



Ottawa Community Health — Ottawa santé communautaire

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2023
2024**



ABOUT MAX

Our health and wellness as queer men and trans and non-binary people has physical, mental, spiritual, sexual, and social aspects, including community building and working for social justice.

The following core values guide our decisions:

- **Fairness and respect.** We treat everyone with kindness, dignity, and respect, ensuring everyone feels valued and included.
- **Collaboration and community.** We work together with others to create services that truly meet people's needs.
- **Excellence and accountability.** We aim to do our best in everything we do, acting responsibly and ethically with our resources.
- **Growth and innovation.** We're always learning, improving, and finding creative ways to make a positive impact.

Land Acknowledgement

With gratitude and respect, we acknowledge that MAX operates on the traditional and unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people. Today, this land is home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in this territory. As a result of a legacy of colonialism, racism, and the dispossession of the Indigenous peoples of this land, we see ongoing disparities in health, wealth, and wellness that we, as uninvited inhabitants, have a responsibility to help address. MAX is committed to supporting local Indigenous communities, following their lead in this work.

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BOARD CHAIR AND ED MESSAGE

This has been a big year at MAX, focused on getting programs back online, filling vacant staff roles, and being present in the community.

As we reflect on a year of major changes, we're thrilled to report on the incredible work that the MAX team delivered for queer men and trans and non-binary people across Ottawa.

In June 2023, we welcomed Adam Awad as our new Executive Director. Adam was previously the Manager of Communications at the Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance, where he helped anchor the public health response on mpox in Ontario and developed media and educational resources on sexual health for queer and trans men. He has also served as the National Chairperson for the Canadian Federation of Students, as a director on the boards for both the Centretown Community Health Centre and the Alliance for Healthier Communities, and has worked on political advocacy and campaigns at all three levels of government. Born and raised in Ottawa, but with work experience across the country, Adam has deep roots in the community and a broad network across the health sector from coast to coast.

With new leadership came a renewed focus on organizational stability and resilience. That included revamping governance and operations policies, getting vacant staff roles filled, and ensuring consistent programs and service delivery.

This year, we relaunched support programs like *Queerspora*, for queer and trans newcomers, and *Been There, Done That, Now What?*, for gay and bisexual men over the age of 50. We expanded participation in *Keeping It 100*, for Black queer people, and supported six new peer-led interventions through *MAXimizer* projects.

We dramatically expanded our presence in community spaces throughout the year. During Capital Pride alone, our team was organizing or present at 18 separate activities over the course of the week. We have engaged a record number of community members in our work this year, meaning more resources distributed, more referrals to health services, more education and support conversations, and better connection all around. Time and again, our team heard, "wow, MAX is everywhere."

In August, as news and fears circulated about a more virulent strain of mpox, we moved quickly with our partners at Ottawa Public Health to host a series of pop-up vaccine

clinics in our space—successfully preventing an outbreak as cases rose elsewhere in Canada and around the world. The strength of our partnerships with healthcare providers, including public health authorities, is essential for improving the wellbeing of our community.

This year we also delivered on a new project to create tools and training resources for healthcare providers on gender-affirming care. Too often, we hear from trans and non-binary people about the challenge of accessing appropriate healthcare, with wait times to begin transitioning sometimes taking years. By working with the team at Centretown Community Health Centre, we have created a toolkit for healthcare providers and supported three new clinics in taking on trans clients. As a direct result of this work, we've seen wait times drop significantly, though more work is needed to close this access gap.

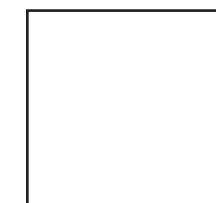
A new strategic plan is in development, which we look forward to releasing in the spring. Our second ever, this plan is an opportunity to set a course for the next three years to better meet the needs of our community and ensure MAX remains strong, vibrant, and impactful.

As detailed in this report, we made great strides in re-engaging with the community

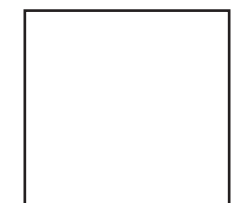
and helping people connect to the health and social services they need. All of this is thanks to the tireless work of our staff, board members, and volunteers, who are carrying our mission in everything they do. MAX's work is also successful because of the support of our partners, funders, and donors, and builds on a legacy started over 20 years ago by a small group of community visionaries.

We hope that you are as inspired as we are from what you read in this report. And if you aren't part of this work already, we invite you to join us in improving the health and wellbeing of queer and trans people in the National Capital Region.

With gratitude,



Rémi Samson
(He/Him)
Board Chair



Adam Awad
(He/Him)
Executive Director

2023-24 IN NUMBERS

In 2023 and 2024, we expanded our efforts in HIV prevention, substance use support, and mental health support while deepening our community engagement through outreach and education. Looking ahead, we are committed to increasing access to sexual health services, growing our volunteer network, and strengthening culturally competent care for our communities.

2,120

outreach interactions to connect with at-risk and priority populations, including gay, bi, trans, and queer men who have sex with men (GBT2Q/MSM)

25

educational workshops delivered, engaging **580+ participants** across key communities

- 18 sessions for **community members** (across MSM, ACB, Indigenous, and other populations)

- 7 sessions for **service providers**, including health care workers, addiction services, and mental health professionals

646

people reached through education events and community interventions

644

Essential health referrals provided, ensuring community members accessed the care they needed, including:

- 294 referrals for HIV/STI testing
- 118 referrals for PrEP/PEP access
- 91 referrals for mental health services
- 141 referrals for substance use and addiction support

128,137

drug use, sex, and HRT supplies distributed to promote safer practices and prevent HIV and Hepatitis C transmission

225+

doses of mpox vaccine administered—helping prevent outbreaks and protect our community

4,344

Volunteer hours contributed to MAX's work, including:

- 1,895 through leadership and advocacy
- 1,809 through outreach
- 260 through education
- 204 through events
- 176 through administrative activities

116

dedicated volunteers, including **44 new recruits**

THE STORY OF MAX

MAX's predecessor, the Ottawa Gay Men's Wellness Initiative (OGMWI) was born in 2002, fuelled by passionate community advocates dedicated to a holistic approach to gay men's health.

Partnering with public health agencies and a range of stakeholders, OGMWI crafted and executed cutting-edge health promotion strategies tailored for men who have sex with men.

One standout success was the launch of Gay Zone in 2008, a collaborative effort with Ottawa Public Health (OPH), Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC), the AIDS Committee of Ottawa (ACO), and other community leaders. Gay Zone offered a welcoming, judgment-free space where gay and bisexual men could access sexual health testing and treatment, along with an array of health promotion activities and events. In 2016, we expanded our services to the community and hired our first staff members, and in 2017 we rebranded as MAX. In 2018 MAX proudly achieved registered charity status.

By 2020, substance use harm reduction services were created to meet a growing need within our community—including peer support programs and the Tea2Go supply distribution service. We also broadened our programming designed to support sex workers, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans newcomers, gay men over the age of 55, and more.



MAX TODAY

Today, we remain focused on the two central pillars of our work: offering a holistic suite of wellness services for queer men and trans and non-binary people and working to improve the quality of care available to our community within the National Capital Region. We continue to do this by relying on strong partnerships across sectors to leverage capacity wherever it is available.

Tangibly, we offer a range of psychosocial support programs that help build community and create welcoming spaces for those who face similar challenges and share unique life experiences. Our programs and services are constantly evolving to remain effective and impactful to our communities' needs in a changing landscape. Our work with trans people has been expanded to improve the quality and availability of gender-affirming care in the region. We also provide harm reduction supplies to ensure that our communities have access to essential resources that promote safer practices and overall well-being.

A NOTE ON OUR FUTURE

We're in the process of developing our next strategic plan to direct MAX's work in the coming years. In the meantime, we've adopted the priorities laid out in this document, which reflect the needs of our community and the organization at this time:

- Empower queer men and trans and non-binary people to navigate health and wellness pathways across their lifecourse.
- Foster and support the development of community leaders.
- Solidify our organizational foundation.
- Build up a network of high quality healthcare services for queer men and trans and non-binary people.
- Lay the groundwork for an integrated health and wellness centre in Ottawa.



OUR WORK

During this year of growth and transition, our work has been reorganized to provide a coherent structure and support for the programs and services we offer. In collaboration with our clients, partners, and funders, our work fits into these areas:

1. Capacity Building
2. Sexual Health
3. Mental Health
4. Substance Use
5. Health Navigation
6. Community Connection
7. Community Education and Outreach
8. Critical Infrastructure Development



CAPACITY BUILDING

Don't complain, but do the work to make it better.

Having access to appropriate and qualified care is central to our community's health. It is not enough to tell people to seek out services if those services are inadequate, missing, or even harmful. By working directly with healthcare providers, we have been able to substantially increase the availability and the quality of services.

Training, Partnerships, and Resource Development

MAX provides many services directly, but we know that we can't always be there to help. We work on a partnership model, as caring for our community is larger than one organization alone. MAX meets people where they're at with a two-fold approach:

- We help service providers with accessible, well-researched tools to make client care simpler.
- We help community members advocate for the kinds of care they need, with tools that foster direct, appropriate conversation.



The Trans Health Navigation Project

Gender-affirming care is among the simplest, most impactful, and least available aspects of healthcare affecting our community. We know that trans people experience the highest rates of harm—including suicidality—while waiting to access gender-affirming care, but also see the most dramatic turnaround in health outcomes once they start care. Meanwhile, many service providers are open and willing to support trans clients, but have told us they don't know where to start.

In 2023, MAX launched the Trans Health Navigation Project in partnership with Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC). CCHC's Trans Health Clinic is widely recognized as a leader in providing exceptional gender-affirming care, and together, we set out to create a comprehensive toolkit and training program to support clinicians in providing better care.



By the end of the project, we:

- Ensured that community members helped shape this project through a Community Advisory Committee.
- Ensured that local physicians and researchers helped inform the end deliverables through a Service Providers Advisory Committee.
- Completed a literature review and landscape scan capturing all existing tools and guides for implementing gender-affirming clinical care.
- Supported the creation of a Trans Health Residency elective with the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Ottawa.
- Created a comprehensive toolkit for healthcare providers, including templates, guides, and practical resources that could be implemented easily in their practice.
- Produced a suite of affirming and representative medical illustrations depicting a range of physical attributes of both feminizing and masculinizing gender transitions.
- Piloted a new tip-to-tail clinical training program with three local health centres, which focused on the experiences of trans clients from the moment they connect to the centre to the completion of their transition.
- Successfully connected trans community members to healthcare providers for ongoing care, reducing overall wait times.

For Service Providers

Bridging Capital Care Workshop

Healthcare workers are busy and often expected to do more with less. They need reliable guidance to advocate for queer men and gender-affirming care. In response, we developed programming to provide clinicians with support. MAX hosted *Bridging Capital Care: Emerging Trends in Queer Men's Health in Ottawa*, a panel event for medical professionals to broaden their knowledge and skills in topics like new innovations in prevention methods for HIV and STIs, as well as STBBI self-testing and epidemiology.

- **ALL participants** reported that they learned new information relevant to their sexual health
- **90% of participants** stated that what they learned would be implemented in their practice

For Community Members

The ANCHOR Program

Crisis response is a delicate, crucial aspect of community care. The *Alternative Neighbourhood Crisis Response (ANCHOR)* is led by Centretown Community Health Centre and Somerset West Community Health Centre. ANCHOR aims to address mental health and substance use emergencies using informed and culturally-sensitive care by providing a 24/7 non-police intervention service.

The MAX team developed and delivered customized sexuality and gender diversity training to ANCHOR staff. We covered the nuances of sexuality and gender; how queer people interact with legal and healthcare systems; as well as Party and Play (PnP)/Chemsex among queer people.

Drug Information Cards

Asking questions about drugs can be scary for many people—but it doesn't have to be. Our new series of information cards is designed to make safer drug information more accessible to our community. These quick reference cards provide basic information about drugs and alcohol and link to online resources with more robust information, external resources, and connections to treatment options. By distributing these resources in areas where people gather to party, we make crucial information accessible when and where it's needed most.

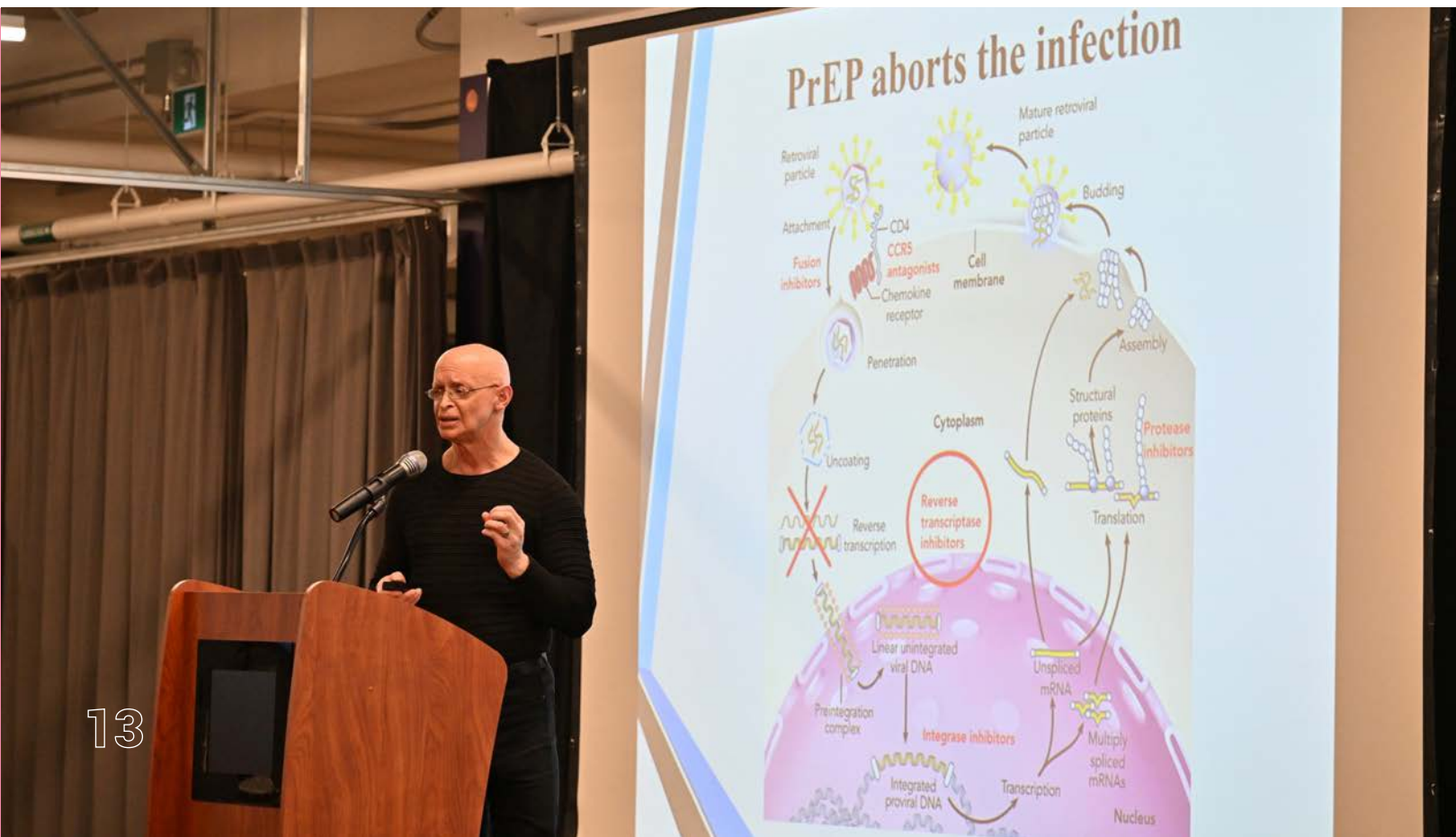
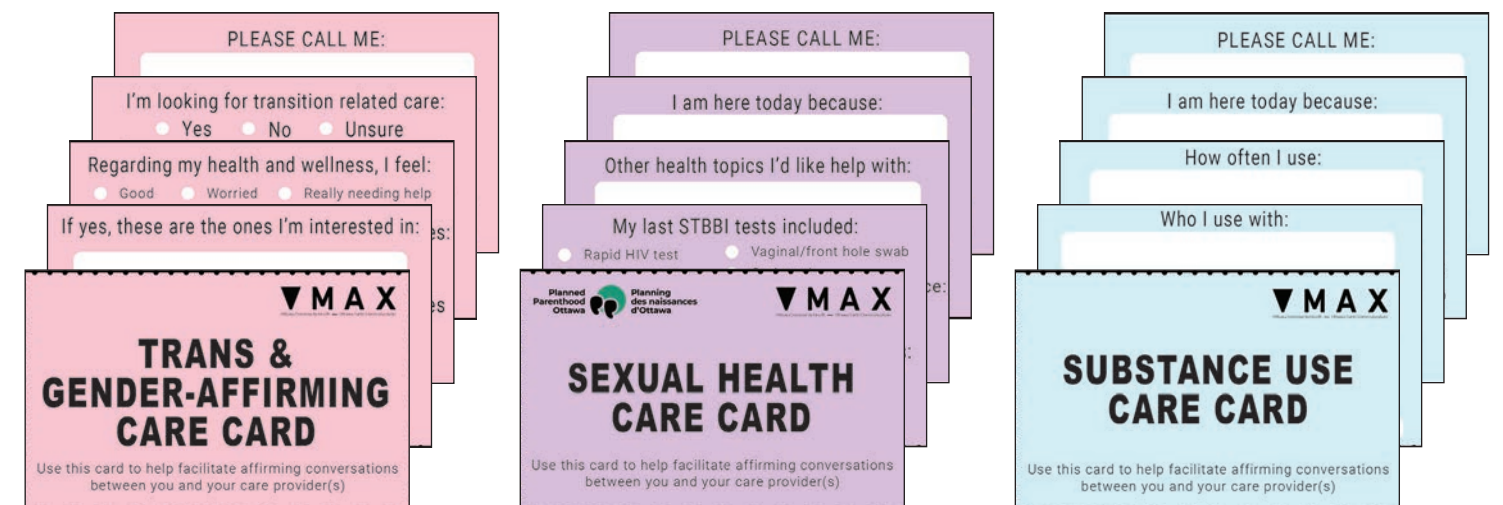
We focused on 10 substances that are most commonly used within our community:

- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Cocaine
- Crystal Meth
- Erectile Agents
- G (GHB)
- G (GBL)
- G (BDO)
- Ketamine
- MDMA
- Mushrooms
- Poppers



Care Cards

Healthcare providers often tell us that they struggle to know which questions to ask their clients—or how to ask them—when it comes to gender, sex, sexuality, and substance use. Inspired by a tool developed at the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), MAX produced a series of three Care Cards on different topics to take out some of the guesswork for both community members and service providers. The goal is to facilitate a better experience and better care for those who are looking for gender-affirming care, those who use substances, and those who have sex.



HEALTH SERVICES

Sexual Health

As an organization founded in the HIV response, supporting our community's sexual health has been central to our work since 2002.

Over the last year, this has included distributing HIV self-test kits, lube, and condoms, running vaccine clinics, making referrals for PrEP and PEP, and sharing critical information with community members about healthy sex and sexuality. We've done this while strengthening our partnerships with Ottawa Public Health, AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Centretown Community Health Centre, Somerset West Community Health Centre, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, and local healthcare providers.

We've expanded our efforts to ensure accessible, community-centered sexual health resources. Through innovative programs and targeted responses, we've continued to meet the evolving needs of our community. Two key initiatives exemplify this commitment:



Get-A-Kit

Easy access to sexual health testing is critical to ending HIV transmission in Ottawa. The Get-A-Kit project, developed by our partners at the University of Ottawa, is a program that offers free HIV and STI testing in Ottawa and surrounding regions through an online platform. While MAX has been a partner on this project since it launched, this year we explored a more integrated approach to program recruitment. Starting in August, Get-A-Kit staff have attended MAX programs and events to offer on-the-spot registration to access HIV and STI testing along with PrEP initiation. This more integrated approach is a step towards further reducing barriers to getting tested and getting treated—to stopping the transmission of HIV and other STIs in our region.

Mpox Response

As a more virulent strain of the mpox virus (formerly: monkeypox) made its way around the world in August 2024, our team mobilized to keep our community safe. By leveraging our strong partnership with Ottawa Public Health, we organized a series of pop-up clinics in the MAX office throughout the Pride festival. Within 48 hours, all available spots were booked, with more people joining the waiting list. Our quick work was recognized in the media, being featured on CBC Metro Morning, Radio Canada, CTV News Ottawa, and as the front-page story in the Ottawa Citizen on August 20.

From August to December, we organized a total of **five community pop-up clinics** and **administered over 225 doses of the vaccine.**

Mental Health

For many in our community, this year has been defined by loneliness, isolation, and struggles with mental health.

By leveraging our partnerships and our programming, we aim to address critical gaps in mental health support for queer and trans people.

Working with the Hopewell Eating Disorder Support Centre, we co-hosted support and skills-building workshops for people in our community with eating disorders. This work factored in the unique challenges faced by 2SLGBTQI+ individuals with disordered eating and provided a dedicated space for discussion, learning, and connection.

The link between mental health struggles and harmful substance use is well-established, but stigma around both prevent people from seeking help. This year, we worked with CAPSA to expand our anti-stigma work and bring open and honest conversations about substance use to our community.



- We are honored to have been awarded the CAPSA Community Organization Allyship Award for our contributions to reducing stigma around substance use—an important step in fostering better mental health for people who use drugs and those who care for them.

Community services are most impactful when they are shaped by community members directly. To better understand and respond to our community's evolving mental health needs, we conducted a Mental Health Needs Survey to help us shape new programming and resources.

While we've made significant progress, we recognize that there is still much work to be done. We are actively laying the groundwork for a stronger collaboration with The Royal Centre for Mental Health—a leading mental healthcare and research hospital in Ottawa specializing in mental health and addictions services—to ensure that our community has access to informed, affirming, and sustainable mental health supports in the years to come.

Health Navigation

Navigating the healthcare system can be doubly complicated for queer and trans people. Our Health Navigation service focuses on strengthening our network of resources to help our community connect to culturally-informed services. We act as a point of referral for community members to find therapists, doctors, community-based health organizations, and sexual health testing facilities that fit their needs.

Our growing network includes:

- 40** Community-Based Organizations
- 40** Healthcare Providers
- 38** Licensed Therapists



Supporting Newcomers

Coming to a new country can be an intimidating process, especially as a queer person. Knowing where to find services, or even knowing what services you should be looking for, can prove difficult in a new environment. *Queerspora* began by making safer sex information more accessible with Spanish and Arabic translation, but quickly grew into standalone psychosocial programming. The monthly sessions are designed to support newcomers, providing discussions around key topics such as healthcare, sexuality, and getting adjusted to life in Ottawa. We have also organized group

outings to places like Gatineau Park to both build social connections and improve mental and physical health of program participants.

Some of our *Queerspora* participants have joined us while going through their immigration or refugee application processes. From time to time, MAX provides letters of support for those who are active in our programming, and in this last year, three of our program participants who received letters from MAX successfully completed their applications.

SAFER USE AND SAFER SEX

Accessible, anonymous, and appropriate supply options are crucial for our community.

The stigma surrounding substance use often results in a lack of knowledge about how to use drugs safely. MAX's harm reduction work follows a judgment-free and evidence-based approach that facilitates access to safe supplies and resources while fostering a supportive environment for people who use substances. In this way, we meet people where they're at and help connect them to other supports, resources, and treatment in the city when needed.

The Zones of Engagement Model

As part of our evidence-based approach to harm reduction, we align our work with the *Zones of Engagement Model*, as outlined in *Empowering the Search for Pleasure, Health and Well-Being Outside Heteronormative Definitions: The Role of Evaluation in Shaping Structurally Sensitive Programming for 2SGBTQ+ Men Who Party and Play in Ontario* by Yassir Ismail in collaboration with the Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance.

This model recognizes that substance use exists on a spectrum, and individuals may move between different zones over time – including pleasurable and sustainable use, harmful or risky use, and periods of abstinence.

At MAX, we meet people where they are: providing harm reduction supplies for better outcomes in those who choose to continue substance usage, and offering our support for those who need help. Our work respects self-determination and avoids stigma, aiming to reduce the potential physical, mental, and social harms associated with substance use.

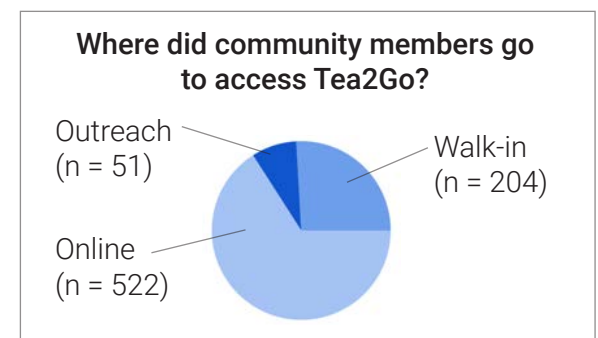
Tea 2 Go

MAX's program, Tea2Go, dispenses supplies for safer sex, partying, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), as well as hygiene products.

Accessible, anonymous, and appropriate supply options are crucial for our community. The Tea2Go program dispenses supplies for safer sex, partying, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), as well as hygiene products. In total, **over 50 different products** are available, including pre-made kits with core safer use items needed for specific circumstances, making Tea2Go one of the best-stocked services in the country. Supplies can be ordered online and shipped, picked up from the office, or taken from one of our outreach tables at events and venues across the city.

The program covers **137 municipalities** and communities within the Champlain Region in Ontario and has **served over 700 people** this year.

Online ordering is by far the most popular way to access Tea2Go, since it doesn't require disclosing personal information or interacting with a person to get the supplies they need and is accessible to people living outside downtown Ottawa.

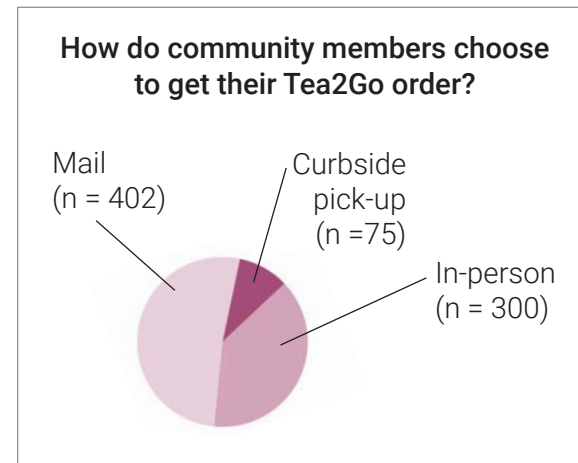


When ordering online, there is the option to receive an order via the mail or pick-up at the MAX office.

Mail continues to be the option of choice, especially for those living in a suburb or who have difficulty traveling. In-person works for community members living or working near our office.



While the majority of Tea2Go service users live within the City of Ottawa, in 2023-2024, 28% of them live in smaller communities across the region where there are no similar services.



Tea2Go also supports peer distribution, encouraging community members to grab extra supplies for people they know who need it, but aren't yet comfortable coming to MAX. Based on community member responses, **21% ordered for a friend.**

Of all the supplies Tea2Go distributes, the three categories that make up the largest proportion of what is given out are: **Needles, HRT supplies, and condoms.**



A map of the Champlain Region.
Map available at www.champlainhealthline.ca

Safer Substance Use

Tea2Go distributes safer substance use supplies individually and in pre-made kits: safer injection kits, safer crack inhalation kits, booty bumping kits, snorting kits and GHB/GBL/BDO kits.

New Harm Reduction Supply:
Snorting Spoon



Tea2Go has provided snorting straws for several years, but community members told us that something was still missing. Based on conversations with the community throughout early 2024, we identified that many people were snorting their drugs as "bumps"—smaller doses often done off of items like keys or fingernails—and that the straws weren't helpful. In response, we designed and produced a new resource to add to the service.

The snorting spoon was designed specifically to help measure a "common dose" of drugs like cocaine or ketamine to prevent overdoses. Made of plastic, the spoons are durable, washable, and easily distributed to prevent people from sharing them, which lowers the risk of HIV and Hepatitis C transmission.

By designing something bright and MAX-branded, we also aim to reach people at a time when they may not have problems with their substance use so that, should that ever change, they know there is a local organization there to support them. Hopefully, this will lead people to reach out for help earlier, potentially avoiding major crises.



Overdose Prevention and Reversal

To prevent overdose, Tea2Go distributes Narcan (Naloxone), both nasal spray and injection kits, dosing supplies like G kits for GHB/GBL/BDO and spoons, as well as drug testing kits for harmful contaminants or additives like fentanyl, benzodiazepine, and xylazine.

Safer HRT

After hearing from the community of how difficult it can be to get appropriate HRT supplies in Ottawa for trans people, Tea2Go added HRT supplies to the service. The new supplies consisted of 1ml LuerLock syringes and a variety of changeable needle tips, which are better structured to handle the viscosity of testosterone and prevent breakage during use.

New Harm Reduction Supply:
HRT Kits

With our distribution data, and feedback from the Trans Health Clinic at Centertown Community Health Center, we created HRT kits to distribute at outreach events based on the most commonly ordered size needle tips.

The success of adding HRT supplies is tracked through our anonymous program survey sent after they fill out an online order. From the survey respondents, we have learned that **21% identify as trans men.**

Safer Sex

Tea2Go distributes safer sex supplies such as condoms, lube, dental dams, internal condoms, and fisting gloves to prevent STBBIs like HIV, Hep C, syphilis, etc.

New Harm Reduction Supply:
Condom Boxes

In 2024, we created new condom boxes to house our condom kits. Inspired by those developed at the AIDS Committee of Toronto, these boxes are a visually engaging way to distribute condoms while providing a QR code linking community members to safer use guides for all of our harm reduction kits.

Condom kits include two condoms of the same type (Regular, Large, Latex-Free and Kimono thins), and two individual pouches of water-based lube.



TEA2GO HIGHLIGHTS

29,510

Needles distributed this year

"Thank you so much for this program. It relieves a lot of mental stress to have access to so many harm reduction supplies for hormones, safer sex, and safer drug use. I think this is one of the coolest programs in Ottawa."

21%

of Tea2Go participants identify as trans men

128,137

Total individual items were distributed between 2023 and 2024 through Tea2Go.

27,303

HRT supplies distributed this year

"You really have helped me access the right HRT supplies for a long time now and I will not stop appreciating it."

16,257

Condoms distributed this year

21%

Percentage of all service users who ordered supplies for a friend

"This service is the best harm reduction supply site, I feel a lot safer and it helps me worry less about my friends who use."

"I appreciate the ability to order these harm reduction supplies. I've looked in the past for similar products but they're either cost prohibitive or I'm nervous about going into a drop in service."

2,845

Condom kits distributed

1,681

Nalxone kits distributed total

31,570

Total number of safer sex supplies distributed in 2023 - 2024.

828

Drug testing kits distributed in 2024

"I get orders with stuff needed/required for myself and friends. I often try to educate others on harm reduction as well. I just have friends who aren't in safe environments to be having items offered here mailed to their own homes."

"I thank you all for your services, as you truly help out the community so much. You guys also give me the ability to keep my friends alive, and healthy; and for that I thank you all so much."

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Meeting other queer people outside of bars and hookup sites can be difficult, leading to isolation, disconnection, and greater negative health outcomes.

This disconnectedness leaves community members vulnerable as they may lack a support network, and may not receive information that is relevant to their health. MAX hosts several programs to provide social spaces for connection within our larger community. While these groups help foster new connections amongst participants, they are also a means of connecting community members both to MAX's services and referrals to other services in the city. In 2023-2024, we offered four groups: *Keeping it 100*, *Now What?*, *Queerspora* (discussed above), and *Crafternoon Delight*.

Crafternoon Delight

Evolving from our art therapy-based program *MAXpress Yourself*, *Crafternoon Delight* began in Summer 2024 as occasional programming to bring people together to create crafts and community. *Crafternoon Delight* provides social engagement not based on drinking or sex, where participants make friends and create unapologetically queer crafts that allow them to express themselves more fully in a supportive and affirming environment. This year, 21 community members participated in 4 *Crafternoon Delight* sessions.



Been There, Done That, Now What?

Social programs for older members of our community are critical for healthy living as we age. Developed in partnership with the Ottawa Senior Pride Network, *Now What?* is a discussion group for gay men over the age of 50. Each month, participants chat about different topics like mental health, advance planning for passing on, housing, intergenerational developments, and sex and sexuality.

After a short hiatus, *Now What?* was relaunched in June of this year.



Keeping it 100

The challenges of being Black and queer are as diverse as the places we come from, and finding community can be lifesaving.

Keeping it 100, or *K1* for short, is a peer discussion group for African, Caribbean, and Black queer men and trans and non-binary people. The group typically meets once a month, serving as a safe space by Black queer people, for Black queer people, in order to share experiences and culture. Each meeting explores different topics such as sex, friends, family, education, work, and more.

"I think K1 is a much needed space for all those who are disenfranchised and isolated. It's an excellent outlet for people to speak and share in all confidentiality and safety."

- K1 Participant

"K1 is a lifesaving intervention. It keeps me grounded and secure in my Black gay identity that there are places I don't have to hide."

- K1 Participant

In 2023, we said farewell to K1's founder and first coordinator—Robert Alsberry, who moved away— and welcomed Antonio Wilson as the new coordinator. This year, *Keeping it 100* has continued to see record attendance numbers and a growing reach across the community. The group is in constant evolution, both with starting to welcome queer femme folks into the space as well as expanding its francophone programming.

- Highest attendance: **45 participants**
- **124 Members**
- First French-English split session delivered in June 2024

Black Queer Excellence (BQE)

As K1 created a space for Black queer people in Ottawa to connect and build community, that connection led to the creation of *Black Queer Excellence*.

Launched in 2019, *Black Queer Excellence* is an event for Black, African, Caribbean, Afro-Indigenous, Afro-Latinx, and other members of the African Diaspora 2SLGBTQ+ community members and allies. It is hosted in partnership between MAX Ottawa, the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, and Somerset West Community Health Centre, with the first year having support from the The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, and The 27 Club providing the venue.

Focused on empowerment, celebration, and community connection, BQE expanded in both 2023 and 2024, with over 150 attendees coming together at the National Arts Centre on December 13 to close out the year.

Black Pride 2024

In August 2024, BQE returned for a Pride Edition, along with a series of Black Pride events focused on confidence-building and body image, including a burlesque workshop, a ballroom workshop, film screenings, a ball and a dance party.

Wake Up Ottawa Ball

Showcasing the magic of ballroom culture with show-stopping performances, dazzling runways, and iconic vogue battles, *Wake Up Ottawa* was a ball to remember. Celebrating love, diversity, and creativity as the ballroom scene ignited the night with unparalleled glamor and unity.

The *Wake Up Ottawa Ball* took place at the Bronson Centre, with over 150 community members in attendance. This event was the culmination of a series of ballroom events and workshops, giving attendees the chance to show off what they had learned and truly experience the magic of ballroom culture with the hopes of sparking further events in Ottawa.

Organized in partnership between MAX, Capital Pride, BGMN, and CCKBA.



Femme Folks: Bold and Beautiful

A sensational burlesque workshop and celebration dedicated to Black Femme Folks. This empowering event was designed to boost confidence, embrace body positivity, and encourage people to take up space with courage in everyday life.

Organized by Sister Sister in partnership with MAX, *FEMME* was an evening of glamour, self-expression, and celebration that took place at the Bronson Centre on August 16, 2024. Three key Ottawa burlesque performers, Minnie Bombay, Bluette, and Saffron St. James, led an introductory workshop on Burlesque and body image to 17 community members.

Confidence is Key. Ballroom Workshop

MAX, in collaboration with Black Gay Men's Network (BGMN) and Cap City Kiki Ballroom Alliance (CCKBA), proudly presented "*Confidence is Key*", an immersive Ballroom Workshop Series designed to elevate skills and boost confidence.

This was an all day workshop, empowering 33 (both new and seasoned) ballroom performers with knowledge and experience from legends, and creating community while strengthening the ballroom scene in Ottawa.

Bumpah 2 Bumpah

Bumpah 2 Bumpah was a free party held on August 24, organized in collaboration with Capital Pride as part of the Capital Pride Festival. Centered on joy and creating a safe space for QTBIPOC communities, the event proudly featured the first all-Black queer DJ lineup, with 11 DJs from Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal.

MAX staff and volunteers provided harm reduction supplies and resources, helping partygoers celebrate while staying informed and supported.



Education and Discussion Through Film

Film is a powerful way to tell stories and learn about other people's lives. This year, we expanded our community education efforts to include film screenings and panel discussions on important health topics affecting specific people within our communities. We also established a new partnership with the Toronto-based Inside Out Film Festival to co-host several screenings. These events covered topics like HIV, Black resilience, and 2-Spirit Indigenous healing.

Viral Interventions

What does it mean to live with HIV today? To answer this question, we turned to those who know best—people living with it.

To mark World AIDS Day 2024, MAX hosted Viral Interventions: HIV Futures, a powerful afternoon of film, performance, and dialogue. The event featured a screening of six bold and visually stunning short films from around the world—Nepal, Bulgaria, Brazil, Ecuador, and Canada—that shared deeply personal, inventive, and activist responses to living with HIV today. Co-created through the Viral Interventions research-creation project led by John Greyson and Sarah Flicker at York University, the films reflected the resilience, anger, intimacy, and joy that continue to shape the HIV movement globally. Following the screening, we welcomed Canada's Drag Race star BOA for a performance and fireside chat on the future of HIV. The event brought together community members, artists, and advocates in an intergenerational space of remembrance, resistance, and hope.



Wildhood

On June 22, 2024, MAX partnered with the Inside Out Film Festival to host a screening of Wildhood, a film following the story of two brothers searching for their mother, exploring the intersections of queer and indigenous identities. The screening was followed by a discussion on the relationship between culture and healing with Haley Robinson, a local 2 Spirit activist and influencer, in addition to Jennifer St. Germain, the Chief Strategy Officer for the Métis Nation of Ontario on the relationship between culture and healing.



I Wanna Dance with Somebody

From old way to new way, MAX partnered with the Inside Out Film Festival for the second installment of a collaborative film screening series, with this one focused on the healing power of ballroom and Black queer cultures. Hosted at Bytowne Cinema on August 18, the event screened:



- **Realness with a Twist:** In London, a talented footballer suppresses his secret passion for voguing for fear of his teammates' disapproval. *Directed by Cass Virdee.*
- **Haus:** A displaced black queer boy finds refuge in Toronto's underground Kiki Ballroom scene. *Directed by Joseph Amenta.*
- **MnM:** An exuberant portrait of chosen sisters Mermaid and Milan, two emerging runway divas in the drag ballroom community. *Directed by Twiggy Pucci Garçon.*
- **The House of LaBeija:** A poetic documentary that pays homage to the first ballroom house, the House of LaBeija, through a series of letters from its members. *Directed by Fredgy Noël.*
- **Unless We Dance:** In Quibdó, a city with the highest homicide rates in Colombia, Jonathan and hundreds of young people come together through dance to face the brutal fate of violence. *Directed by Hanz Rippe and Fernanda Pineda.*
- **The Tweetations Revue:** A charismatic cast of songbirds take flight on a musical journey through a vibrant variety show, creating a fantastical celebration of cultural heritage and artistic brilliance. *Directed by Fraser Collins.*

Following the screening, we were joined in discussion by prominent figures in the Canadian ballroom scene, including:

- Kingston Louboutin Alpha Omega
- Legendary Father Senbo old Navy
- Legendary Canadian Mother Slimthick Pinklady
- Legendary Style-eS Mulan
- Fraser Collins





MAXimizer

Our community members understand their own needs better than anyone else.

The MAXimizer Project equips community leaders with the support and resources they need to develop and carry out programming tailored to improving the health of queer people in the National Capital Region.

This year, MAX supported six projects, furthering our mission of enhancing health and wellness for queer men, trans, and non-binary people.

Bangy Gxrl Sesh - Teddy Bizimana

Bangy Gxrl Sesh (BGS) provided a safe space for Black and Brown queer people in the ballroom community to gather and express themselves. With 25 participants, the event was the start of a series of ongoing open practices focused on physical health, skills building, and empowerment.

Queer Nature - Jonathan Blanchard

The Queer Nature project brought together 40 participants to explore the intersections of queerness, nature, and climate activism. Through group hikes across the city, participants had the opportunity to get outdoors, discover new parts of Ottawa, meet new people, and engage in conversations about nature and environmental action.

"My goal for creating this group is to demonstrate how 2SLGBTQ+ people are inherently in community with nature, and how climate activism can intersect with queerness and our communities. The intersections of 2SLGBTQ+ folk, nature and climate crisis activism are relatively unexplored as we tend to flock to urban spaces as a community."

- Jonathan Blanchard

"I find there are not a lot of social, inclusive spaces in Ottawa that do not include drinking. [Queer Bike Club] Ottawa is a place to make friends, stay active and spread queer joy!"

- Program Participant

Queer Bike Club Ottawa - Grace Poland

This project established a new group hosting bike ride drop-ins for queer people in Ottawa, with the goal of fostering connections through exercise and the shared joy of cycling. Through MAXimizer, a total of 8 community bike rides were organized, in addition to 3 workshops on bike maintenance.

Drag MahJong with China Doll

The Drag MahJong workshop brought together the art of drag and a piece of Chinese cultural heritage. With 50 attendees, this event encouraged community members to engage with the intersectionality of queerness, drag, Chinese culture, and history with the goal of promoting cultural understanding and appreciation in a safe space.

"The Asian community was hit hard by anti Asian sentiments during the pandemic. This opportunity was a chance for those in the community to feel embraced again and not targeted. This event also brought allies together from all sectors of the community to celebrate intersections of cultural knowledge and identity through art, performance, and play."

- Program Participant

Disability Drag: A Workshop Series - Cameron Jette and Taylor Stocks

Disability Drag is a set of workshops to teach members of the drag scene about accessibility and inclusivity in producing shows. Over the course of four unique workshops, topics like accessible event planning, neurodiversity, and chronic illness were discussed. There were 111 participants reached across four sessions.

"We created a safe and accessible space for community members to meet other people who had shared/similar experiences with disability and its intersections to make meaningful connections, make friends and feel inspired within their creative lives."

- Cameron Jette

111 Participants reached across four sessions.

Be Informed - Panashe Kupakuwana

The Be Informed workshop series brought crucial information around STBBI prevention and treatment to the queer organizations within the colleges and universities in Ottawa. A total of 39 queer youth participated in the workshops.

39 Queer youth participated in the workshops.

COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Your friend MAX

MAX meets people where they are so that we remain an approachable and accessible resource for when people need us.

We make it our mission to be present in spaces where our community gathers, including places like clinics, bars, Pride, on campuses, and beyond. Our hope is that community members see MAX as a friend they can go to easily if they ever need resources, information, or advice.

40 Community events where MAX did outreach in 2024.



Sports Engagement

In 2024, MAX supported Atlético Ottawa in organizing their annual Pride Game on June 2, helping to celebrate 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion in sports. As part of the event, funds were raised for Capital Rainbow Refuge, an organization supporting queer and trans newcomers seeking safety in Canada. MAX's presence at the game was part of ongoing efforts to reach broader audiences and promote visibility for 2SLGBTQ+ communities in sports spaces.

Swipe right on MAX

In 2024, MAX relaunched its online outreach initiative, building on years of connecting with community members through popular hook-up apps and websites. Meeting people where they are—including online spaces—is essential to making health information, harm reduction tools, and community support more accessible. The revamped project helps ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ people can access resources and get questions answered in real time, in spaces where they already feel comfortable.

On-Campus Outreach and Education

University and college are pivotal years for identity development, first sexual experiences, substance use, and mental health challenges. That's why MAX strengthened its presence at Algonquin College, Carleton University, and the University of Ottawa's campuses—to meet 2SLGBTQ+ students where they are and provide affirming, evidence-based support when it's most needed.

By tabling at campus events, collaborating with student groups, and offering tailored resources, we created accessible entry points for queer and trans students to engage with our services. For many, this stage of life includes navigating first sexual experiences, experimenting with substances, managing mental health challenges, or confronting social pressures for the first time. For 2SLGBTQ+ students especially, this can come with added layers of stigma, isolation, or lack of representation in mainstream health services. MAX helps bridge that gap—offering non-judgmental, culturally relevant care rooted in harm reduction. In doing so, we foster trust, connection, and long-term pathways to wellbeing.

Harm Reduction 101 at City Afterlight

On May 23, 2024, MAX partnered with the Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research (CANFAR) to host an evening event focused on the importance of harm reduction, from HIV prevention to addressing the impacts of the drug toxicity crisis. Held at Afterlight in downtown Ottawa, the event brought together community members for an engaging discussion on how harm reduction strategies save lives and strengthen our communities. The evening wrapped up with a celebration following, creating space for connection, dancing, and community-building.

600 Interactions during Pride 2024.

800 Interactions in 2024 through outreach.

National HIV Testing Day

On June 27, National HIV Testing Day, MAX joined the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health, and GetAKit for a public outreach event in the ByWard Market—bringing HIV awareness, stigma reduction, and testing resources directly to the community.

MAX staff were on-site sharing harm reduction tools and sexual health information tailored to 2SLGBTQ+ people, while GetAKit offered discreet self-testing options. The event highlighted the power of collaboration in making HIV testing more accessible and affirmed MAX's role in promoting health equity across the National Capital Region.

Behind the scenes, all good programming rests on responsible resource management and good organization.

By rolling out new tools and processes to streamline our work, we have ensured that more of our resources go into programming without sacrificing administrative quality. In 2023-2024, we have improved our internal infrastructure in order to make our work as efficient and effective as possible by rolling out the following tools to streamline our work:

THE MAX SUITE

- Teamwork: a project management and time-tracking tool
- Slack: an internal office communications software
- DEXT: an invoicing software facilitating expense accuracy payments and financial management
- Plooto: a payment software that reduces reliance on cheques and streamlines payment
- Kadence: a room-booking software allowing MAX's office to serve as a hub to other community partners
- ActionNetwork: a customer relationship management system (CRM) enabling MAX to communicate with community members more efficiently

"Over my time at MAX, the way we've improved organizational infrastructure has made my work easier—streamlining processes that were time consuming and making both day-to-day work and bigger projects more manageable."

*- Brenna Egan
Events and Outreach Coordinator*

VOLUNTEERS

This year, **116 dedicated volunteers** gave their time, energy, and expertise to support MAX's programs—helping us create a stronger, healthier community.

Their contributions totaled an incredible **4,344 volunteer hours**, ensuring that our services remained accessible, engaging, and community-driven.

From **1,809 hours** spent on outreach—connecting with community members and providing critical resources—to **1,895 hours** of leadership and advocacy through board and advisory committee service, volunteers have been at the heart of our work.

Whether coordinating special events like Capital Pride (**204 hours**), supporting education initiatives (**260 hours**), or assisting with administrative tasks (**176 hours**), their efforts have shaped the work we do.

Each hour given reflects a deep commitment to improving the health of our community, and we are incredibly grateful for every individual who has contributed to MAX's mission.

**Thank you to all
of our volunteers for
making a difference.**

4,344
Volunteer hours

116
Dedicated volunteers

Community Engagement Committee

To ensure that MAX understands the needs of the diverse groups it serves, we invite members of the community to be part of advisory committees. Members of MAX's Community Engagement Advisory Committee inform programming and identify necessary resources to support holistic queer health.



Our Funders

MAX's work is generously supported by government agencies, foundations, and individual donors within our community. This includes:



Board of Directors

MAX's Board of Directors is responsible for critical areas in our work, including legal and financial accountability, strategic direction, community engagement, and fundraising. While our staff manage the day-to-day operations, the Board is crucial to providing leadership and oversight to ensure our work has the greatest impact. The following people served on the Board of Directors in 2023 and 2024:

Current Board Members

- Rémi Samson, Chairperson
- Tamir Virani, Vice-Chairperson
- Curtis Fillier, Treasurer
- Joseph Flores, Secretary
- Theo Hug
- Yannick Galipeau
- Teilhard Paradela
- Austin Zygmunt

Former Board Members

- Kathryn Anderson
- Allen Chen
- Brent McRoberts
- Kody Muncaster
- Roger Scott

Partners

Our work would not be possible without the support of our community. Through partnerships, we've expanded access to critical health services including HIV testing sites, mental health service providers, and substance use support organizations. These collaborations allowed us to deliver crucial resources, improve healthcare accessibility, and strengthen support networks for our communities. A few key partners in 2023-2024 included:

- AIDS Committee of Toronto
- Atlético Ottawa Soccer Club
- Black Gay Men's Network of Ontario
- Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research
- Capital Pride
- Capital Rainbow Refuge
- Community Addictions Peer Support Association
- CATIE
- Centretown Community Health Centre
- Community Based Research Centre
- Connected Canadians
- FrancoQueer
- Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance
- Get A Kit
- Good Companions Seniors Centre
- Health Initiative for Men
- Inside Out Film Festival
- Kind Space
- Ontario AIDS Network
- Ottawa Gay Men's Choir
- Ontario HIV Treatment Network
- Ottawa Public Health
- Ottawa School of Art
- Ottawa Senior Pride Network
- Rainbow Rockers Curling League
- RÉZO
- Somerset West Community Health Centre
- Ottawa Hospital Research Institute
- University of Ottawa
- Université du Québec à Montréal

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[The List - Ottawa's Queerest Calendar](#)



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