted by David Hamp-Gonsalves (@davidhg.art on Instagram) painted in our waiting room. We dedicated the mural to Dr. Pam Brown, a founding physician of HSHC. The mural is truly the highlight of our physical space. It embraces the joy and affirmation that comes from having your health needs met. We embraced the innuendo and playfulness inherent in our work to remind people in our waiting room of our values. At HSHC, we are sex positive, pro-choice, confidential, community driven, youth friendly, 2SLGBTQIA+ focused, and judgement free.



Additionally, HSHC was awarded The Helen & Fred Bentley Award for Excellence of Achievement for one of our longest running programs – Compassionate Contraceptives. A decades-long mainstay of HSHC, we are proud to continue to give out thousands of dollars' worth of free birth control products every single year. In fact, we doubled our budget for Compassionate Contraceptives this fiscal. We continue to advocate for universal contraceptive coverage with our involvement with Access Now Nova Scotia, a coalition of clinicians, professionals, politicians, and individuals pursuing barrier-free access to contraception in consideration of gender equity, best medical practices, and smart economics.

We've made some very exciting investments into accessibility and modernization this year. With help from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage, we purchased a power exam table that ensures accessibility, safety, dignity, and autonomy for patients of all capacities. Thanks to the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund, we subscribed to innovate medical communication software, Mikata Health. This provides text-based secure messaging and appointment reminders/instructions to prevent the financial burden of no-shows, and saves precious administrative time.

Looking forward to the future, HSHC board and staff members embarked on a strategic planning process this past fall. Spanning six hours of collaborative discussion, outputs of the session included steps toward a renewed Mission, Vision, and Values, understanding future scenarios and long-term goals and objectives. While we are looking down a challenging national and global political climate in terms of 2SLGBTQ+ and reproductive rights, I'm continuously inspired by the long legacy of HSHC. We have seen struggle as an organization before, and will overcome it, with the help of our passionate and dedicated board members, staff, clinicians, and community partners.

In solidarity,



Abbey Ferguson
Executive Director, HSHC

Medical Director's Report

Halifax Sexual Health Centre's 2023/2024 year was action-packed from a clinical standpoint. We continue to fill our appointment slots within 1-2 days of releasing appointments each month. This high demand for sexual and reproductive health primary care is a direct result of the ongoing lack of primary care services in our province, as well as long wait times for specialists, such as gynecology.

On a hugely positive note, we no longer have a waitlist for gender-affirming hormone initiation therapy. This technically officially occurred after this end of fiscal, but this feat was made possible due to the combined efforts of gender-affirming care(GAC)-providing physicians, our social work team, and HSHC administrators who went to great lengths to actively book GAC patients over the past year. A huge thank you to Dr. Hali Bauld and our ED Abbey Ferguson for securing a sessional billing rate for HSHC GAC-providing physicians. This new sessional fee more fairly compensates physicians for time spent on the assessment, treatment and administrative paperwork associated with GAC patient care. This payment model has resulted in a significant increase in the number of GAC clinics offered, as well as a useful monthly multi-disciplinary GAC-provider virtual meeting to discuss, collaborate and improve HSHC GAC patient care.

Our physician workforce is currently 17 part-time clinicians, each working in various capacities, frequently evolving as physicians come and go; most notably, the retirement of Dr. Jenni Moon in December 2023. Other clinical updates include the part time addition of RN Michelle Harvey in November 2023. Michelle also works part time at the VG-STI Clinic and has helped create an informal, but mutually beneficial, connection between HSHC and the VG-STI clinic. As of April 1, 2024, in hopes of improving referral wait times, the Nova Scotia Health Authority mandated the use of OCEAN software for ultrasound, MRI and surgical requests and referrals. HSHC physicians and administrators took part in on-site learning sessions. Lastly, HSHC continues to partner with Public Health to provide vaccines for persons at high risk of infection, including Imvamune for MPox, Gardasil-9 for HPV, and Twinrix for Hep A&B prevention.

For 2024/2025, we will continue to advocate for additional resources for the ongoing provision of sexual and reproductive health primary care, including GAC, in our community and beyond.

Thank you,



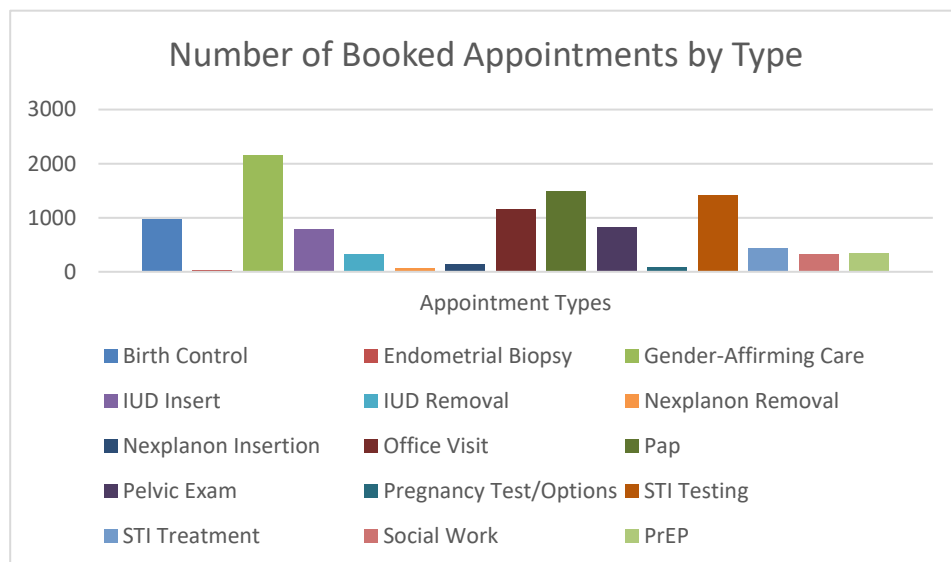
Dr. Julie Gibson
Medical Director, HSHC

Operations & Services

HSHC provided primary sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming health care to **5,777 patients** and booked **12,366 appointments** during the 2023-2024 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 197 STBBI tests (blood draws)**.

Overall, services in highest demand were Gender-Affirming Care (2,154 appointments), Pap Testing (1,490 appointments), STI Testing (1,404 appointments), and general Office Visits (1,160 appointments). Office Visit appointments can be used to discuss all sorts of sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care services, both virtual and in-person.



Gender-affirming care is a major focus at HSHC, with nine of our physicians offering gender-affirming health services, including hormone therapy, surgical referrals, navigational support, and post-operative care. This past year, HSHC supported **705 transgender/gender diverse patients with their gender-affirmation journeys**. We have a total roster of 1,359 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.

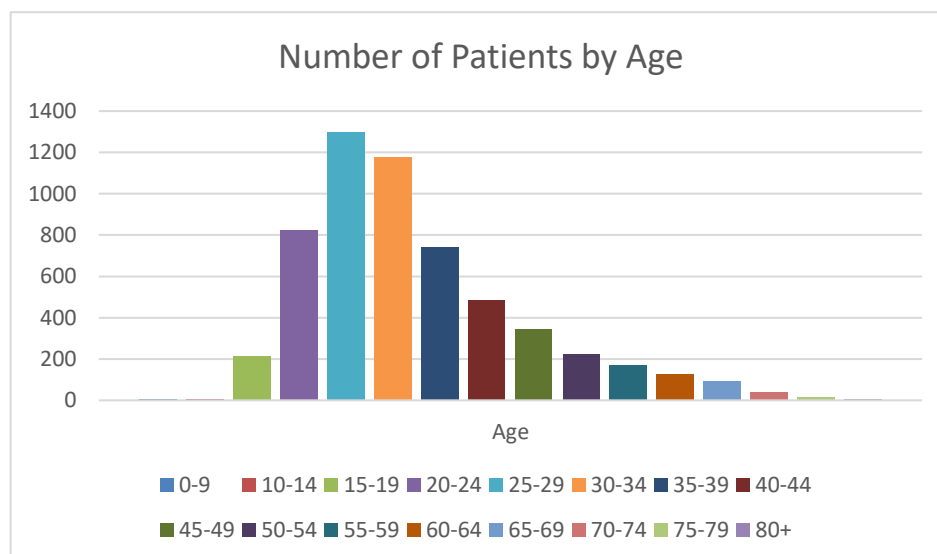
Thanks to the generous contributions of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, we were able to hire a Masters of Social Work last fiscal year to help us on the transitional journey of

delivering gender-affirming care through an **Informed Consent model**. Continued funds were received from Sexual Health Nova Scotia to continue this work. We officially shifted to an informed consent model in August 2023! What this means is that patients will no longer require a formal Letter of Readiness to be placed on our waitlist for hormone replacement therapy. Instead, patients can expect to have an intake appointment performed by a social worker before meeting with one of our physicians. This intake appointment helps us remain efficient while managing a large patient load. This service can be offered in person or virtually, for anyone living in Nova Scotia. Additionally, our MSW continues to be available to offer FREE surgical readiness assessments to meet provincial funding coverage requirements. Thanks to this change, the waitlist was reduced from 12 months to 5-10 months for most of 2023-24. We look forward to decreasing the waitlist even more with these exciting clinical improvements.

Our MSW has also expanded scope beyond gender-affirming care, offering collaborative primary care social work services. This can include services such as diagnosis acceptance support, assistance with forms, referrals to outside non-profit and community services, single session mental/sexual health discussions, navigational support, needs assessments, appointment debriefing, and more.

As reported last year, we are continuing to see 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 are keeping an eye on this trend as it pertains to advocacy work and opportunities for professional development for community physicians.

Of the over 5,700 clients we saw at HSHC this year, the majority were between the ages of 20 and 40 years old.





We continue to provide **telehealth services** (we offered **2,280 televisits**) this fiscal year. 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.

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 Tuesday and some Mondays. Our average wait time for an in-person appointment throughout the year was approximately 5 weeks. **Our clinical schedule, released monthly, takes on average 1 – 3 days 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 so high that it is our chief complaint from clients and patients. We are constantly looking for ways to streamline call volume, including new priority voicemails for procedure follow-up patients and for health professionals looking to get in touch with us. We look forward to exploring online booking as a possible option to alleviate call volume.

Health Promotion and Advocacy

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. This year, our social media reached over 34,000 users.

We were able to **put HSHC on the national radar** by participating in several national-level projects. In addition to the CBRC Sexual and Reproductive Health Project, we also participated in train-the-trainer and delivery of the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity's 'Not Just the Tip' program. This program is meant for educators and other professionals looking to improve their capacity to deliver sexual education. Abbey (Executive Director) and Suzanna (Medical Office Administrator) were able to attend a training weekend in Toronto, Ontario with colleagues from around the country. From there, Not Just the Tip content was integrated into several professional development workshops. We were also invited to contribute to CATIE's (Canada's official knowledge broker for HIV and hepatitis C) National Dialogue on HIV Self-Testing in Toronto. As one of the only clinical locations involved in early HIV self-test kit delivery (via CBRC's TestNow program), we offered an important voice on the connection from self-testing to clinical care. You can also find HSHC highlighted in ***That Sex Show***, a television series created by Accessible Media Inc. Hosted by sex educator Rachele Manett, *That Sex Show* is a deep dive into the intersection of sex and disability.



Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights hosted their first Member Centre's Retreat, and we were able to attend. Objectives of the event were to build trust and connection across members of the associate network, to reflect together on our accomplishments, to work towards developing our strategic objectives and to inform future planning. Most excitingly, **we secured a meeting with Federal Minister of Health, Jean-Yves Duclos**. HSHC was a spotlighted organization in this meeting, and we were able to highlight the trend of non-profit clinics filling gaps in care provision by provincial authorities.



Thanks to the Community Based Research Centre (CBRC), **our Health Promotion team grew last year!** We have hired a Sexual and Reproductive Health Project Coordinator, Abbie. Over the course of this two-year project, Abbie organized and delivered two streams of content – community education, and provider (doctor, nurse, social work, etc) education. This past fiscal, Abbie delivered Pivot, a program from 2SLGBTQ+ people with an interest in becoming community health leaders and advocates in their communities. She also delivered Queering the Compass, a day-long professional development session for providers on 2SLGBTQ+ sexual and reproductive health topics. The two-year timeline of the project has come to an end, with fantastic feedback from participants of the programming. One of our resources, created by participants, on the legal rights of 2SLGBTQ+ people seeking health care, was highlighted and published by CBRC.

In the community, we provided sexual health education to 28 classrooms and 16 community

groups. We had professional development sessions with 10 allied health professional offices/institutions. Some sessions were held over Zoom, but most were able to be in person this year. This year, new workshops were created on sexual health and oncology, menstrual management, and sexual health for newcomers.

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), **over 100 DivaCups**, and countless safer sex supplies and resources. Tabling is a valuable learning opportunity for students, and this year we were joined by admin and social work staff, volunteers, and placement students.

We had a whole host of students this year! Over this fiscal, we were joined by Madeline (Masters of Social Work), Theiaj (Bachelors of Social Work), and two pairs of students from the Dalhousie Medicine Service Learning program, Reanna and Alexa, and Jessica and Meg. Madeline and Theiaj shadowed health promotion presentations, joined staff at tabling events, assisted our staff MSW in performing intakes and assessments for gender-affirming care, created social media posts, and more! Reanna and Alexa created a wonderful resource for clinicians on newcomer sexual health. Jessica and Meg assisted in delivering HIV self-test kits at several events.



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

Volunteers are very important members of our team here at HSHC. Volunteers help with our daily operations (e.g. reception, appointment bookings and reminders, specimen management, etc.) and our fundraising initiatives. We had 26 volunteers pick up shifts this year, contributing over 1760 hours of support! We are so grateful for their help.

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. Our admin are our champions for modernizing our clinical processes – without them, there would be no text-based reminder services or updates to new Electronic Medical Records systems, like Ocean! We welcomed Kailey Webber to the team this year.

Social Work

Thanks to the generosity of the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia and Sexual Health Nova Scotia, we have an MSW on our team, Jey Benoit! Jey was also able to take on two Social Work students, one Masters level and one Bachelors level. Students help us increase our capacity while ensuring future providers are well informed on sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care provision.

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, Abbie MacPherson, last fiscal year. 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 and Pivot). This project was only funded for two years, and wrapped up at the end of fiscal. We'll miss Abbie and her wonderful breadth of knowledge!

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, Michelle Harvey!

Physicians

We have had an incredible full roster of physicians this fiscal year. 19 physicians practiced with us over the course of this year, and we are ending with a team of 18. 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. This year, physicians offering gender-affirming care have started their own monthly meetings, led by Dr. Sarah Fraser, to discuss care provision, program development, and interesting cases. A special shout out to Dr. Jenni Moon, who retired from practice this year. Dr. Moon has practiced with HSHC since 1994 and contained a wealth of institutional knowledge. She will be greatly missed; enjoy retirement!

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. Julie Gibson, who offers ongoing support and leadership of our clinical service offerings, policy, and resource development. Dr. Hali Bauld continues to advise on gender-affirming care projects. Chey Morris is a part of the team as Financial Controller/Bookkeeper.

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:

- Joining Access Now Nova Scotia, a coalition advocating for barrier free, universal access to contraception in consideration of gender equity, best medical practices, and smart economics.
- 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.
- Joining Sexual Health Nova Scotia and other 2SLGBTQ+ health leaders in advocating for a provincial Sexual Health Strategy.
- Offering a student placement for the Dalhousie University Bachelors and Masters of Social Work programs.
- Collaborating with Public Health and the Nova Scotia Health Authority in the continued management of mpox immunizations.
- Participate in national conversations on best practices for HIV self-test kit delivery with CATIE.
- 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.
- Providing feedback and consultation support to a variety of projects relevant to sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming care, such as with the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, prideHealth, clinics looking to provide sexual, reproductive, and gender-affirming services, and many community groups and researchers.
- Participating in 2QTHINKS, an Atlantic-wide queer health networking group. We meet several times a year 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).

- 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, prideHealth, CBRC).
- Providing Safer Sex Supplies to several community groups such as Laing House, Mount Saint Vincent University, Elizabeth Fry Society, NSCC, Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, Marguerite Centre, YWCA Supportive Housing for Young Mothers, and F*cking Trans Women theatre production. Free safer sex supplies are also given out at every in-person Health Promotion workshop.
- 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! After consultation was completed, we delivered components of the program with local allied health professionals in Nova Scotia.
- 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.
- Partnering on the TestNow 2.0 research project, which delivers free HIV self-test kits to community members, funded by the Community Based Research Centre.



THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR
**GENDER+SEXUAL
DIVERSITY**

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.

HSHC would like to thank several departments in the Province of Nova Scotia, in particular the Department of Health and Wellness, Department of Community Services, and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage's Community ACCESS-Ability Program. Additionally, this year HSHC was able to secure a sessional compensation package for our physicians providing gender-affirming care, thanks to collaboration with the Department of Health and Wellness.

Special thanks to the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund, the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, the Community Based Research Centre, Sexual Health Nova Scotia, The Plum Foundation, and United Way for supporting HSHC. Thank you to the Helen & Fred Bentley Awards for Excellence of Achievement for their financial award for our Compassionate Contraceptives program.



Fundraising & Donations

We are thrilled to announce HSHC raised **\$23,212.12** 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 funds from Fagrances, a small queer-owned perfumeries business, 2 Crows Brewing 'Queer Beer,' and the Board Room Game Café's RuPaul Drag Race Trivia event.

Huge thanks to our private donors for your many contributions big and small that have an equally important impact. While grants come and go, it is the support of our community members that sustains HSHC our long-term, operational endeavors. 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.

