

# ▼ MAX

Ottawa's Health Connection for GBT2Q Folks

## RETROSPECTIVE

2019



2022



© MAX Ottawa 2022



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*As a community-based organization, MAX Ottawa shares in the work of recognizing the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, taking responsibility for the atrocities of the past, and prioritizing Indigenous-centred guidance in ongoing efforts at decolonization and community building.*

*In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that MAX Ottawa and the communities it serves are located on the unceded and unsurrendered lands of the Algonquin and Anishinaabeg people. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- p.3 Message from the Leadership
- p.5 Services Overview
- p.5 Sexual Health
- p.7 Harm Reduction
- p.9 Mental Health
- p.11 Community Health
- p.13 Volunteer With Us
- p.14 Working at MAX
- p.14 Accessing MAX's Services
- p.15 Communications and Outreach
- p.15 To Our Donors
- p.16 Financial Overview
- p.16 Funding Partners

## OUR VALUES

**GBT2Q SEX POSITIVE**  
We have a right to satisfying sex lives and health care services free from guilt, stigma, coercion, violence and shame. We endeavour to support this right through a culturally competent queer harm reduction lens.

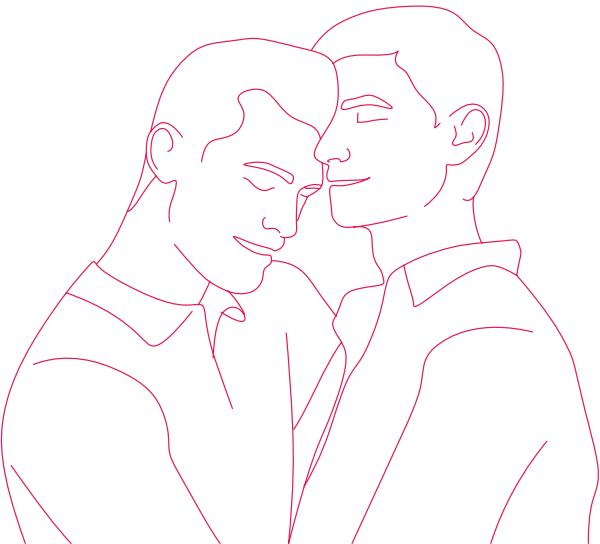
**HOLISTIC & ASSETS-BASED APPROACH**  
We are resilient, creative, and strong. As a community-serving organization, we build strength on traditions of overcoming historical adversity and oppression. We believe that health and well-being are encompassed by physical, mental, spiritual, sexual and social well-being.

**DIVERSITY**  
We acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate our diverse communities as a source of strength and insight. We serve trans, gender fluid and cis guys into guys and strive to free ourselves of bias.

**COMMUNITY BUILDING + HASSLE-FREE APPROACH**  
We support advocacy at the individual, community and systemic levels. We seek to foster intergenerational connections to create mentorship opportunities and address ongoing issues facing our community.

Our services are delivered in a congenial environment that is respectful, non-judgmental, and affirming.

**PARTICIPATION**  
Our communities are involved at all levels of planning and program development. We work regularly with other health and community partners to achieve a care network that is grounded in the past, organizing in the present and planning for a future where all our communities will thrive.



# MESSAGE FROM THE LEADERSHIP



Rémi Samson  
CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



& James Demers  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*On behalf of MAX Ottawa, it is with immense pleasure that we present this Retrospective for the years 2019-2022. That this communication can be issued on the year MAX celebrates 20 years of community service should be a cause for great pride for the people we serve and for our organization as a whole.*

*Over the past three years, despite the hardships caused by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, MAX delivered on its strategic priorities, expanded its programming, hired additional staff, and solidified its funding.*

## 2002

MAX grew out of the Ottawa Gay Men's Wellness Initiative, a grass-roots organization created in 2002 by community members advocating for health equity for gay men.

In partnership with public health authorities and others, the OGMWI implemented a more holistic vision of gay men's health.

## 2017

After substantial community consultations, MAX Ottawa was launched as a corporate successor to the OGMWI and later obtained its charitable status.

## 2019

After extensive consultations with community partners, MAX published its first strategic plan, announcing the following **five strategic priorities for the years 2019-2022:**

1. **Enabling guys into guys to navigate health and wellness pathways across their life course;**
2. **Fostering cohesive community-led spaces and connections;**
3. **Building partnerships to achieve responsive systems for guys into guys;**
4. **Solidifying MAX's policy foundations;**
5. **Laying the groundwork for an integrated health and wellness centre in Ottawa.**

## The years 2019-2022 have been pivotal for MAX.

### Of particular note:

- MAX moved its headquarters to a new building, at 400 Cooper Street, after having outgrown its original offices.
- In the summer of 2021, MAX hired a new Executive Director, James Demers, who moved from Calgary to Ottawa to succeed Roberto Ortiz Núñez and Matthew Harding in the role.
- And in September 2021, Brent Bauer and Nick Valela, the last two founders of MAX, retired from the organization, passing on to new leaders the task of developing the organization alongside a growing and evolving community.

## TODAY

Today, here we are, stronger than ever, and proof to all of MAX's incredible resilience as a pillar of Ottawa's queer community. Support for MAX, both from the queer community and our funding partners, has never been stronger. And we continue to develop new partnerships at the local, provincial and national levels.

As we move towards the development of MAX's next strategic plan in 2023, the focus is shifting towards new areas, including:

- Increased support for program growth and community engagement;**
- Development of a robust funding strategy to realize the long-term goal of creating an integrated health and wellness hub for queer people in the National Capital Region;**
- Investment in the people and communities that make MAX what it is through the application of an equity lens to MAX's program development and operations.**

## At this time of rapid transformation for MAX,

publishing this Retrospective seemed an appropriate way of publicly taking stock, celebrating our successes, and looking to the future.

In closing, none of this would have been possible without the vision, hard work and dedication of our founders, especially of Brent Bauer and Nick Valela, to whom we owe a special debt of gratitude.

We would also like to express deep appreciation to our smart, dedicated and professional staff, the myriad volunteers that make MAX's wheels turn, and our ever-essential and supportive funders. We look forward to continuing to serve Ottawa's diverse queer communities, in pursuit of an inclusive and holistic vision of health care for all of us.

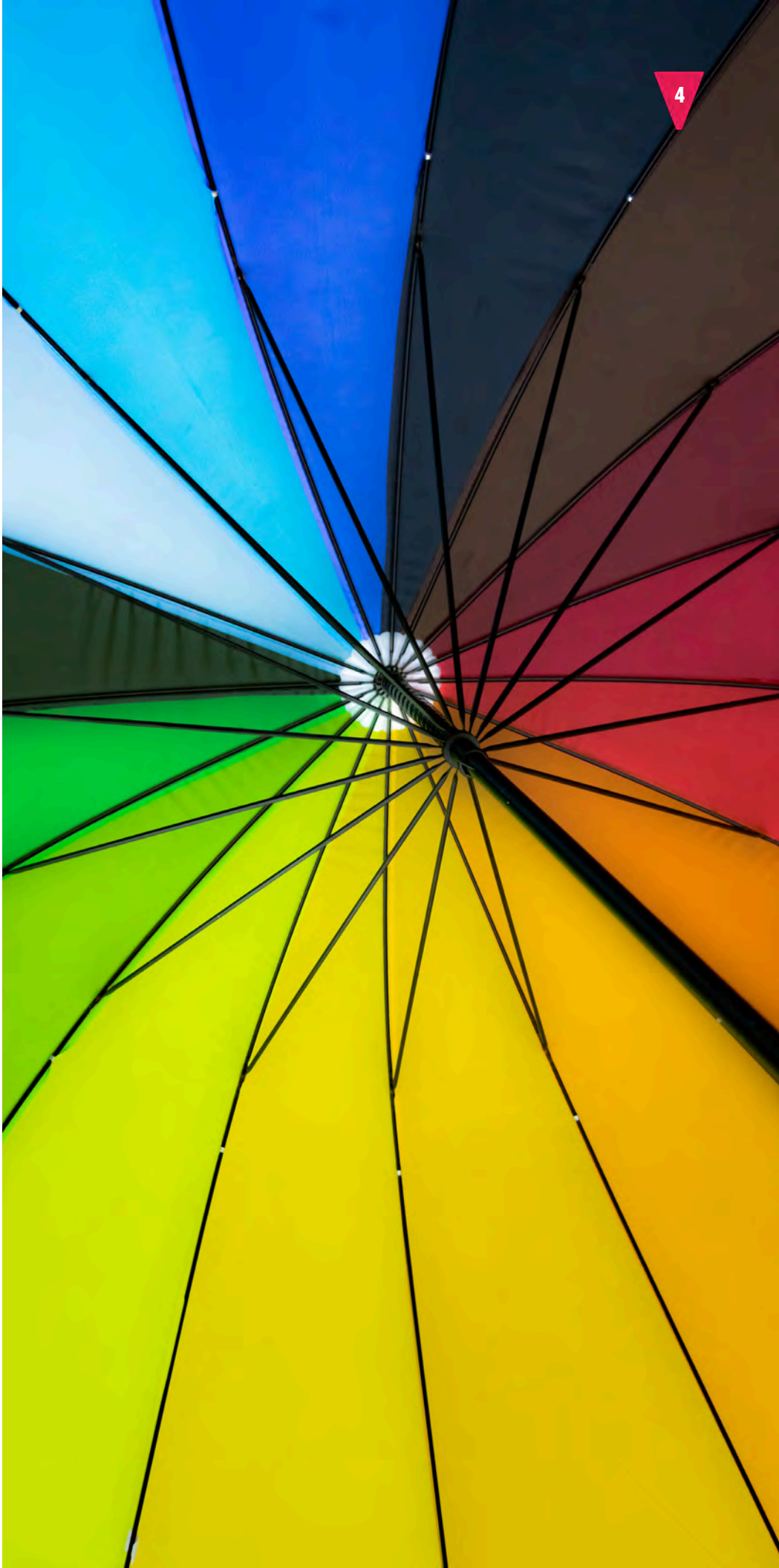
**Rémi Samson & James Demers**





# SERVICES OVERVIEW

Over the 2019-2022 period, MAX experienced significant growth and secured the appropriate funding to pursue its strategic objectives. In constant consultation with key stakeholders, including its partners and the members of the communities it serves, MAX developed and delivered programming in the following areas.



**MAX’s sexual health programming** works to increase the awareness of HIV, HepC, and other STBBI prevention measures, testing, treatment, care, and support services in the National Capital Region. Through our partnerships with the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, the Centretown Community Health Centre, Ottawa Public Health, and others, we coordinate and support the development of several initiatives that aim to increase access to and uptake of sexual health services.

**During 2021-22** MAX’s sexual health programming expanded and shifted with the COVID-19 pandemic. We increased partnerships for PrEP and PEP referrals for community members, extended programming to support sex workers, and developed sexual health pilot programming for queer newcomers. We also responded to and led the Monkeypox vaccine rollout in partnership with Ottawa Public Health over Pride season. In 2022-23, we plan to expand our educational content for service providers, begin to develop a health navigation app, and develop additional support services for the community.



COMMUNITY  
ROUND TABLES



SEX TALK



GET-A-KIT



GAY ZONE



TOMQ



NOTABLE  
ACHIEVEMENTS

MAX supports ongoing round table discussions with community members to identify and address issues relating to access to sexual health and prevention services in Ottawa.

The 120-minute, audio-recorded, qualitative discussions yield feedback that helps ensure our programs are responsive to community needs.

Sex Talk is a series of hybrid workshops that aim to provide resources for improved sexual health over the lifetime. Topics covered include consent, communication skills, and exploring kinks and fantasies.

In 2021, Sex Talk quickly became a peer leader development project that culminated in a series of presentations delivered by queer newcomers.

Get-A-Kit is a program that offers mail-out delivery of free HIV self-test kits in Ottawa and surrounding regions.

Data generated by the program contributes to a study, supported by Ottawa Public Health, on effective testing access in Ottawa.

Gay Zone was created in 2008 as one of the main realizations of the Ottawa Gay Men’s Wellness Initiative. To this day, it provides a wide range of programs and services for gay, bi, trans men and other men who have sex with men in the Ottawa area.

**179 Clarence St. Clinic:**  
Thursdays 4pm -6pm  
(by appointment only).  
613 - 234 - 4691

MAX’s TOMQ program takes the form of a bilingual website, developed by and for sex workers in Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal and Québec City, where members share tips and tricks of the trade, access articles and information on sex work, and access safer sex supplies.

TOMQ is a confidential service, and access is free to sex workers.

In 2023, TOMQ will be hosting podcasts featuring the stories and lived experiences of sex workers.

MAX led and coordinated **14 advisory councils** for health care providers and community partners to increase knowledge of and access to PrEP and PEP for community members.

**A total of 289 community members** engaged in round-table research projects with Ottawa Public Health. The projects were led by marginalized communities, including African, Caribbean, Black community members and newcomers, with the goal to address systemic inequities, implement community-focused policies and enhance access to preventative sexual health services and support.

**A total of 104 community members** accessed our Get-A-Kit instant HIV testing program.





# HARM REDUCTION

**MAX's harm reduction programming** is designed to provide stigma-free spaces for substance users, facilitate access to safe supplies and resources, and create and sustain a supportive community in the National Capital Region.

## PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

Respect for the rights of people who use drugs

Commitment to evidence

Avoidance of stigma



### DISTRIBUTION

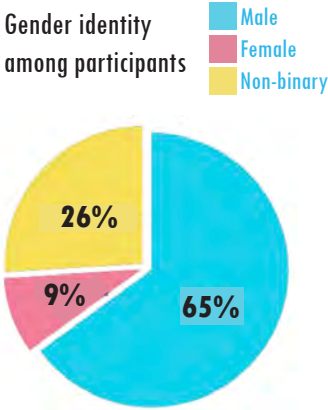
MAX's harm reduction supply delivery service is available to community members in the Ottawa area. Piloted during the pandemic, MAX's distribution program grew to become its most sought-after front-line service.

Online order forms are confidential and available in both English and French. Contactless deliveries are made on Wednesday evenings each week. Supplies are also available by mail within the National Capital Region.

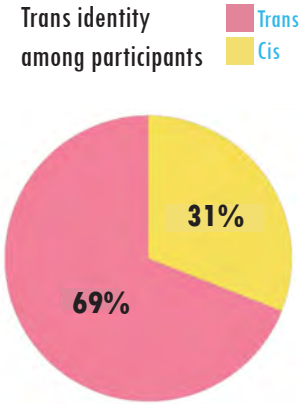
All shipments or drop-offs are done using discrete packaging.

In 2023, we will expand the services we offer to trans and non-binary populations, like supplying HRT support, gender-affirming gear and social supports.

Gender identity among participants



Trans identity among participants



Peer Distributed Items



## NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

**MAX distributed 86,496 harm reduction kits and supplies** over the course of 622 orders between 2019-2022. We expect to provide 100,000 pieces of harm reduction supplies in 2022-2023 within the National Capital Region.

After attending MAX's Naloxone training program, participants reported a **181% increase in knowledge around Naloxone**.

**A total of 584 professionals attended 16 training sessions** on PNP cultural competency. 203 participants were front-line healthcare providers.



### TEA PARTY

Tea Party is a peer-led weekly drop-in support group for GBT2Q folks who Party and Play (PnP, or chemsex). The group alternates between peer-led presentations and discussions on topics relating to PnP and open group support that focuses on come-down strategies, self-care and system navigation.



### AFTER THE PARTY

After the ParTy is a recurring 8-week group for GBT2Q people who have stopped using meth or are exploring possibilities of sex without meth and who are looking for support around the challenges of navigating this experience.

Participants reported that the program improved by 20% their overall happiness, their ability to control cravings, and their skills to cope with difficult emotions. They also identified that their ability to make healthier choices had been enhanced by 40%.



### ODYSSEY

MAX now offers a 6-week substance use change program that incorporates motivational interviewing methods to help participants meet their own goals, such as changes to consumption type, method and frequency.

The program runs twice a year, once in the Spring and once in the Fall.

# MENTAL HEALTH

**MAX’s mental health programming** focuses on strengthening MAX’s service offerings that help queer folks in Ottawa connect to mental health services from a queer-affirming lens.

*"... I extremely appreciated having a specifically queer space to talk through the intersections of dysphoria and eating disorders, and to feel accepted and seen in my experiences as a queer person and as a fat person."*

- LGBTQ Disordered Eating group participant



## PEER SUPPORT

MAX’s peer-led programs help participants feel connected to the community and provide an empathetic touchstone to the unique experiences of GBT2Q folks.

Peer support volunteers offer advice on lived experiences and connect service users to community resources.



## SUPPORT GROUPS

MAX offers eight-week support groups throughout the year on various health and wellness topics. In 2021, we expanded to include groups specific to managing anxiety, youth leadership development, and healthy sexuality.

We also developed a new partnership with the Hopewell Eating Disorder Support Centre to offer a support group for 2SLGBTQ+ folks struggling with disordered eating, and launched Getting Connected, a group for building relationship skills from a queer perspective.



## HEALTH NAVIGATION

MAX has long helped service users to navigate mental health services and find GBT2Q-affirming professionals to support their goals.

In 2021, the health navigation program was expanded to include navigation services for physical health. Some services are available in French and English.

In 2023, we will be expanding our navigation services to trans and non-binary health navigation and will be aiming to support a bilingual, full-time navigation team.



## NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Referrals to queer-affirming mental health professionals **increased by 185%**.

MAX experienced a **150% increase** in the number of mental health professionals included in its database, with the majority of additions at the intersection of multiple identities (e.g. racialized and trans health care providers).

**90% of participants** in MAX’s support groups described improvements in how they relate to topics such as anxiety and body image.





Jeremy

"As a Peer Supporter, I have spent countless hours volunteering to provide a safe and comfortable environment for guys who need someone to talk to. During volunteering, I have developed a strong sense of social connectedness with my fellow peer supporters and gained valuable communication skills, such as active listening.

When I think of my experience with MAX, I would say the culture at MAX is the biggest standout. Everyone is very accepting and willing to provide any help or advice if you need it."

#volunteerofthemoth #MyStoryWithMax



COMMUNITY  
MAXIMIZER

In 2020-2022, eleven projects were approved and delivered through the Community MAXimizer program.

The projects are led by community leaders and contribute to MAX's mission of maximizing guys' health and wellness.



NOW WHAT?

A casual discussion group for GBT2Q guys over 50 years of age who want to age with pride.

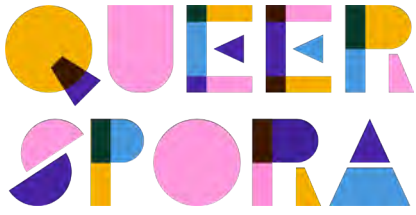
The group comes together online and in person to create a welcoming environment that helps reduce isolation and where members can expand their network of friends.



KEEPING IT 100

Keeping it 100, or K1 for short, is a Black guys into guys peer discussion group.

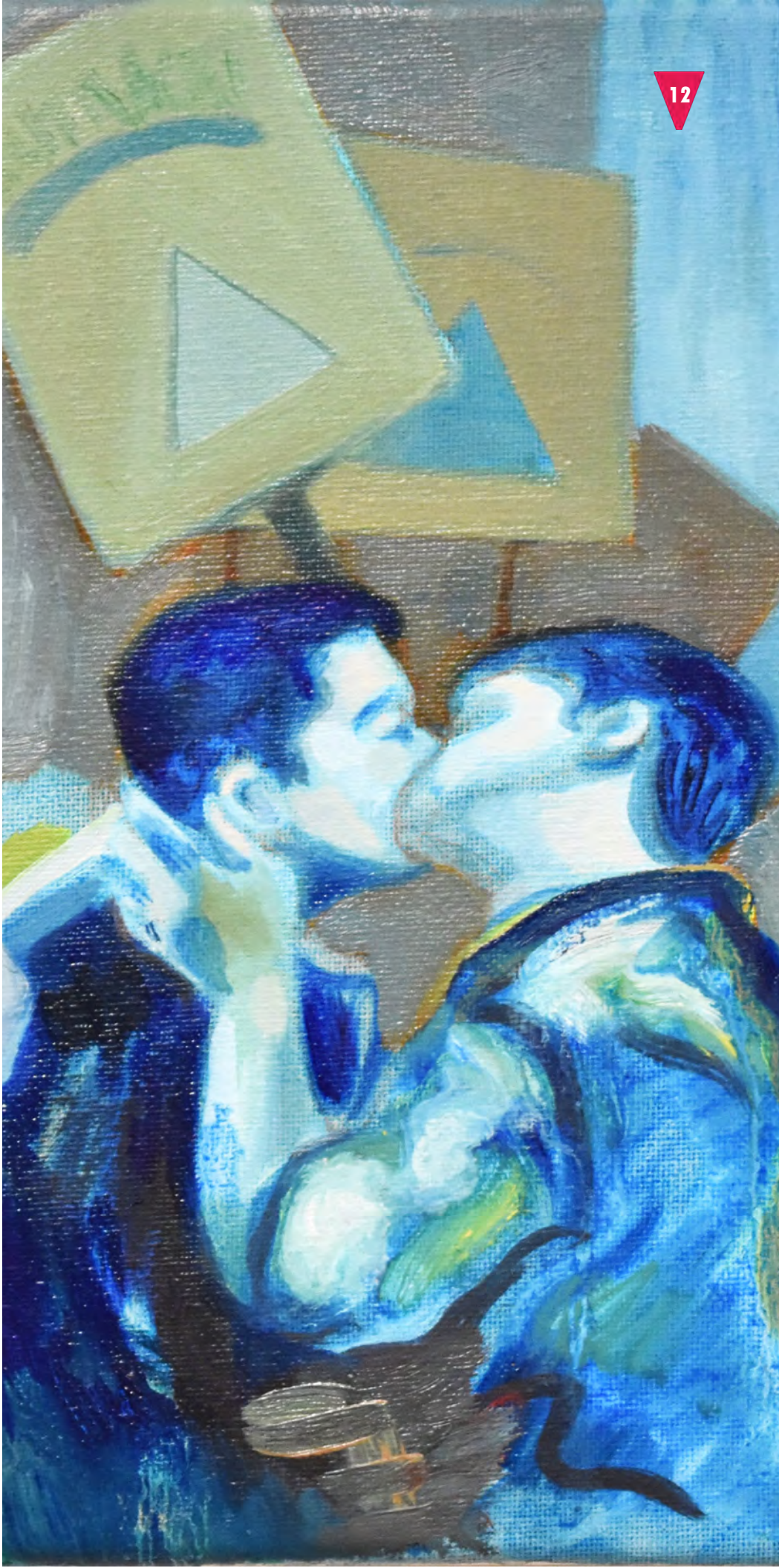
K1 is open to any cis, trans, gender non-binary person who identifies as gay, bi-sexual, queer, questioning or other same-gender loving identities, and is inclusive of African, Caribbean, Black, Afro-Latino, Afro-Indigenous, bi-racial, mixed race, and other members of the African diaspora.



QUEERSPORA

A series of programs, outreach initiatives and events that seek to ease GBT2Q newcomers on their journey of settling in a new place.

The project is delivered in partnership with Capital Rainbow Refuge, an organization dedicated to providing support for immigration and settlement processes for queer newcomers to Canada in the Ottawa area.







# VOLUNTEER WITH US

*MAX cannot exist without the support of countless volunteers who, year after year, generously give their time and skills in support of MAX's mission to improve the health and wellness of GBT2Q folks in the Ottawa area. Throughout the pandemic, MAX continued to benefit from the support of its volunteers to deliver its programs and meet the needs of the communities it serves.*

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

To ensure that MAX meets the needs of the diverse communities it serves, we invite members of the community to be part of an advisory committee. Members of MAX's Community Engagement Advisory Committee can help inform programming and identify necessary resources to support holistic queer health in our communities.

The Board of Directors represents, leads, and serves MAX Ottawa, and holds itself accountable to it. Working collaboratively with the Executive Director, the board is actively involved in setting strategic priorities and goals based on the vision and mission of the organization.

The board is ultimately responsible for the management of MAX's affairs and for all aspects of MAX's performance. Individual directors come from a variety of backgrounds, and the diversity of experiences and knowledge they contribute is essential in ensuring the sustained health of MAX.



## VOLUNTEER WITH MAX

[volunteers@maxottawa.ca](mailto:volunteers@maxottawa.ca)

In 2021, **75 new volunteers** joined the MAX family. Our programs offered more than 20 unique hybrid positions to the volunteers over the pandemic.

Each year, **over 100 volunteers** engage with MAX in a range of activities such as communications, mental health support, governance and committee work, program development and harm reduction.

Between 2019 and 2022, volunteers **contributed over 4,000 hours** of their time to the success of MAX.

# WORKING AT MAX

Every day, our team works with healthcare providers and community partners to deliver critical support and education services and connect guys with the health resources they need. We are proud to employ a diverse team of professional staff members with strong links to the community and who are committed to continuous learning and development.

Our staff members are members of the Ottawa GBT2Q community. They are present at Pride events in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, and attend sector conferences including Surviving to Thriving: National Newcomer Conference, the International AIDS Confer-

ence, and the CBRC Annual Sexual Health Summit.

Over the past three years, our staff have benefitted from ongoing professional development, which includes the Indigenous Canada course delivered by the University of Alberta, ASIST- Suicide Prevention and Intervention, Non-violent Crisis Intervention, and CMHA Concurrent Disorders Training for front-line staff.

Our staff members occupy a number of full-time and part-time positions. MAX also benefits from the support of paid students and interns.



*"MAX is a place where I can bring my whole self to work and have a positive social impact. My work has given me a sense of community and belonging, and I am invited to bring my own perspective to the work."*

Mohamad

# ACCESSING MAX'S SERVICES

**Write to us**  
[info@maxottawa.ca](mailto:info@maxottawa.ca)

**Call Us:**  
(613) 701-6555

**Connect with us on social media**  
Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter

**Visit our website**  
[www.maxottawa.ca](http://www.maxottawa.ca)

**Meet with us in person**  
400, Cooper St., Suite 9004,  
Ottawa, ON K2P 2H8





# COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH



## SOCIAL MEDIA



1.5k fans



2k followers



1.2k followers



101 followers



165 subscribers



MAX contributed to the development of a total of **57 bilingual blog posts** as well as articles written by experts from the community on GBT2Q holistic health.

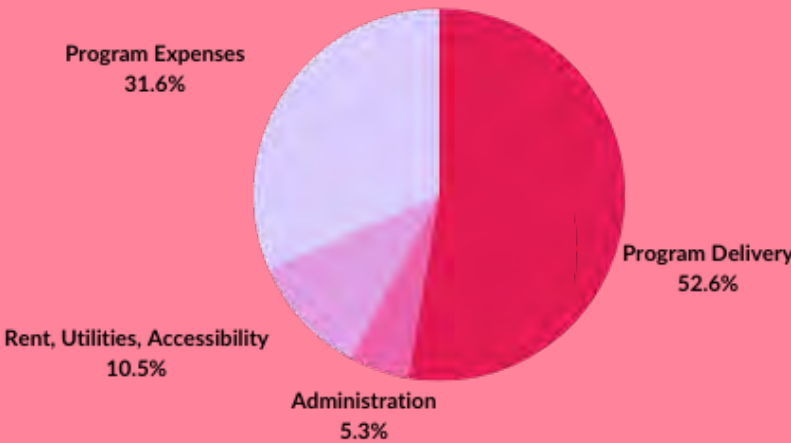
A total of **93 bilingual public workshops, classes, and videos** were offered for free to community members and service professionals.

We launched an innovative online educational method combining an evidence-based relaxation technique (ASMR) and educational posts in health, reaching over **800 views per video on YouTube**.

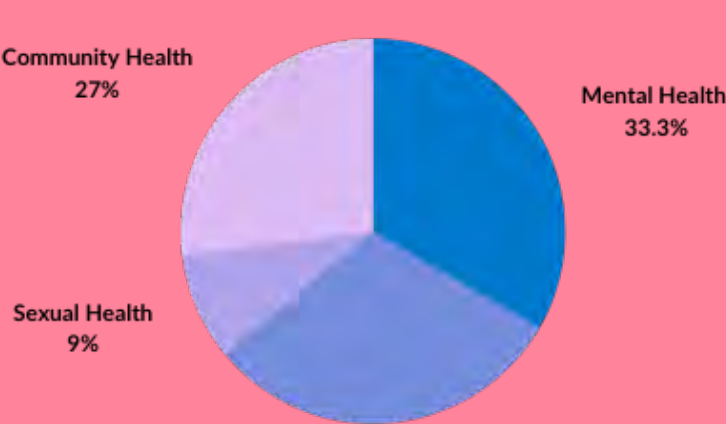
# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Since 2019, MAX has grown into an organization that operates on an annual budget of about **1 million dollars**

Operational Spending



Funding by Area



# TO OUR DONORS



*Thank you so much for your support of MAX Ottawa during the past three unprecedented years.*

*Your generosity is an essential part of the support we can provide to our diverse and growing communities in the National Capital Region. Every dollar you donate contributes to local programming, social support and the removal of barriers to healthcare for our communities.*

*On behalf of the board, staff and community members that we serve, thank you for your generous contribution. We look forward to continuing to create MAX's future in collaboration with you.*

# FUNDING PARTNERS

Ministry of Health  
Ministry of Long-Term Care

Ministère des Soins de longue durée

Employment and Social Development Canada  
Emploi et Développement social Canada

Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada  
Women and Gender Equality Canada

Public Health Agency of Canada  
Agence de la santé publique du Canada

Ontario Trillium Foundation

Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario

## Acknowledgements and Credits

**Images:**  
MAX Ottawa  
Adam Krajewski (couple linework; Ottawa map)  
China Doll  
Nic Cooper (painting of couple kissing)  
Finney (umbrella) (Unsplash.com)  
Monika Kozub (peace sign) (Unsplash.com)

**Layout and esign:**  
Adam Krajewski