

ANNUAL REPORT 2025–2026

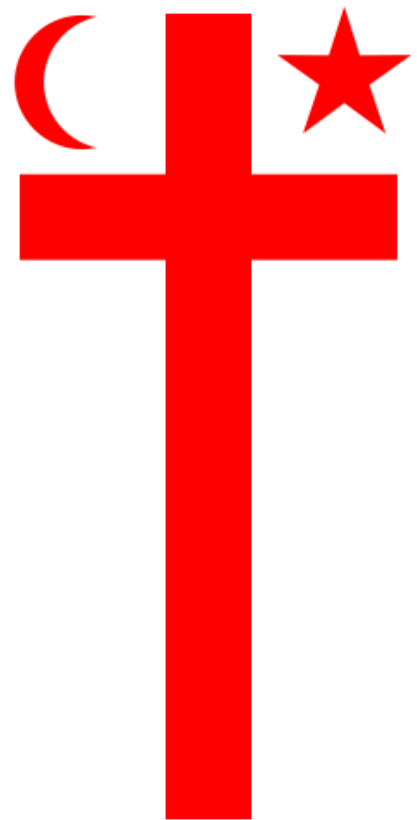


LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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 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 Nova Scotian Indigenous and Black communities through our programming, 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

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are proud to share Sexual Health Nova Scotia's 2025–2026 Annual Report. This year, the SHNS network reached more than 9,500 people with supports and services, delivered sexual health programming to more than 4,600 people, and distributed over 21,700 sexual health and menstrual supplies. Behind those numbers are 3,395 volunteer hours and the dedication of staff in every corner of the province.

Growth was the story of the year. The Transformation Closet gave out more than three times as much gender-affirming gear as the year before, launched a free online store, and grew to eight Satellite Sites. SUGAR Health added 138 new registry listings, more than doubled engagement on its warmline, and grew its Community of Practice to 113 service providers. We were honoured to receive the 2025 Helen & Fred Bentley Award for Excellence of Achievement, which made the new Community of Practice archive possible. And together with all five member-centres, we released Volume 3 of our Sex Over Sixty Guide, alongside a new digital resource library for Nova Scotians over 60.

Across our member-centres, teams continued to expand access, respond to community needs, and create welcoming spaces for people at every stage of life. This included new partnerships that brought free STI self-testing closer to home, thousands of appointments for sexual and reproductive health care, and new approaches to making procedures like IUD insertion more comfortable.

From Period Parties and Teen Nights to menopause support groups and a drag-hosted Sex Ed Trivia night, our centres found creative ways to connect with their communities, provide care, share knowledge, and make sexual health support more accessible, inclusive, and relevant.

None of this came easily. Several of our programs, including SUGAR Health, did this work while facing real funding uncertainty. Securing sustainable funding will remain a priority for the Board in the year ahead.

We are deeply grateful to our Executive Director, Stella Samuels, and to the SHNS team: Kelsey Benoit, Olivia Kerr, and Sar Ayton. We also thank Kade Lumsden, who left in March 2026, for helping steer the Transformation Closet through a year of such growth.

Thank you to the executive directors, staff, and volunteers of our member-centres; to our fellow board members; and to our funders, including the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights on behalf of the Bentley Awards, the DAWN Fund, prideHealth, the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Department of Seniors and Senior Care, and the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia.

We can do more together than we can alone, and this year has certainly shown that.

With gratitude,
Emma Van Rooyen
Emma Van Rooyen, Co-Chair

Jenny Rand
Jenny Rand, Co-Chair

WHO WE ARE

SHNS Board of Directors

Holly Dickinson - Rep for Halifax SHC

Thomas Williams - Rep for Halifax SHC

Vanessa Walker - Rep for Cape Breton
Centre for Sexual Health

Sheila Martin - Rep for SeaHorse SHC

Charlotte Gallivan - Rep for SHC for
Cumberland County

Louise Hopper - Rep for South Shore Sexual
Health

Emma Van Rooyen - Co-Chair

Jenny Rand - Co-Chair

Bryah Boutilier - Secretary

Jaiden Decaire - Treasurer

Alex Hill - Treasurer

Ry Pembroke - Member-at-Large

Asia Holloway - Member-at-Large

Claire Horn - Member-at-Large

Amanda Kolwich - Member-at-Large

Ty Silver - Member-at-Large

Sam Wilson - Member-at-Large

Ella Lawrence - Member-at-Large

SHNS Staff

STELLA SAMUELS (they/them)
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

KELSEY BENOIT (she/they)
PROJECT MANAGER - SUGAR HEALTH

SAR AYTON (they/them)
TRANSFORMATION CLOSET
COORDINATOR

OLIVIA KERR (they/them)
SYSTEM NAVIGATOR - SUGAR HEALTH

KADE LUMSDEN (he/they)
PAST TRANSFORMATION CLOSET
COORDINATOR

MEMBER-CENTRES

CAPE BRETON CENTRE FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - VANESSA
WALKER (she/her)

HALIFAX SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - ABBEY
FERGUSON (she/her)

SOUTH SHORE SEXUAL HEALTH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - JULIE VEINOT
(she/her)

SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE FOR CUMBERLAND COUNTY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - COREY HUNTER
(she/her)

SHEET HARBOUR SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - Vicki Rutledge
(she/her)



2025-26 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

TRANSFORMATION CLOSET



2025-2026 was a busy year for the Transformation Closet! In total, we distributed 1163 pieces of gender-affirming gear, fulfilled 356 orders to individuals and Satellite Sites, and purchased over \$50,000 of gender-affirming gear that went directly to trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse community members. The numbers show how much the T Closet's reach and impact have grown; the quantity of gear given out this year is nearly 3.5 times the amount from 2024-2025.

The T Closet changed through the year as Kade and Sar worked together as incoming co-coordinators until Kade's departure in March 2026. We developed new systems to manage the program's administrative side, and brought in fresh new ideas for outreach. Thanks to the groundwork laid by previous coordinators, the launch of our new website, our free online store, and free shipping made it easier for people anywhere in the province to get the gear they need.

We worked to keep building awareness about gender-affirming gear and the T Closet. We tabled at four official Pride events, three university resource fairs, and one GSA conference. After revamping our Gender-Affirming Gear 101 training, we delivered it five times to Satellite Sites and other community organizations. Coastal Gender Affirming Care, Diverse Roots, and the North End Community Health Centre joined our network of Satellite Sites, bringing us up to eight sites across Nova Scotia.

Collaboration and partnerships with other community organizations helped us increase access to gender-affirming gear for underserved populations. With support from the DAWN Fund, we piloted the Care Package Project with shelter-based organizations to provide quick and easy gear access to unhoused and precariously housed folks. We also continued to work with prideHealth on bringing gender-affirming gear to primary care settings in rural areas.

We were delighted to finish out the year with a wonderful new logo by Nova Scotia artist Ray Smith. Inspired by nature, the logo represents self-expression, joy, and creativity, all things we hope to contribute to in our communities.



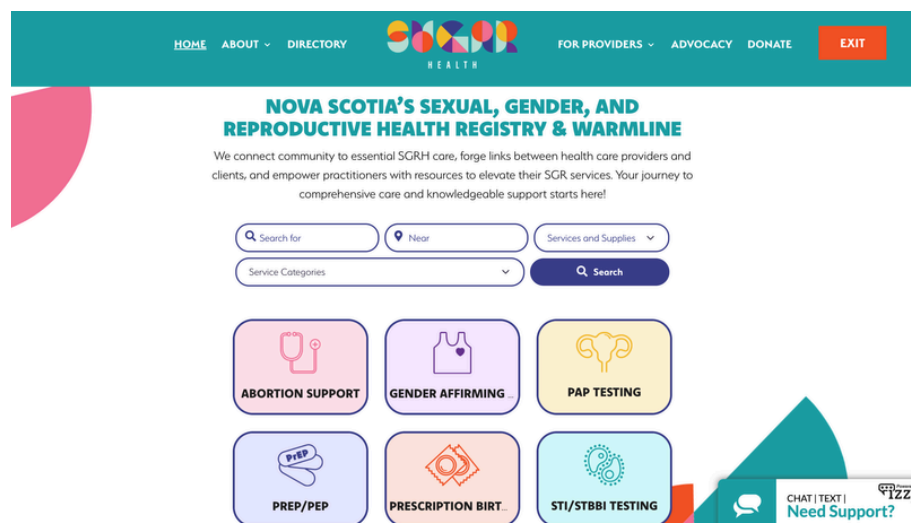
SUGAR HEALTH



Despite funding challenges, Sexual Health Nova Scotia (SHNS) saw the continuation of the SUGAR Health project, a 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 connect with a navigator if they require additional support or advocacy in navigating systems or services.

This fiscal year saw the launch of 138 new registry listings, with new supportive and non-clinical service categories such as birth ceremonies, Indigenous healthcare navigation, pre/post-natal supports, sex and relationship therapy, and more. Previous clinical service categories were also expanded upon or split up into smaller, individual categories to ensure accurate and comprehensive system navigation for service users. Additionally, there was an expansion on training for healthcare providers on the SUGAR Health registry. The SUGAR Health project was promoted through 16 virtual information sessions, six in-person events, and through six collaborative consultations with other service providers.

From April 1st, 2025 to April 1st, 2026, there have been 139 conversations between warmline users and the SUGAR Health navigators, demonstrating a 110% increase in engagement since last fiscal year. To better meet the needs of the community, the warmline was changed to a 24/7 text-based service in February 2025. Sustainable funding continues to be a focus for the SUGAR Health team as we move into the next fiscal year.



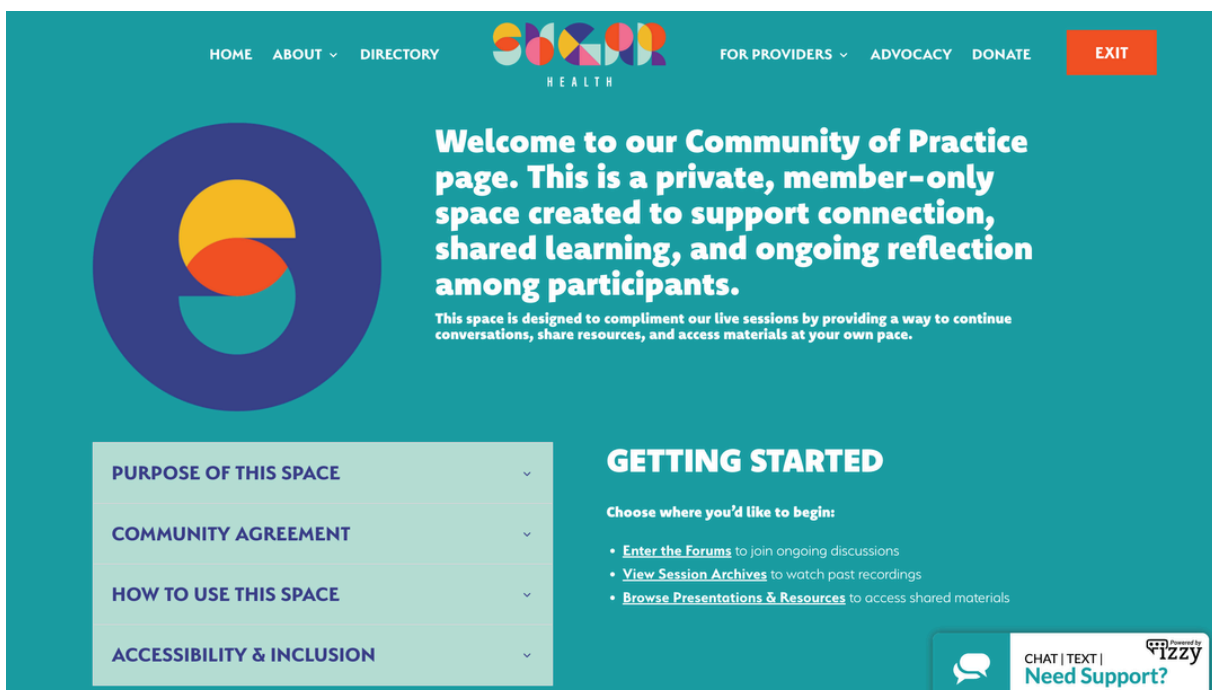
SUGAR HEALTH'S COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



This fiscal year saw the continuation of SUGAR Health's SGRH Community of Practice, where we alternate between research, advocacy, and resource-focused SGRH topics presented by community partners each month in hopes of creating collaborative partnerships that can bridge connections and bring about action.

There were eight Community of Practice sessions held this fiscal year, with a current membership of 113 service providers, representing a 28% increase in membership since last fiscal year. Examples of topics explored this year include pre-menstrual disorders, sex and cancer, and gender-affirming physiotherapy.

This year we were honoured to be awarded the 2025 Helen & Fred Bentley Awards for Excellence of Achievement which allowed us to create an online archive. Community of Practice member pages were added to the SUGAR Health registry, including an archive page for recorded presentations, a page for slides/resources to be posted, and a forums page to encourage continuous discussion and networking amongst CoP members.





This year, SHNS, in partnership with all of our member-centres, was so excited to release Volume 3 of our Sex Over Sixty Guide.

This resource was first created to fill a large gap in the information and resources the SHNS network was seeing – resources specifically aimed to share information around healthy sexuality in our senior population. Our Sex Over Sixty guide book contains 14 topics that delve into the changes we might experience around our bodies and sexual desires as we age, the changing world of dating, information on safer sex, and ways we can support a healthy relationship to sex and sexuality for ourselves.

And this year, we didn't just release our print guide, but we also developed a living digital resource guide on sexual health for folks over the age of 60. It lives on the SHNS website, and contains a section full of services, groups, and programs in Nova Scotia, as well as information and resources.

Sex Over Sixty: A Digital Resource Library

Welcome to our library of digital resources specific to seniors, and healthy sexuality while aging!

If you are looking for support navigating sexual health services, you can use our [SUGAR Health registry](#) which lists sexual health services around the province. You can also reach out to our support navigators at infosexualhealthns@gmail.com, or by texting us at 1-888-429-8167 and we will be very happy to answer any questions and do our best to help figure out what resources or services would meet your needs.

The SHNS network of sexual health centres also do a lot of amazing work in the [South Shore](#), [Cumberland County](#), [Halifax](#), [Sheet Harbour](#), and [Cape Breton](#) providing sexual health information and support.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction to the Guide	Page 1
2. Glossary/Language Use	Page 2
3. Keeping Sexually Healthy	Page 3
4. Menopause & Andropause	Page 9
5. 2SLGBTQIA+	Page 13
6. Body Image	Page 15
7. Sexual Dysfunction in People with Vulvas	Page 16
8. Sexual Dysfunction in People with Penises	Page 20
9. Lubrication	Page 24
10. Assistive Devices & Therapeutic Tools	Page 27
11. STBBIs	Page 30
12. Consent	Page 34
13. Online Dating	Page 38
14. Match Game	Page 42
Contact Us	Page 44

SHNS NETWORK BY THE NUMBERS

3,395

Volunteer Hours
Contributed

OVER
9,593

Individuals supports
and services were
provided to

OVER
21,722

sexual health and
menstrual supplies
distributed

OVER
4,651

individuals recieved
sexual health
progammimg

1,279

pieces of
gender-affirming
gear distributed





2025-26 MEMBER CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

CAPE BRETON CENTRE FOR SEXUAL HEALTH



Some highlights from the past year have been:

- Partnership with the STI Care Now program to offer STI self testing kits at our centre increasing low barrier access to testing options across Cape Breton. This positions our centres to better meet community demand and reduce wait times for screening.
- We were awarded \$15,000 from the DAWN Fund to support our Affirming Access Program, which helps offset essential living costs for 2SLGBTQ+ community members in Cape Breton. This funding directly enhances our capacity to provide practical, dignity affirming support.
- In partnership with the Cumberland Sexual Health Centre, we developed a presentation to accompany the updated version of the Sex Over 60 guide. This resource strengthens our ability to support older adults with inclusive, relevant, and evidence-based sexual health information.
- Partnering with IMWAH to host a fully funded Girls' Night for newcomer youth. The event included food, an icebreaker activity, and sexual health trivia. Several participants reached out to the centre afterward for additional support.
- Being invited to the Atlantic Menopause Show in Halifax to speak on a panel with our HotBloomers cofacilitator about starting menopause support groups in rural communities.
- Being interviewed by the Healthy Tomorrow Foundation for a blog posting about HotBloomers article linked here
<https://www.healthytomorrow.ca/blog/moving-through-menopause-with-hot-bloomers>

SHEET HARBOUR / SEAHORSE SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE



Over the past year Seahorse has focused on:

- **Strengthening Our Foundation:** SeaHorse continued to strengthen its organisational foundation through improvements to governance, policies and operational procedures. We created a new ED Manual, reviewed and updated policies & procedures and developed a comprehensive Board Binder to support directors in their roles. We also updated our mission, vision and logo and have a new tagline to ensure they were relevant and matched our new brand.
- **Our Team:** One of the greatest accomplishments was building a small team. Despite ongoing funding challenges, we have a group of professionals whose skills and passion support every aspect of our work – from youth programming and 2SLGBTQIA+ initiatives to communications and finance.
- **STI Care Now Testing Kits:** We are very excited to be a distribution site and that we're able to offer this as a service.
- **Programming:** Our youth program coordinator has done an amazing job of raising awareness of our services. She held regular 'Teen Nights' at the Musquodoboit Valley Family Resource Centre, was involved with a number of initiatives at Marine Drive Academy including a 3-day theatre camp, an event for Sexual Health Awareness Week, a Community Elders Project and continues to be part of the GSA group.
- **SeaHorse Corners:** Partnerships with the Musquodoboit Valley Family Resource Centre and Old School Community Gathering Place have continued to allow us to establish a presence in these communities. We provide information, resources, safer sex products, period products, pregnancy tests and they each have their own mini Transformation Closet.

HALIFAX SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE



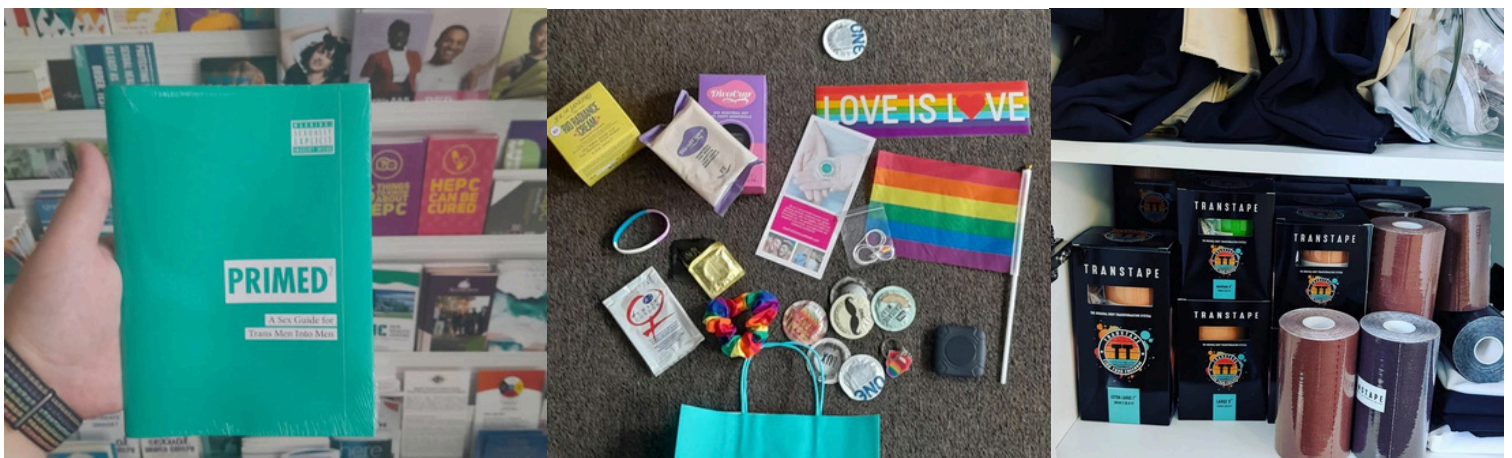
Over the past year the team at HSHC have:

- Hired a Gender Affirming Care Coordinator to facilitate a blended admin-social service approach
- Added Pentrox to our service delivery, ensuring that we take pain management during IUD insertions and other procedures seriously
- DAWN Fund supported Gender Affirming Surgery Recovery Program, which provides direct financial support for individuals undergoing gender-affirming surgery who do not have access to compensation to support necessary time away from work for recovery
- Booked over 9,400 appointments
- Supported the continuation of the in house Physiotherapy program, offering 335 free appointments



Over the past year the team at SSSH has been working on:

- Joining STI Care Now as a pickup site to make taking STI testing easy for our clients!
- Creating and approving our first ever strategic plan.
- Rocking the Old Confidence Lodge in Riverport with a February Sex Ed Trivia hosted by drag queens Brooke Rivers and Trinity Foxx.
- Providing self care sessions for 2SLGBTQ+ youth including journaling, trauma informed yoga and affirming makeup.
- Accessing an amazing series of professional development including liberatory leadership, performance management, and persuasive writing through IONS, Workplace Education, and United Way.



SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE FOR CUMBERLAND COUNTY



The top five highlights from the past year at SHCCC have been:

- 1. Launching and growing programming at Anchor Youth Space.** The Centre established a meaningful programming presence at Anchor, including SAFER Space, the Trans Support Group, workshops, inclusive swims, and other youth-focused activities. By early 2026, some SAFER Space sessions were reaching approximately 25 participants, showing considerable growth in youth engagement.
- 2. Implementing STI Care Now at the Centre.** Becoming a Nova Scotia Health STI Care Now community-based organization partner was a significant expansion of the Centre's role in improving access to sexual health services. It brought free HIV, gonorrhea, and chlamydia self-testing into the Centre, alongside consultation, service navigation, and information about options such as PrEP and PEP. Our partnership with Lilac Place also helped extend access outside regular Centre hours.
- 3. Expanding menstrual health education and Period Party programming.** The Centre substantially developed its menstrual health work, including Period Parties in schools, distribution of menstrual products and Diva Cups, and continued development of the Menstrual Manual with partners. Period Parties alone reached approximately 65 youth in November and December, and the model attracted interest for broader use through Sexual Health Nova Scotia.
- 4. Increasing access to gender-affirming supports.** The Centre continued developing the Transformation Closet and gender-affirming gear program while finding new ways to bring these resources directly into the community. This included initiatives such as the Transformation Closet pop-up at the GSA Conference, which served 33 youth, as well as strengthening connections with gender-affirming healthcare providers and other supports.
- 5. Strengthening community partnerships and coordinated services.** Throughout the year, the Centre deepened working relationships with Anchor Youth Space/Maggie's Place, Lilac Place, Autumn House, Public Health, Mental Health & Addictions, Coastal Gender Affirming Care, schools, YMCA programs, Sexual Health Nova Scotia, and others. These partnerships resulted in tangible programming and supports, including sharing circles for survivors of sexualized violence, Safer Spaces workshops, youth programming, harm-reduction education, referrals, outreach, and coordinated client support.



THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS!



Action Canada
for Sexual Health & Rights



NOVA SCOTIA
Department of Seniors and Senior Care



Mental & Health
Foundation
of Nova Scotia