



MAX Ottawa Community Health
STRATEGIC PLAN

2025 – 2028

**Health and wellness services and programs
for queer, trans, and non-binary people.**

MAX Ottawa Community Health

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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. We pay our respects to them, their cultures and their Elders, past and present, and are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their 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.

MAX Ottawa gratefully acknowledges the financial support of our primary funders, including the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada. In particular, this plan was made possible as a result of the financial support of Women and Gender Equality Canada.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada 

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
-------------------------------	----------

About MAX Ottawa	4
-----------------------------------	----------

Our Vision	7
----------------------	---

Mission	9
-------------------	---

Values	11
------------------	----

What We Do	12
----------------------	----

Strategic Priorities	15
---------------------------------------	-----------

Priority 1: Improve Our Services	16
--	----

Priority 2: Increase Our Visibility	18
---	----

Priority 3: Inspire Our People	20
--	----

Priority 4: Improve Our Funding	22
---	----

How We Work	24
------------------------------	-----------

INTRODUCTION

MAX Ottawa Community Health is excited to present its new strategic plan for the years 2025-2028. This new plan continues the development of programs and services to which MAX has been committed since its founding over two decades ago. It sets out a clear path to ensuring positive community impact, operational excellence, and organizational stability by focusing on four priorities: improving our services; increasing our visibility; inspiring our people; and improving our funding. The plan also updates MAX's mission to better align it with the changing needs of the diverse communities we serve.

MAX has always been run for and by community. Initially focused on the HIV response among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, our work gradually expanded to incorporate other areas of sexual, physical, and mental wellbeing.

In 2019, we adopted our first strategic plan, setting a roadmap for healthier communities in our region. The outbreak of COVID, among other things, posed unexpected challenges to the execution of this plan. However, the team at MAX adapted to the circumstances and ensured programs and services remained accessible to all.

In 2023, we began consulting with a broad range of stakeholders, including community members, staff, volunteers, funders, healthcare partners, and researchers to determine where next to take the organization. We wrestled with questions like how best to determine and meet the changing needs of our communities, how to navigate a volatile funding landscape, and how to strengthen our team and networks in the face of increasing challenges to queer liberation.

While developing our new strategic plan, it became clear that the core elements of the initial 2019 roadmap remained integrated across—and integral to—the organization: MAX is about offering holistic wellness services for our communities, improving the quality of care available in the region, fostering strong partnerships with like-minded organizations, and creating more welcoming community spaces.

It was equally clear, however, that MAX's reach had grown beyond that contemplated in the first strategic plan, towards greater inclusion. For example, our work now extends to gender-affirming care for trans and non-binary people, as well as services for gay men who Party and Play and for people who use drugs of any kind. In response to community needs, we've opened up participation in programs like Keeping It 100 to Black femmes, including cis queer women.



These changes, gradual in nature, have all been dictated by a stronger commitment to inclusion, a shifting social landscape, and a better understanding of needs, both within Ottawa's queer communities and in society more broadly.

As we finalized this new strategic plan, there was broad consensus on the need to acknowledge that MAX's work can and should grow to serve queer and trans people more broadly. More than ever, queer people must stand together in the face of a social landscape that is changing—and not always in our best interests. As a long-standing queer health and wellness organization with deep community roots, MAX has a key leadership role to play in that regard. That is why our new strategic plan reflects that goal. No person who can benefit from MAX's services and expertise should be turned away. We've updated our mission and added tangible measures to our priorities to ensure gradual but real progress in that direction over the next three years.

In making this change, we are acutely aware of the need to name the expertise we have developed over the last 23 years in serving gay, bisexual, queer, and trans men. MAX grew out of a visionary and targeted response to the HIV epidemic, and this is still reflected in fundamental ways throughout the organization, including our governance, funding structure, and staff and volunteers.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that many of the health inequities that we have worked to address persist. While there have been major advancements in treatment and prevention, HIV transmission and stigma remain challenges in our region, and the majority of new cases are still among men who have sex with men. Any expansion of our activities must be done gradually, with sensitivity, and in collaboration with community members. Crucially, excellence across all of our programs and services must always be maintained.

We feel that our updated mission and strategic plan strike the right balance between maintaining the work we have always been known for while drawing on our strengths to find appropriate ways to address critical and diverse health challenges faced by all members of our communities.

We are excited to bring this plan to life alongside our communities, our partners, and our supporters. Together, we're building on the foundation laid by activists and caretakers who've always believed in the importance of enhancing the quality of life of people in our communities and breaking down barriers to health and wellbeing.

Rémi Samson

Chair, Board of Directors

Adam Awad

Executive Director



ABOUT MAX OTTAWA

WHO WE ARE

MAX Ottawa Community Health is the principal queer health and wellness organization in the National Capital Region. Since its founding in 2002 as the Ottawa Gay Men's Wellness Initiative, MAX has grown and changed to adapt to the evolving needs of people in our diverse communities.



OUR VISION

The people we serve live full and healthy lives free from stigma and discrimination within inclusive and thriving communities and have access to the health and wellness services and supports they need.



OUR MISSION

We enhance the quality of life of people in the communities we serve and break down barriers to health and wellbeing.



OUR VALUES

1

Fairness and respect. We treat everyone with kindness, dignity, and respect, ensuring everyone feels valued and included.

2

Collaboration and community. We work together with others to create services that truly meet people's needs.

3

Excellence and accountability. We aim to do our best in everything we do, acting responsibly and ethically with our resources.

4

Growth and innovation. We're always learning, improving, and finding creative ways to make a positive impact.

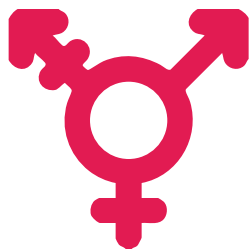
WHAT WE DO

MAX HELPS REDUCE HEALTH INEQUITIES FACED BY QUEER AND TRANS PEOPLE.

We do this by:

- **Delivering programs and services** designed to meet community needs;
- **Educating and training** community members and service providers on topics related to health and wellness;
- **Raising awareness and providing information** to help prevent the transmission of HIV and other infections, reduce harms related to substance use, and improve access to programs and services;
- **Empowering individuals** by giving them the tools they need to make health choices that work for them; and
- **Building community** through peer-led activities to improve connection, cohesion, and resilience.

MAX also works with organizations and individual health and service providers to improve the quality of healthcare and other services available in the region for our communities.



Over the years, **MAX** has developed specific expertise on **the health inequities faced by men who have sex with men and trans and non-binary people**, including those who:

- live with or are impacted by HIV and other sexually transmitted and blood borne infections;
- seek gender-affirming care;
- do sex work;
- use drugs; and
- are new to the region, including immigrants and refugees.

Our approach is based on methods that have been proven effective (*evidence-based*). It also considers the effects of interactions between health problems (*syndemics*) and the many non-medical factors that impact health, like community connections, education and income (*social determinants of health*).



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1

IMPROVE OUR SERVICES

PRIORITY 2

INCREASE OUR VISIBILITY

PRIORITY 3

INSPIRE OUR PEOPLE

PRIORITY 4

IMPROVE OUR FUNDING

PRIORITY 1

IMPROVE OUR SERVICES





WHY WE'RE FOCUSING ON THIS:

Our communities continue to face real barriers to living well—physically, mentally, sexually, and socially.



GOAL:

To be a gateway for people to access peer support, information, counselling, clinical services, and other options for improving physical, mental, and sexual health and wellness.



OBJECTIVE 1.1

Continuous improvement: Establish regular evaluation cycles of all programs and services to ensure they have the right impact and meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve.

OBJECTIVE 1.2

Partnerships and alliances: Partner with community-based organizations and public health agencies to deliver new programs and services.

OBJECTIVE 1.3

Convene and coordinate: Facilitate collaboration between community and partner organizations, community leaders, and decision-makers.

OBJECTIVE 1.4

Resource generosity: Support organizations who share our values and serve specific groups within our communities—such as queer women, Indigenous People, and people with disabilities—by sharing governance and operational resources and expertise.

OBJECTIVE 1.5

Community Health Hub: Continue building an Integrated Queer Health and Wellness Hub in the region.

PRIORITY 2

INCREASE OUR VISIBILITY





WHY WE'RE FOCUSING ON THIS:

Leveraging MAX's history, profile, and brand more effectively can increase our influence and level of engagement with the communities we serve and ensure that our services are more visible, accessible, and trusted.



GOAL:

Build awareness with partners, supporters, and the public to expand our network, foster collaboration, improve our programs, facilitate access to our programs, services and information, and be more accountable to the communities we serve.



OBJECTIVE 2.1

Community engagement and external communications:

Create an engagement and communications plan to enhance how MAX informs, connects, and supports our networks and communities.

OBJECTIVE 2.2

Advocacy support: Participate meaningfully in shaping legal and policy issues at the core of MAX's mission and expertise.

OBJECTIVE 2.3

Media outreach: Launch a media outreach and engagement strategy to reinforce our messages and capture the attention of relevant audiences.

PRIORITY 3

INSPIRE OUR PEOPLE





WHY WE'RE FOCUSING ON THIS:

Better community health depends on more than running good programs and delivering relevant services. A culture of learning and leadership will ensure that everyone who engages with MAX's employees and volunteers feels better off as a result.



GOAL:

To cultivate a culture of excellence at MAX that drives broader improvements to the health of our communities.



OBJECTIVE 3.1

Leadership at all levels: Harness our collective experiences and empower our people to act as change leaders, collaborators, advocates, and ambassadors.

OBJECTIVE 3.2

Commitment to learning: Deepen the culture of learning across the team, prioritize professional development, and empower our people to find ways to grow and work to their full potential.

OBJECTIVE 3.3

Safety and stability: Ensure that systems—like training, policies, and procedures—are in place to foster a high level of stability, satisfaction, and safety for employees and volunteers.

PRIORITY 4

**IMPROVE
OUR
FUNDING**





WHY WE'RE FOCUSING ON THIS:

We want to make sure MAX remains a stable, efficient, and effective community leader even if funding sources change.



GOAL:

To secure support and resources from new funders, donors, sponsors, and partners.



OBJECTIVE 4.1

Philanthropy: Develop a strategic mindset around philanthropy and strengthen our relationships with existing and potential funders, donors, and sponsors.

OBJECTIVE 4.2

Funding development: Finalize and roll out our funding development plan to grow and diversify our revenue sources.

OBJECTIVE 4.3

Training: Invest in professional development, training, technology, and data gathering to support our funding development efforts.

OBJECTIVE 4.4

Social enterprise: Leverage MAX's resources to engage in business directly related to its charitable goals and advance its mission.

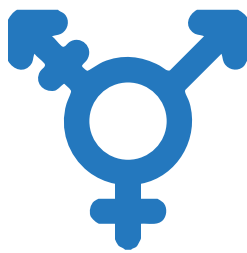
HOW WE WORK



Our work is anchored by two central pillars:
offering holistic wellness services for queer, trans, and
non-binary people; and improving the quality of care available
to our communities in the National Capital Region.



We rely on strong cross-sector partnerships to expand our
capacity and impact. Our psychosocial support programs
help foster community and build safer, more welcoming
spaces for those with shared experiences and challenges.



Our services evolve alongside our communities. We've expanded our work with trans people to support access to gender-affirming care, and we provide substance use and sex supplies to promote safer practices and enhance overall well-being.



Our approach is evidence-based and responsive, ensuring our programs remain effective and aligned with community needs in a dynamic landscape.

**“OUR VISION IS A COMMUNITY
WHERE EVERYONE
—REGARDLESS OF IDENTITY—
CAN ACCESS THE CARE,
RESPECT, AND RESOURCES
THEY NEED TO THRIVE.”**



Ottawa Community Health — Ottawa santé communautaire