

Land Acknowledgement

Based in Mi'kma'ki, SHNS acknowledges that the lands on which we work are the traditional and unceded territories of the Mi'kmaq. We recognize and appreciate the ancestral and continued ties of Indigenous Peoples to the lands and waters in the region known as Nova Scotia. We cannot engage in the work of addressing health inequities without considering the ongoing and historical impact of colonialism and settler structures on the first peoples, including those who are Two-Spirit. We also need to recognize the historical oppression of African Nova Scotians, People of Colour and Immigrants in our province. As a community-based organization it is our responsibility to engage in anti-racist practices as we strive to support and make change for the people we serve.

We are grateful for the ways our Indigenous community partners have shared their knowledge with us and supported us this past year. We continue to seek to serve our Indigenous and Black communities through our programming, representation within our staff and volunteer positions, and in our educational content. We take full responsibility for our continued growth in this area, and are excited for a year full of deeper, wider, and more diverse programs and services.



About SHNS

MISSION

Sexual Health Nova Scotia (SHNS) is a leading and expert voice around the issues of sexual and reproductive health. We champion positive sexual health throughout the lifespan for all Nova Scotians through the following core activities:

- Advocacy;
- Education;
- Navigation;
- Partnership.



VISION

We envision a province where positive sexual health is held in the same regard as any other area of wellness, and people can enjoy their sexuality free from shame and violence, with access to judgement-free services when and where they need them.

VALUES

Sexual Health Nova Scotia and its member-centres are:

- Sex-positive, open-minded, and non-shaming
- Respectful of individuals' confidentiality and autonomy
- Pro-choice
- Trauma-informed
- Committed to an evidence-based approach rooted in best and promising practices
- Mindful of equity and inclusion in all aspects of our work



We can do more together than we can alone!

A message from our board chairs

What a year it has been for Sexual Health Nova Scotia! In 2023 we were able to expand our work and improve access to sexual health services and resources through the creation of Nova Scotia's Sexual, Gender, and Reproductive Health Registry & Warmline [SUGAR Health]. We also celebrated the expansion of the Transformation Closet; an essential service providing gender-affirming gear and benefitting the health of many trans and non-binary Nova Scotians.

We received a blow when Health Canada did not extend SUGAR Health's funding through the Sexual and Reproductive Care Fund – however, the provincial board rallied and was able to keep Kelsey Benoit, Community Navigator of SUGAR Health, on to operate a pared-down version of SUGAR Health. Thank you to Kelsey for your continued work.

We want to thank Leigh Heide, Project Manager and Chrissy Merrigan, System Navigator for their hard work with SUGAR Health, for receiving the difficult news with generosity, and for offering their support to Kelsey to continue keeping SUGAR Health afloat.

This year, the Sexcellence Award committee nominated The Red Door Youth Health & Support Centre to receive recognition for significant contributions to the landscape of sexual health access, education, and advocacy in Nova Scotia.

To our Executive Director, Stella Samuels, thank you for your exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment to advancing sexual health in Nova Scotia. Your dedication has a profound impact on our community, and we are truly grateful for your leadership, support, and perseverance.

To our membership and board, thank you for your continued contributions to gender, sexual, and reproductive justice in Nova Scotia.

Jenny Rand and Emma Van Rooyen
Co-Chairs, Sexual Health Nova Scotia



Who We Are



SHNS Staff

STELLA SAMUELS (they/them)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

KELSEY BENOIT (she/they)

COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR

WREN TIAN (they/them)

TRANSFORMATION CLOSET COORDINATOR

Special thanks to past SHNS staff Leigh Heide, Chrissy Merrigan, & Shauntia Israel.

SHNS Board of Directors

Malory Beazley - Representative for Halifax Sexual Health Centre

Erin MacDonald - Representative for Cape Breton Centre for Sexual Health

Sheila Martin - Representative Sheet Harbour Sexual Health Centre

Lisa Johnson - Representative for Sexual Health Centre for Cumberland County

Erin Hirtle - Representative for South Shore Sexual Health

Emma Van Rooyen - Co-Chair

Jenny Rand - Co-Chair

Bryah Boutilier - Secretary

Sara Brushett - Treasurer

Jaiden Decaire - Treasurer-in-training

Kathy McKay - Member-at-Large

Claire Horn - Member-at-Large

Amanda Kolwich - Member-at-Large

Ty Silver - Member-at-Large

Thank you to outgoing Board members Lauren Sobot, Rob Robinson, Phillip Joy, and Sarah Rodimon.

CAPE BRETON CENTRE FOR SEXUAL HEALTH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - VANESSA WALKER (she/her)

HALIFAX SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - ABBEY FERGUSON (she/her)

SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE FOR CUMBERLAND COUNTY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - COREY HUNTER (she/her)
special thanks to Rene Ross, the out-going executive director

SOUTH SHORE SEXUAL HEALTH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JULIE VEINOT (she/her)

SHEET HARBOUR SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - KELTY MOSER (she/her)
special thanks to Hannah MacDonald, the out-going executive director

2023-2024

HIGHLIGHTS



H E A L T H

Sexual Health Nova Scotia (SHNS) led the SUGAR Health project, the first virtual provincial registry and warmline which aims to facilitate timely and inclusive linkages to sexual, gender and reproductive health (SGRH) services for Nova Scotians. The registry is a virtual database where people can find up-to-date, comprehensive information about how and where to access the SGRH services they need. The online registry is accompanied by a warmline, through which folks can speak with a navigator if they require additional support or advocacy in navigating systems or services.

A screenshot of the SUGAR Health website interface. At the top is a teal navigation bar with links for HOME, ABOUT, DIRECTORY, FOR PROVIDERS, ADVOCACY, DONATE, and an EXIT button. Below the navigation bar is the SUGAR HEALTH logo. The main heading is "SUGAR HEALTH" in large blue letters, followed by "NOVA SCOTIA'S SEXUAL, GENDER, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH REGISTRY & WARMLINE" in teal. A short paragraph describes the service's mission. Below this is a search bar with fields for "Search for", "Near", "Services and Supplies", and "Service Categories", along with a "Search" button. A grid of six service categories is displayed with icons: ABORTION SUPPORT, GENDER AFFIRMING, PAP TESTING, PREP/PEP, PRESCRIPTION BIRT, and STI/STBBI TESTING. At the bottom right, there is a chat icon and the text "CHAT | TEXT | CALL Need Support?".

Highlights Continued...



The SUGAR Health team conducted community consultation sessions and worked with the project's advisory committee and task team to gather feedback and perspectives that would help guide the development process. SUGAR Health's Community Navigator conducted a community mapping process with 12 organizations who work with people who have been historically underserved or marginalized within the healthcare system to ensure that the project, including the registry itself, was informed by the communities it is intended to serve.

The registry and warmline were officially launched to the public in November 2023, with heavy promotional efforts spanning across the province to spread the word. As of March 2024, there had been 3,542 active users of the online registry, and 76 conversations (66 unique callers) between warmline users and the SUGAR Health navigators.



Highlights Continued...

Transformation Closet



Demand for accessible and barrier-free gender-affirming gear, such as: gaffs, packers, stand-to-pees, binders, trans tape, and breast forms, remains high in our second year distributing gear provincially. We distribute this free gender-affirming gear throughout the province at pick-up and closet locations, by mail, and at special events. Following the completion of the KIA Communities in Motion funding and a short hiatus, Wren Tian, Transformation Closet Coordinator, was hired to oversee all operations pertaining to the closet. In preparation for reopening the online order form, Wren attended markets and filled outstanding orders. In February 2024 we reopened our online order form. Within the first night, 68 people had filled out the order form. From February 1st until the end of March we received 139 orders (not including gear distributed through tabling at The Atlantic Sex Show or various markets with Different Folks). Including all of the markets and The Atlantic Sex Show, it is estimated that we have given out gear to almost 200 people up until the end of March. In addition to our previous pickup locations (Halifax Sexual Health Centre, South Shore Sexual Health Centre, Cape Breton Centre for Sexual Health, Sexual Health Centre for Cumberland County, Sheet Harbour Sexual Health Centre, Acadia Resource Centre, and The Red Door) we now have Mount Saint Vincent University Pride Centre, Tri-County Women's Centre, and the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia. Our top three areas of distribution include the Halifax Sexual Health Centre, Sexual Health Centre for Cumberland County, and mail orders all throughout the province. The Transformation Closet looks forward to expanding our reach through partnerships, educational opportunities, and community engagement.



Highlights Continued...

Sexcellence Awards



This year SHNS was so excited to announce our 2023 winner, The Red Door. We are thrilled to present the entire team at The Red Door Youth Health & Support Centre with the 2023 Sexcellence Award for their long service to the community and celebrated them at a virtual ceremony where we welcomed back last year's Sexcellence Award winner, Rachele Manett, as a guest speaker!

For more than 20 years The Red Door has been providing confidential sexual health services, health education, and health promotion to youth ages 13-30. They provide this support without judgment, in a safe environment complete with an expert staff and trained volunteers. As a non-profit, community-based organization The Red Door serves more than 1,000 clients annually, many of whom do not have a family doctor. (<https://thereddoor.ca/>)

Our call for nominations for the 2024 Sexcellence Award winner went out in March, and we are excited to have chosen our winners who will be announced soon.



The
**Red
Door**

Youth Health
&
Support Centre

Instagram: @reddooryouth
email: info@thereddoor.ca
phone: (902) 679 1411

10 Webster Street,
Suite 203
Kentville, NS Canada

Highlights Continued...



Social Worker

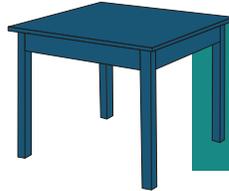
The Halifax Sexual Health Centre (HSHC) Masters of Social Work (MSW) program, supported by SHNS, was successful in addressing barriers to service and increasing access to care. By providing free psychosocial letters in support of gender-affirming surgeries, the MSW has already saved Nova Scotians at least \$68,000, as folks would normally have to pay on average \$190/hr for multiple hours with a private clinician.

Through providing an integrated social work model with gender-affirming care, HSHC noticed other gaps in service that could be addressed by collaboration with a MSW. For example, there is a surge in patients from newcomer communities who, in addition to needing SGR care, need assistance in understanding the Canadian health care system and language support. Using a social worker to 'debrief' with newcomer clients ensures that they understand what was discussed in appointments, are able to review next steps in their care, and get connected with other resources.

With the crisis state of primary health care in NS, and at least 15% of people without a family doctor, HSHC has requests for appointments well beyond their capacity. Their doctors are trying to see more patients and need more support from the Registered Nurse (RN) team. The social worker was able to offer collaborative primary care social work services, such as single issue mental/sexual health discussions, diagnosis acceptance support, etc., which would have previously been offered by an RN or physician.

Highlights Continued...

SHNS in Community



Tabling / Events

Following last year's growth in social media presence and engagement, SHNS switched our focus to raising our profile through tabling at many events with both SUGAR Health and the Transformation Closet. Some of these events included the Atlantic Sex Show, and the Different Folks Markets. Through these events we had many amazing conversations with community members and partner organizations about the value and timeliness of our work and the current climate of SGR Health in Nova Scotia.

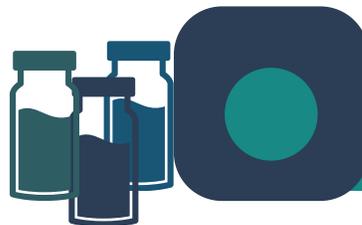
Advocacy/Collaboration



SHNS participated in a number of advocacy, research, and collaborative efforts this year, including:

- As a Provincial Advisory Committee member of the NS APPROACH Study offering HIV, hepatitis C, and syphilis screening in pharmacies
- As a member of AccessNow: advocating for free prescription contraception for all Nova Scotians
- As an advocate for a provincial SGRH strategy through the Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy working group following the successes of the mpox working group

To support the work of our provincial government, SHNS participated in the Health Equity Framework consultations, Asset Mapping and Capacity Assessment Project interviews, and the Equity Youth Health Experience Program.



Test Now: HIV Self-Tests

SHNS and HSHC participated in the Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC) Test Now HIV self-testing kit distribution program. Test Now prioritizes low-barrier testing access which allowed us to get 250 much-needed kits into our community through community events and our member-centres.

SHNS NETWORK

by the numbers



Member-Centre HIGHLIGHTS



Halifax Sexual Health Clinic

- Celebrated our (belated) 50 year anniversary as an organization with our mural dedicated to one of our founding physicians, Dr. Pam Brown.
- Officially launched our informed consent process for gender-affirming hormone starts, thanks to our social worker supported by SHNS funds.
- Purchased a fully accessible power exam table (thanks to Dept of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage) so that patients of all abilities can access a table that ensures safety, dignity, accessibility, and autonomy.
- Participated in national programming through CBRC (Queering the Compass) and CCGSD (Not Just the Tip), delivering health promotion and professional development programming.



South Shore Sexual Health Centre

- Expansion of the Transformation Closet to include more gender-affirming items including wigs and hip pads.
- Ongoing collaboration with South Shore Public Libraries to normalize healthy sexuality by offering outreach sessions at branches, and partnering with Pride events as well as Transformative Clothing Swaps.
- Providing resources for parents and caregivers of Gender Creative Kids through a grant from the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia, who provided the seed money for the Transformation Closet back in 2020.

Member-Centre HIGHLIGHTS



Cape Breton Centre for Sexual Health

- Our organization was selected to present to our local "100 Women Who Care" chapter and we were chosen to receive that night's donation of \$11,900. This money will be used to buy a variety of menstrual supplies to be distributed to any person or organization in need throughout Cape Breton Island.
- Our centre partnered with our local NSCC to host pop up sexual health centres, the first of its kind. Students had access to our free safer sex supplies, pregnancy tests, resources, and menstrual supplies right on campus.
- Our centre partnered with the CBVRCE Student Equity Consultant to plan the "2024 Stronger Together Girls Conference". We supplied over 200 girls with hygiene kits to bring home with the funds used from the Gender Equity Fund we were awarded.



Sheet Harbour Sexual Health Centre

- Launched Cupcakes & Condoms, a lunchtime drop-in at the Youth Health Centre.
- Developed Pizza & Periods, afterschool groups for girls with the Women's Centre.
- Wellness Clinic is still running with the hopes of tapping into birth control options for those who cannot afford it.
- Began plans to expand services to the underserved area of Musquodoboit Valley.
- Conducted first Strategic Plan and developed an ED Guide. Rebranding, name change, new logo, social media calendar will all be launching in September 2024.
- Hiring a Community Health Educator to focus on programming.

Member-Centre HIGHLIGHTS



Sexual Health Centre for Cumberland County

- Professional Counselling: The SHCCC was approved for a Mental Health Foundation Grant, which allowed the Centre to onboard a professional psychologist to provide counselling at the Centre. Sessions were offered both in-person and remotely, and the counsellor successfully supported multiple clients. The goal of this project was to bridge the gap for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members who might be struggling to access services, and the program was successful until the end of its grant funding.
- Leadership Transition: our organization faced a sudden change of leadership, and successfully continued to provide services to Cumberland County residents while it hired a new Executive Director. This involved the leveraging of qualified volunteers and being a team of 'on-going problem solvers'. Despite operating with volunteers for two-thirds of the Centre's final quarter, the SHCCC was able to support approximately 148 unique clients (presentations and individual services) and onboard a new Executive Director.
- HIV Self-testing kits are now being offered from our Centre, and being accessed by local residents and partner agencies to help improve access to forms of testing within Cumberland County.
- Partnership Development: The SHCCC began focusing on partnership development during the final quarter as it transitioned leadership. Our Centre successfully strengthened connections and engaged in active partnerships with multiple organizations, including: Integrated Youth Services, In The Works, Maggie's Place, Youth Development Centre, Autumn House, Restorative Justice, and Cumberland Partners (Interagency Committee).



Thank you to our
Member-Centres for
all your hard work!

Thank You!



We want to first thank the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness and Public Health for providing SHNS' core funding. Our work would not be possible without your support, and the impact that these resources have on Nova Scotians should not be understated.

We want to thank the Health Canada, Sexual and Reproductive Health Unit, under the Health Care Policy and Strategies Program for the resources we were given to create SUGAR Health.



Health
Canada



Thank you to Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia for supporting and uplifting the Transformation Closet. RCFNS has allowed us to ensure equitable access to life-saving gender-affirming gear throughout the province, particularly rural and under-served areas.



Lastly, we want to thank our entire community for the support, love, and solidarity we have felt over the past year. To our Board members, community partners, community members, volunteers, member-centres, government partners, and collaborators, we are so grateful to each and every one of you.
