



apss

*aids programs  
south saskatchewan*

**2022- 2023 Annual Report**

# AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan

## Mission

A trusted Leader in HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and harm reduction through education, prevention, support and care

## Vision

Reducing Harms, Improving Lives

## Values

- Meeting people where they are at
- Respecting and having compassion for others
- Confidentiality
- Being accountable for what we do and how we work
- Continuous Improvement

# AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan Inc.

## Board of Directors

Our versatile board of directors bring dedication and specialized knowledge to their support of this agency.

### Board Chair

Ronni Nordal

### Vice Chair /Treasurer

Kelly Trithart

### Co-Secretaries

Mary-Ellen Scott

Martine Proulx-Birchard

### Director

Kayla Panchuk

### Director

Cheryl Toth

## Staff

Our passionate and team oriented staff are the key to providing optimum care and support

### Executive Director

Shiny Mary Varghese

### Education & Research Specialist

Vidya Dhar Reddy - HIV/HCV/STI/Opioids

### Client Care Coordinator

Morag Hurn - HIV/HEP C Program

James Lukowich - Opioids

### Education Coordinator

Karlee Geiger - HIV/HEP C/Opioids

### Needle Exchange Coordinator

Lynette Flamont

### Harm Reduction

Sarah Ross - Coordinator

Elijah Poitras - Youth Worker

### Program Coordinator

Erin Hidlebaugh

### Peer Support Coordinator

Tashia Acoose

### At Risk Support Group

Elder Janet Dufour

Facilitator Danita Wahpoosewyan

## Message from the Board Chair

It has been my privilege to act as the APSS Board Chair for the 2022-2023 year. The Chair role has been easy to fill with the always available support from Kelly Trithart as Vice-Chair and from each and every Board member. Thank you.

However, the most significant contribution to making the Board of Directors role a simple one is made by Executive Director Shiny Varghese whose dedication, skills and abilities continue to exceed expectations and to greatly benefit APSS. Shiny has gathered an amazing team and each and every staff member's commitment is seen every day (often whether it is a work day or not!)

As the Executive Director's report sets out, there has been a decrease in the number of APSS clients whose lives have been lost to drug toxicity deaths. While there is no scientific evidence to support my statement, I believe it is quite likely that the hard work of APSS staff members and increased education and support they provide has been a contributing factor to the decrease of lives lost. Keep up the amazing work APSS staff!

APSS has continued to grow, to evolve and to be a leader in all it does. We are very excited to be a part of a new venture with the collaborative research project and are looking forward to the results which we believe will help APSS meet its mission of reducing harms and improving lives. Another exciting addition to the many programs that APSS offers is direct observed therapy – a real example of meeting people where they are at.

The APSS Board of Directors met on March 22, 2023 and asked our Executive Director to describe all the programs and services currently being provided by APSS – clearly it would have been a shorter list if we had asked what APSS does not offer! I am proud to be Chair of APSS, a non-profit organization offering:

- HIV, HCV, STBBI and Opioid education;
- HIV self-test kits;
- Needle exchange;
- Research;
- Housing support
- Harm reduction education and supplies; and
- Client support and coordination in all areas.

APSS was active in many other ways to support others, including having arranged the opportunity for many people to get professional hair cuts from professional barbers and hairstylists at no cost. Talk about "Styling Away Stigma"!

Keep your eyes open for continued opportunities to support APSS through fundraising events. The 2022-2023 year was full of amazing events and I am certain events in 2023-2024 will only be bigger and better. There are also opportunity to assist APSS as a volunteer, by making donations or by submitting a resume and letter of interest to be considered for appointment to the Board of Directors. Reach out to myself or to Shiny with any questions.

Thank you to everyone that has contributed to the good work of APSS in 2022-2023.

- *Ronni Nordal*

## Message from the Executive Director

The HIV and the opioid crisis continue to affect the vulnerable population in Saskatchewan. To stem the number of drug toxicity hospitalizations and deaths, APSS intensified efforts and looked at different approaches by responding to the opioid crisis in a comprehensive manner. Eleven confirmed drug toxicity deaths in 2022 were reported among our clients; a decrease from 20 reported in 2021 and 18 in 2020.

Since the launch of reportneedles.ca in 2021, APSS safely disposed of 34,173 discarded needles in the community. In FY 2022-2023, the reportneedles.ca was updated to include geographic information system real time mapping of community needle incidence. Geo maps of community needles data will be used to focus harm reduction interventions in Regina, including naloxone training, safe substance use education, peer and support groups to prevent drug toxicity hospitalization and deaths in hotspots. APSS received a two-year research grant from the Saskatchewan Health Research Fund to study the impact of focused harm reduction intervention in hotspots.

### Programming:

 Harm reduction programming and services on Sundays: 2,317 people accessed the needle exchange on Sundays in comparison to 1,868 in FY 2021-2022, and we distributed 61,881 needles, 2,559 meth pipes, 1,333 crack pipes, associated harm reduction supplies and education.

 APSS provided 5,010 harm reduction conversations through the needle exchange and 4,038 in person/virtual education and outreach.

 Naloxone training, education and distribution: 3,273 naloxone kits of which 496 were used to reverse an overdose and trained 1,976 people.

 APSS distributed 758 HIV Self Test kits received from Sask Ministry, CBRC, REACH/PHAC.

 Direct Observed Therapy (DOT): a new support program for hard-to-reach People Living with HIV to ensure treatment adherence to achieve u=u.

I am incredibly proud of the APSS staff for their powerhouse of passion and creativity to proactively transform feedback received from our clients and the changing HIV/opioid landscape into responsive practices for program enhancement.

**Financial sustainability:** Balancing financial stability along with increasing programming to meet the needs of the people we serve remains a priority. Grants from funders helped cover all expenses. For the fourth year in a row, the fiscal year ended with a surplus and our unrestricted net assets rose to \$207,711.00 to help APSS in its financial sustainability and our ability to support clients in the long term.

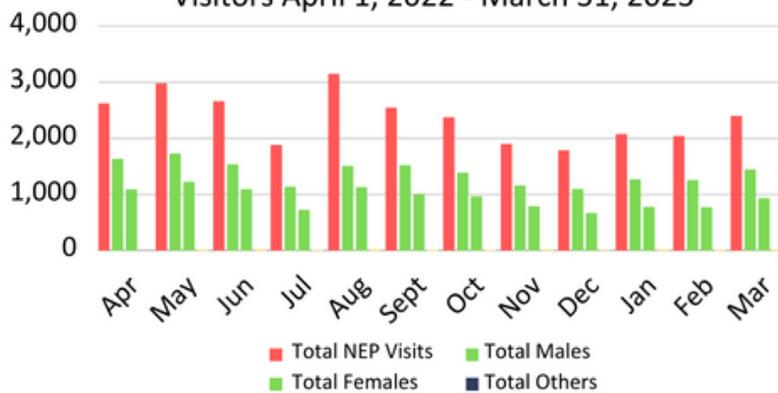
**In Gratitude:** Thank you to the funders, partners and donors for their confidence in APSS, to our dedicated Board of Directors, industrious APSS staff, social work, nursing, medical, mental health and addictions practicum students, Community Engagement Unit of The Regina Police Service and volunteers whose energy, innovation, and dedication keep APSS focused on its strategic goals, its mission, vision and in the belief that we can and are making a difference in the community to tackle challenges and seize opportunities.

– *Shiny Mary Varghese*

# The Queen City Needle Exchange

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan Inc. (APSS), in partnership with Saskatchewan Health Authority, operates one of the busiest Needle Exchange Programs (NEP) in the province. APSS is open Tuesday through Friday from 9am – 4:30pm and Saturday from 10am – 4:30pm, and Sundays, 11am-4pm. The NEP distributes clean needles, tourniquets, cookers, sterile water, alcohol swabs, cotton filters, crack/meth pipes, and condoms. The NEP also provides updated harm-reduction messaging, personal harm reduction counselling, and referrals to other agencies. We collect used/discarded needles from the community and dispose of them safely. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, an addictions counsellor, is available daily. In 2022-2023, we conducted 5,010 information/intervention conversation sessions on topics such as harm reduction, overdose prevention, HIV/HCV/STIs, testing, and treatment in the NEP. These sessions led to increased knowledge and referrals to testing and treatment.

Visitors April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023



## Number of Visits

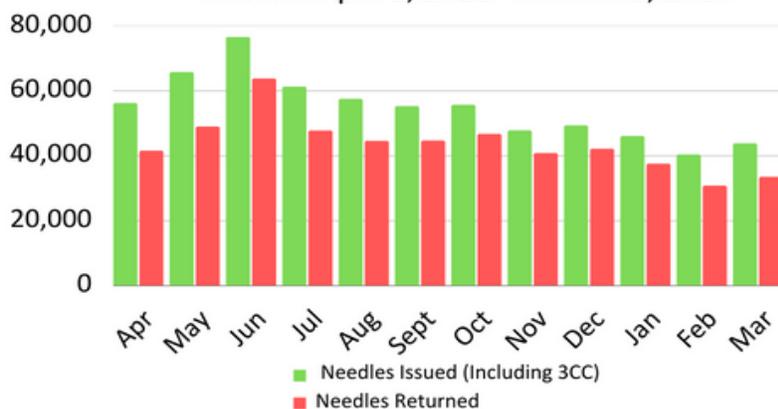
Female: 11,164

Male: 16,623

Other: 513

Total Visits: 28,300

Needles April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023



## Needles Distributed

Needles In: 522,055

Needles Out: 654,599

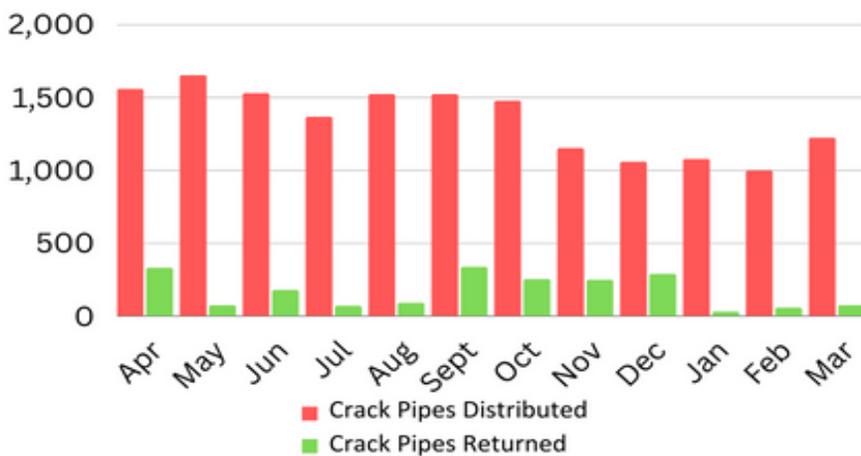
Return Rate: 79.7%

Condoms: 28,960

In March 2019, APSS started distributing safe inhalation kits in our NEP. Clients receive one crack and meth pipe per day and are encouraged to bring back the pipes to reduce the number of pipes in the community. Pipes can be exchanged for up to a total of 5 pipes a day.

In FY 2022-2023, our pipe distribution went up 72%, compared to our pipe stats of FY 2021-2022. Our monthly survey in February 2023 saw some extreme changes compared to previous years in the substance usage profile among NEP clients. In the previous year Crystal Meth was drug of choice with 60%, Fentanyl was used by 51% and Cocaine and Morphine was 17%. In 2022-23, Crystal Meth remained drug of choice at 51%, Fentanyl at 29%, other drugs including Cocaine and Morphine were at 19%.

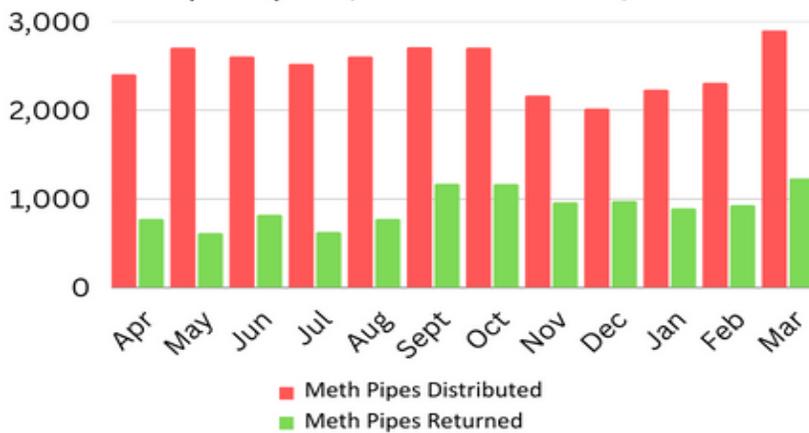
Crack Pipes April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023



**Crack Pipes Distributed**

Crack Pipes: 16,105  
Returns: 2,045  
12.7%

Meth Pipes April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023

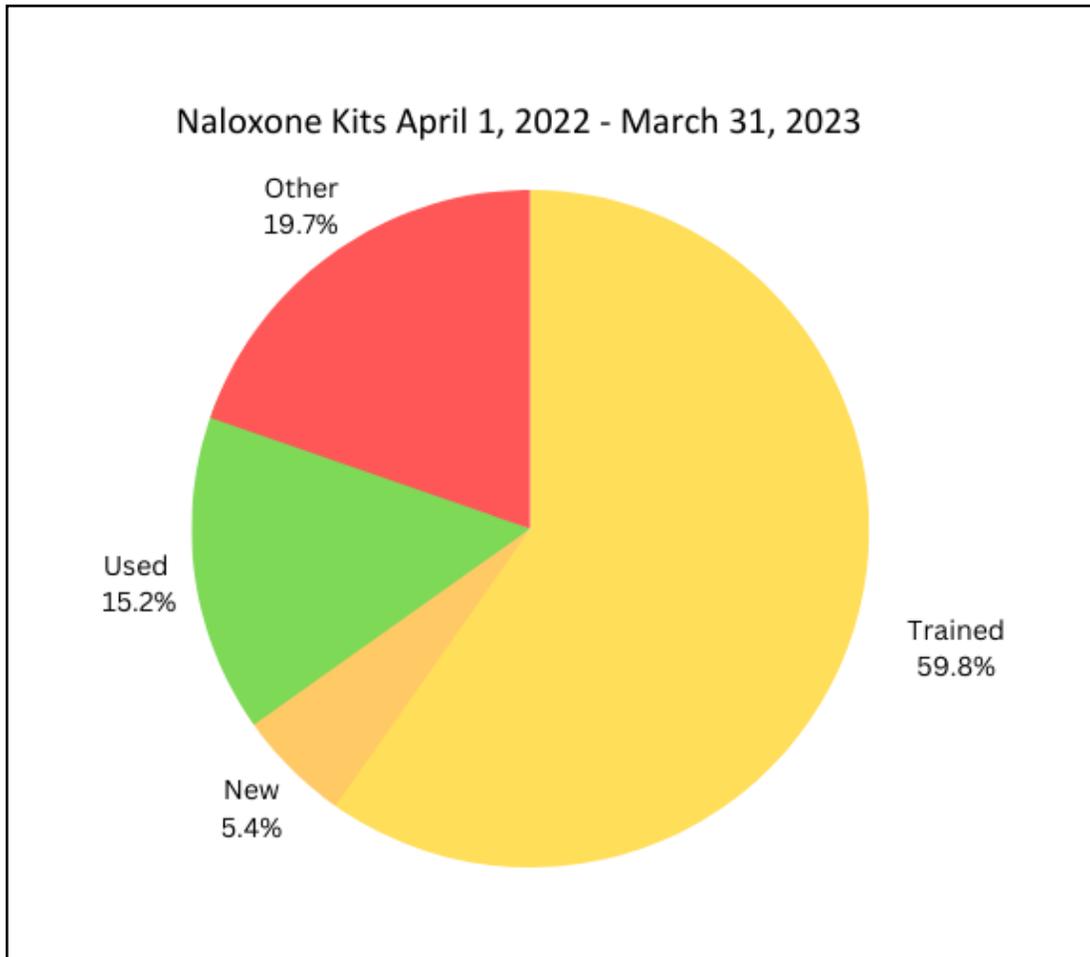


**Meth Pipes Distributed**

Meth Pipes: 29,825  
Returns: 10,936  
36.7%

# Naloxone Kits

APSS continues to be a highly utilized Naloxone distribution site. All APSS staff have been trained and are able to train anyone interested in Naloxone. The training, depending on those being trained, takes 15 minutes and trains individuals on how to administer the drug, how to identify an overdose, and overdose prevention. In 2022-2023, we distributed 3,273 naloxone kits of which 1,956 people were trained and 496 kits replaced that were used in an overdose.



## Naloxone Kits

Trained: 1,956

New: 177

Used: 496

Other: 644

## Naloxone Kits

Kits Distributed: 3,273

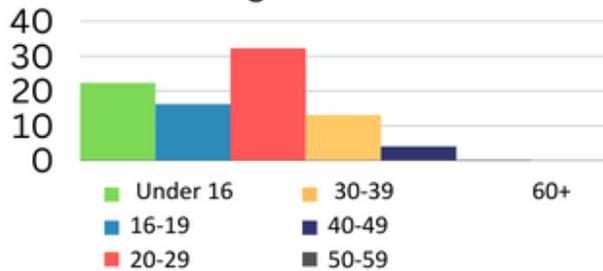
496 or 15.2% Kits Distributed were used in an overdose

# Monthly IDU Survey

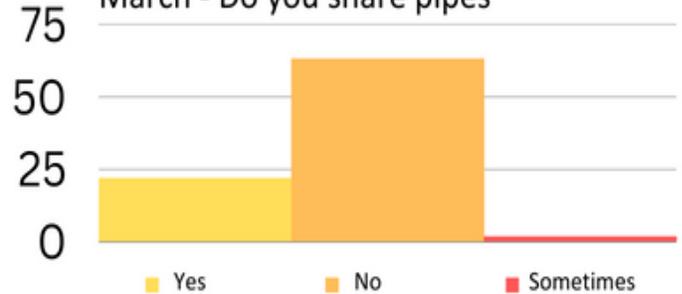
In 2022-2023, we surveyed Needle Exchange clients every month. We asked an anonymous question to different people and noted their responses along with the Needle Exchange ID. This was done to ensure accuracy of results and avoid duplicated data. At the end of the month, all data were collected and separated by gender, age, ethnicity, and location.

People were very open with their answers, even to the point of going into detail and telling our staff their story. By providing a safe space, being anonymous and having consistent staff, needle exchange clients are more likely to trust us. The responses from our Needle Exchange clients have been informative which have helped in relationship building as well as enhance our programs and outreach to meet the needs of our clients. This could include: increased youth education on injection drug use, working with our NEP clients in a way they will understand, and creating awareness events for the public. Sample monthly surveys are indicated below.

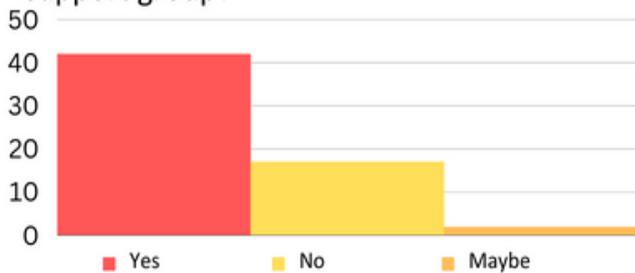
April - How old were you when you first used IV drugs?



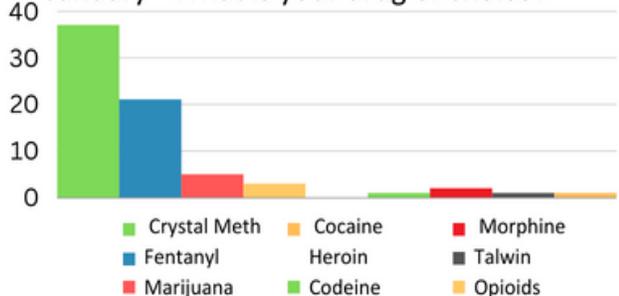
March - Do you share pipes



September - Would you attend a support group?



January - What is your drug of choice?



The questions we asked were as followed:

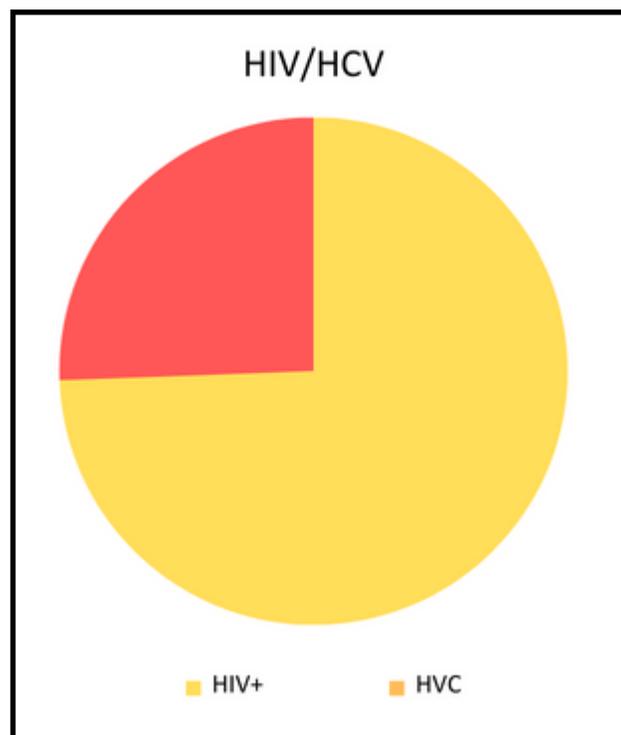
- April – How old were you when you first used IV drugs?
- What did you inject?
- May – Would you use an outdoor vending box?
- May – Have you been tested for Hep C? HIV?
- June – If we had a vending machine and you could only get 10 needles. Would you use the drop box to bring more needles in, knowing you only get a 10 pack from a vending machine?
- July – Have you been tested for Hep C?
- August – Do you have stable housing?
- September – Would you attend a support group? What day would be best for you?
- October – Would you use a HIV self-test kit if available on demand?
- November – Have you been tested for HIV? Would you like an HIV Self test kit?
- December – Would you use an outdoor vending box?
- January – What is your drug of choice?
- February – Do you use protection during sex?
- March – What is your drug of choice? How often do you use? Do you use alone?
- March – Do you share pipes? Do you reuse cookers/ supplies?

## Support Services

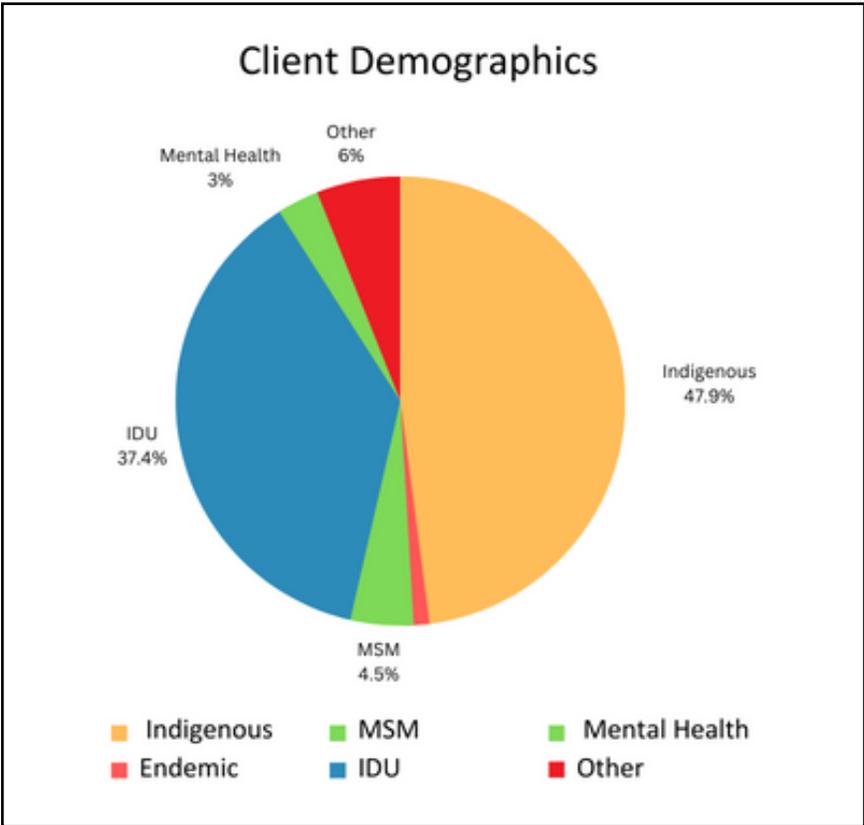
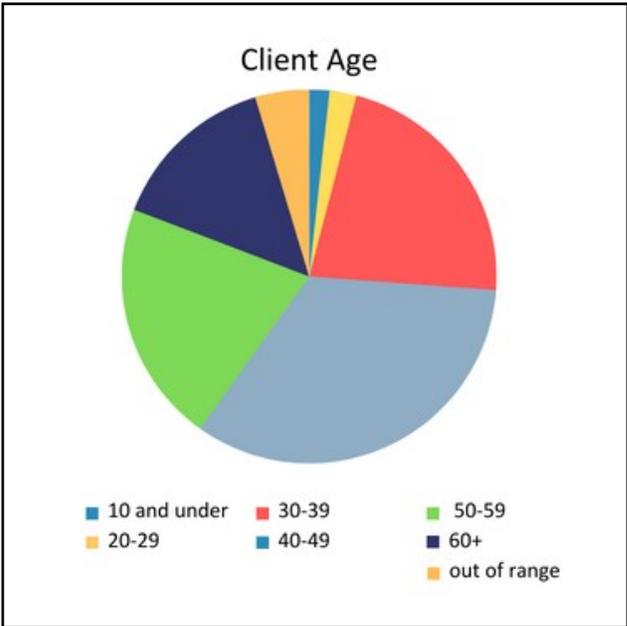
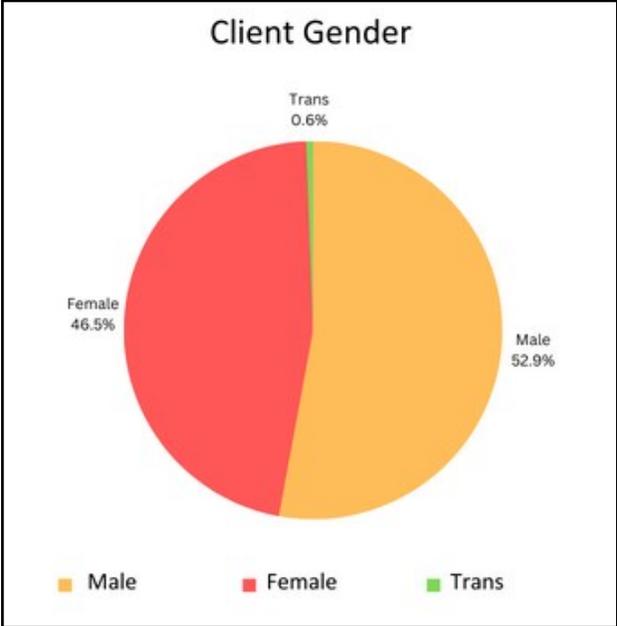
The goal of the Client Care Program is to assist people living with HIV in self-care so that they experience optimum health. Services provided include transportation to appointments, nutritional support, counseling with a psychologist or social worker, financial assistance with prescription costs, food bank deliveries for those needing assistance, one-on-one HIV and HCV education and support, and referrals to other agencies that provide care to people living with HIV. The Support Services' client base continues to grow and our Client Care Coordinator works closely with the Saskatchewan Health Authority case management team to provide integrated care. This year we added DOTs - Daily Observed Treatments to the services provided by the Client Care Coordinator.

Sadly, we lost 5 of our clients in FY 2022-2023. They will be missed but we are grateful to have been able to provide them with support and care throughout the years. We currently have 172 clients.

Our support would not be possible if it weren't for the tremendous ongoing support given to the Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness fund by the Regal Social Association of Regina (RSAR), Gay & Lesbian Community of Regina (GLCR), World AIDS Day, and a host of other donors. (See charts below for clients in care, client demographics and gender)



# Support Services



## Wellness Fund

The Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund provides financial assistance for health care related expenses to people living with HIV/AIDS. The Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund is supported by many fundraisers hosted by community agencies and businesses. APSS provided financial assistance to pay for medical/occupational therapy, transportation to doctor visits, baby formula, psychologist services and other needs directly related to HIV positive status through generous donations from the community. We are very delighted and so very grateful for the tremendous support received from our donors, the Regal Social Association of Regina, and the Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina's annual AIDS Benefit. Their support allows us to continue to assist our clients.



## Drop-In Centre

The Drop-In Centre continues to be a resource to the North Central community that offers programs and helpful answers to questions surrounding HIV and HCV. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, who is also an addictions counsellor, is available to consult with clients daily. The Peer Support Coordinator work Tuesday to Saturday to provide support to people when they need it.

## Health Care Services

On Thursday afternoons, Public Health Nurses from Four Directions provided vaccinations for COVID, the flu and other vaccinations as required and available, in addition to COVID boosters, testing and consultations as needed.

Saskatchewan reported 237 new HIV cases in 2021, the highest rates of the virus in Canada. In FY 2022-2023, health nurse, Pam Ford, Heather, Sarah and a phlebotomist, Brian from SRx Solutions provided HEP C and HIV testing. They tested 52 people for HIV (15 tested positive, with 0 new HIV+ status).

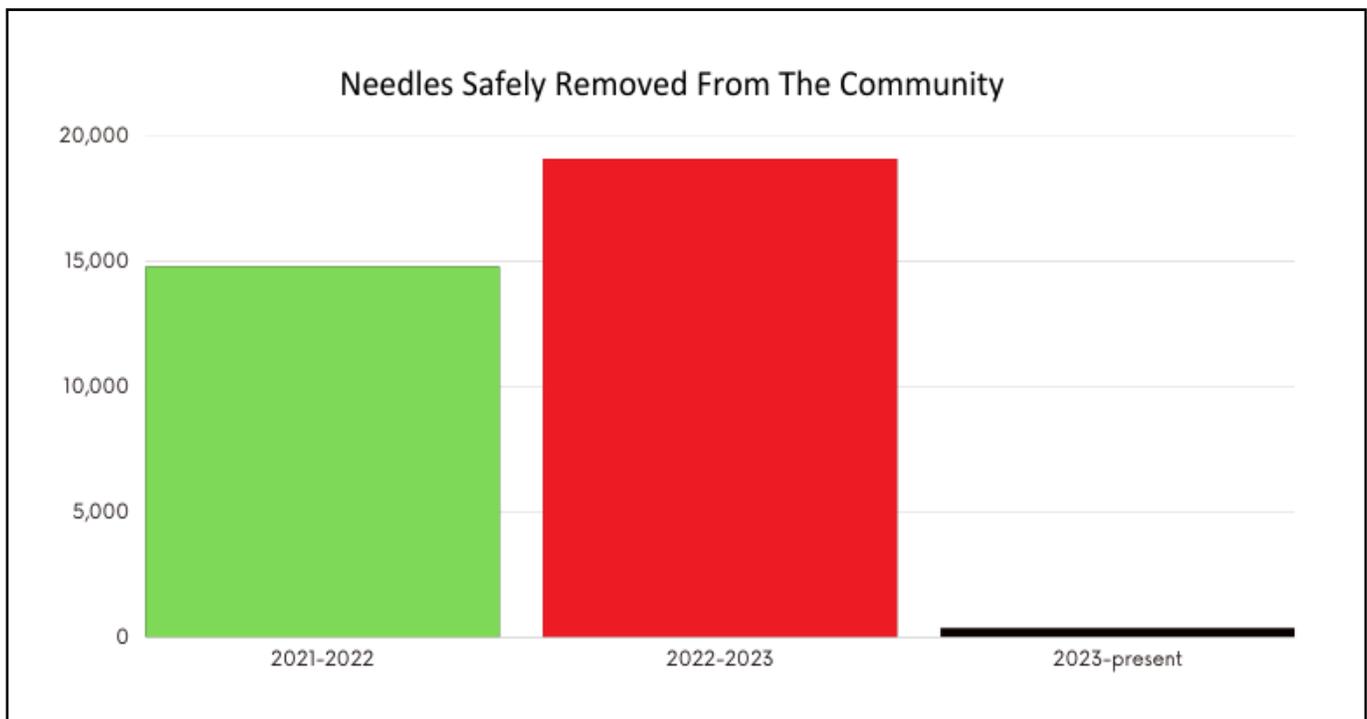
## Practicum Run TLC Program

On Wednesdays, practicum students hosted the TLC program. Through this program the students connected with clients. They provided information, a connection to services and a snack. These events were beneficial to both the students and the clients. Students had conversations with 233 people through the TLC program. These events are vital for stopping the spread of HIV/HCV/COVID-19 and preventing opioid drug toxicity hospitalizations and deaths in our communities and linking clients to care people throughout the TLC program. These events are vital for stopping the spread of HIV/HCV/COVID-19 in our communities and linking clients to care.

## reportneedles.ca

On April 1, 2021, APSS launched reportneedles.ca which allows anyone to submit a report of discarded needles including precise GPS coordinates to the location of the needles as well as an optional picture and description to make it as easy as possible for members responding to the report to find the needles. It also provides information on how to deal with discarded needles safely so members of the general public are empowered to deal with the issue themselves safely if they feel comfortable. It tracks needle reports and the status of the pickup (successful vs unsuccessful and number of needles collected) to better identify locations that could benefit from services like an additional safe needle drop off box. In FY 2022-2023, we collected **19,057** discarded needles from the community and disposed of them in a safe manner; an increase from 14,776 in FY 2021-2022.

Saskatchewan Health Research Fund awarded a two-year research grant to APSS. This community-based rapid assessment and response methodology is a research study where AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan Inc. (APSS) is collaborating with the Eaton Lab and the University of Regina. Dr. Andrew D. Eaton, (Principal applicant) is leading a team of researchers from U of R, U of T and APSS in conducting this pioneering research. The aim of this evidence-based research is to use geographic information system real time mapping of community needles data from reportneedles.ca to focus harm reduction interventions, including naloxone training, safe substance use education, and support groups to prevent drug toxicity hospitalizations and deaths.



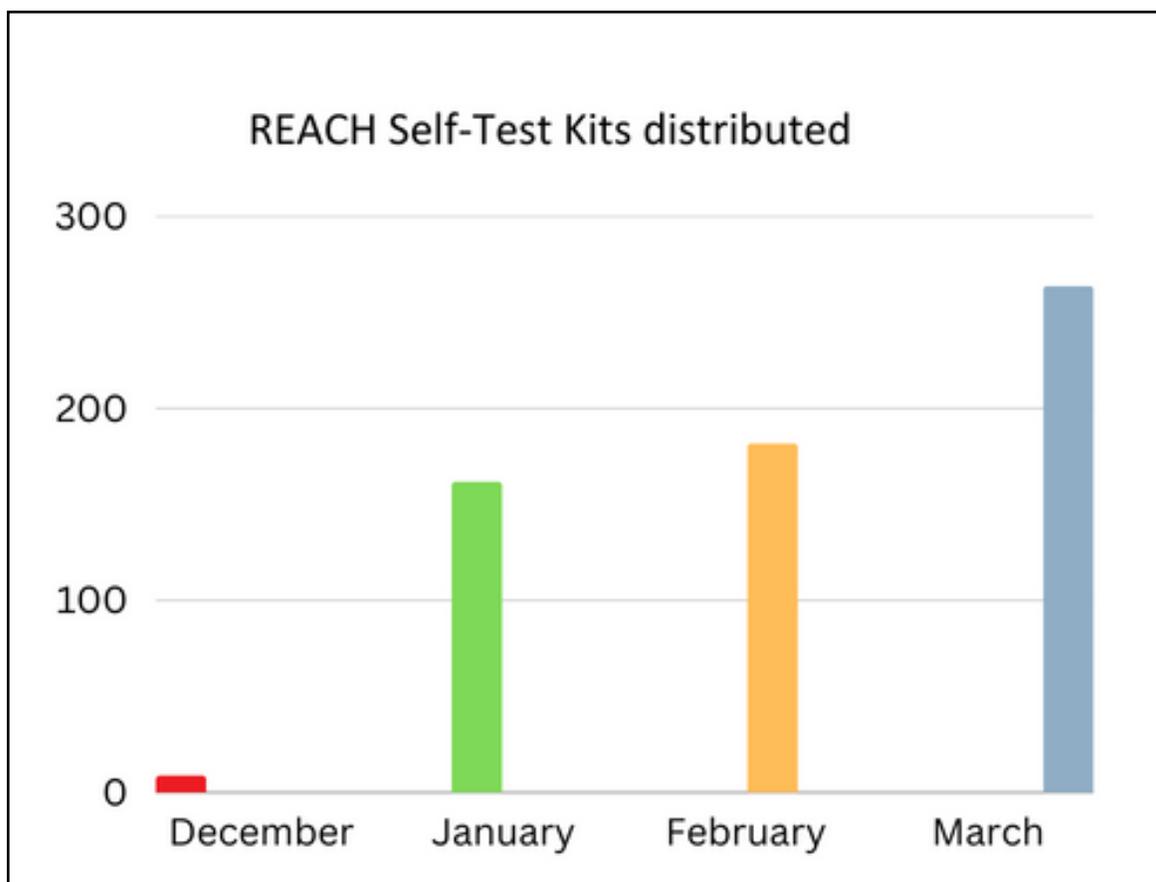
## HIV Self-Test Kits

APSS has proven to be a leader in the HIV Self-Test kit realm. In May 2022, APSS distributed 40 HIV Self Test Kits provided by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health. We also distributed 105 to give away. Executive Director, Shiny Mary Varghese attended a conference held by the Community-Based Research Centre and requested HIV self kits tests be sent to APSS for our visitors.

When those were successfully distributed APSS began to work with REACH Nexus to distribute self-test kits to visitors, students and the general public. With this agreement each person is allowed to take up to 5 tests at a time. In December APSS distributed 8 kits, 161 in January, 181 February and 263 in March for a total of 613 self test kits from the REACH/PHAC program.

At the 32<sup>nd</sup> annual Canadian Association for HIV Research on HIV/AIDS Research, APSS Executive Director, Shiny Mary Varghese was one of 11 organizations from across Canada invited to speak on APSS' HIV self test kit distribution. We were repeatedly referred to as 'champions' of REACH/PHAC's HIV self-test program.

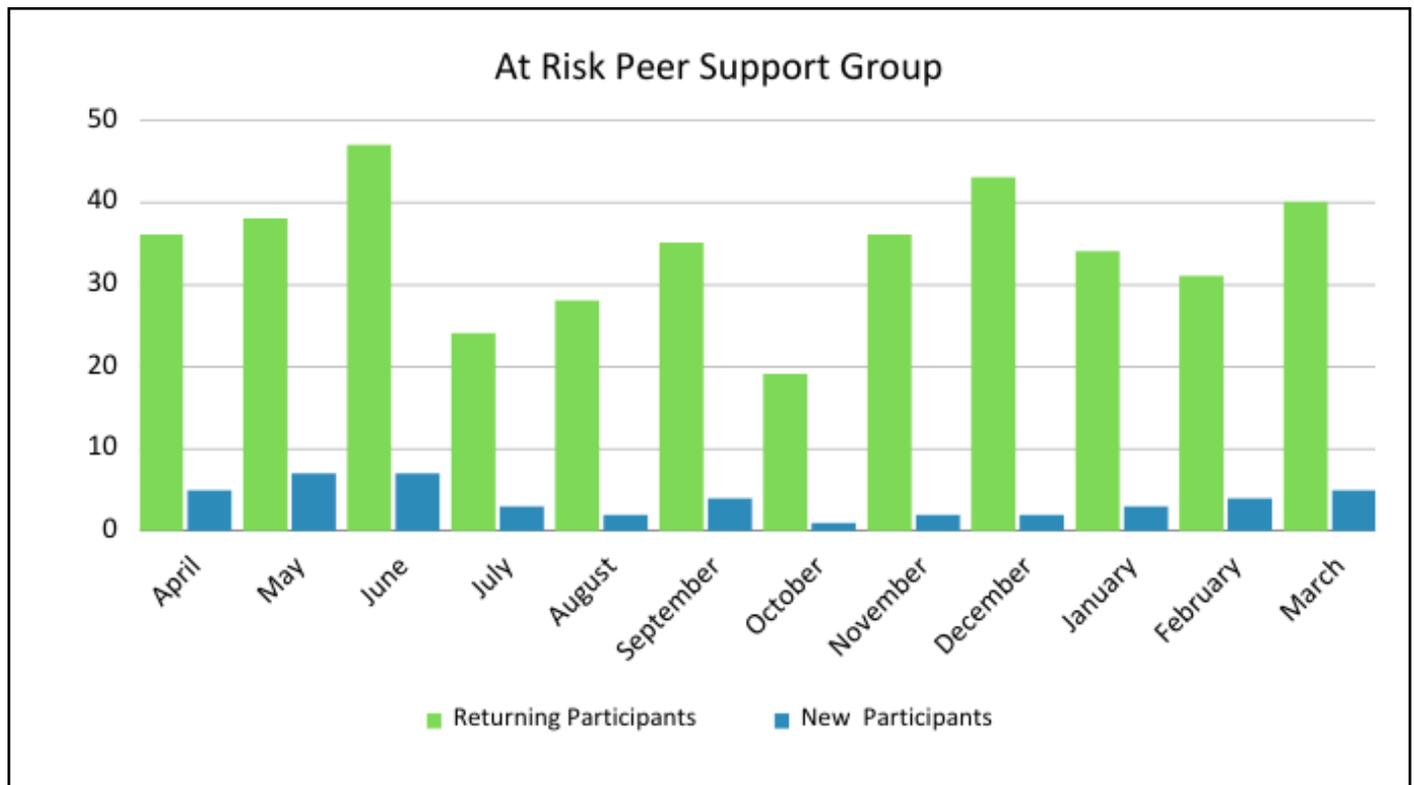
From all three providers of HIV Self Test Kit, APSS distributed **758** kits in FY 2022-2023.



## Anyone-at-Risk Support Group

Funded by the Saskatchewan Health Authority HIV Strategy, the “Anyone-at-Risk” support group meets at All Nations Hope on Thursday evening. Participants are provided with a nutritious meal. Danita Wahpoosewyan facilitated the group. This year two former participants who are no longer using substances transitioned to mentors in the support group.

The group functions in a talking circle that allows participants to share their experiences in a non-judgmental environment as well as cover topics on living with HIV, shared life experience, CD4 counts, needle use, HIV/HCV, the importance of getting tested, high risk behavior, self-care, triggers and “slips” and how these lead to high risk behaviors, and coping with grief. As seen in the chart below, the group continues to draw both regular attendees and newcomers. The group is open to anyone from the community who wants to participate.



## Education & Outreach

The Education Program increased their flexibility by including presentations via Zoom, in addition to the in-person ones and education for IDU's in the NEP. As the province changed regulations and safety protocols in person education presentations increased. The Education Program continued to improve relationships and collaboration with partner agencies, target populations and especially reduce stigma and discrimination among the general public. Over the last year, APSS has had a stronger 2SLGBTQ+ presence participating in both motor Pride Parade and appearing on Prairie Pride (a local community access show). The community also hosted its annual AIDS Benefit for APSS.

APSS had to drastically reduce our meal program due to lack of funding. APSS provided bread on Tuesdays and Thursdays donated by COBS Bakery. We were able to continue to provide lunches on Fridays through the generous donation of bagged lunches from Ronni Nordal, APSS Board Chair. Proper nutrition is an important aspect of harm reduction. Food insecurity aggravates the harms experienced by people who use drugs (PWUD) and therefore food security plays an important role in helping PWUD reduce drug-related harms.

The Education Team added to our APSS educational pamphlets and informational flyers. In addition to the previous literature, HIV (HIV 101, Prevention, and Testing and Treatment), Safer Sex (An HIV sexual health guide for men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women), and Substance Use (Overdose Prevention/Naloxone Training, Overdose Prevention for "Uppers" and Crystal Meth (as Naloxone is not effective), Safer Cocaine Use, Safer Crack Cocaine Use, and Safer Injecting), information pages on drug test strips, safer Benzo/Fentanyl use, a harm reduction activity book for kids was created and so was a brochure on MPox. We continue to reach out to our target demographic, APSS translated several brochures into Cree.

There was great emphasis on mental health and treating the whole person; intergenerational trauma and how it is important to treat people as people and not the addiction.

Summer was a busy time for outreach and education. Our team attending events throughout Southern Saskatchewan focusing on Regina, reserves and Indigenous communities.

On August 31, Overdose Awareness Day, APSS was at Mâdawêyatitân Centre in Regina. Staff educated 35 people and 17 people were trained to use Naloxone and 11 replacement kits were distributed.

APSS partnered with Community Cuts, a group providing haircuts to people experiencing homelessness, addictions, mental illness and people at risk. Three events were held and were great successes. In addition to the haircuts, APSS took the opportunity to provide harm reduction education, food, toiletries and activities for the kids.

This year 4,038 people benefited from the in person/virtual Education and Outreach programs. Education resources were accessed through our website (5,670 unique visits – which is the same as the previous year) and our social media channels (Facebook (Likes 1014-1264 and Followers 1183-1580) and Twitter (Followers 1192-1472), Instagram (559-685). LinkedIn (Followers - 49-255) We post relevant and current information on HIV, HCV, STIs, Overdose Prevention, and services available.

## Special Events & Donations

**APSS Events:** Two fundraisers on in August with a steak night was at The Tap, a taco night was at the end of October held at Agave. We raised \$1,262 at the steak night, almost \$500 at the taco night.

Over the past year, students have been creative in their fundraising efforts. There were raffles, 50/50s, an online auction and a “find the joker” game.

**The Annual AIDS Benefit** fundraiser hosted by **The Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina (GLCR)** for World AIDS Day was in person. \$328.00 was raised to support people with HIV through our client care support program.

### Our sincerest gratitude to our donors and supporters:

Ronni Nordal, Martine Proux-Birchard, Mahidhar Reddy, Tom McIntosh, Cheryl Toth, Emily Barber, Amber Christensen, Heather Szeponski, Laurie Sampson, Dr. Andrew Eaton, Saskatchewan Union Of Nurses (SUN), Debbie Rodger, Andrew Stevens, Carla Beck, Pam Reimer, Lorraine Ulmer, Beverly Crossman, Dave Sletter, Steve Togerson, Angela Togerson, Natalie Togerson, Mitchell Togerson and Noah Togerson, Barry Clemens, Brenda Clemens, Mary-Ellen Scott, Kelly Trithart, Kayla Panchuk, Community Engagement Unit of the Regina Police Service, Mitchell Johnstone, COBS Bakery, Kirk Nordick, David Meldrum, SRx Health Solutions, John Edgar, Angels4Warmth Inc. and Little Elves Foundation.

# Thank You!

## Our Funders



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada



Health  
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Saskatchewan  
Health Authority



Saskatchewan  
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Health



Community  
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SHRF  
SASKATCHEWAN  
HEALTH RESEARCH  
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## Our Partners



## Community Partners

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Affinity Credit Union                   | Regal Social Association of Regina             |
| All Nations Hope Network                | Regina Catholic Schools                        |
| Carmichael Outreach                     | Regina Public Schools                          |
| COBS Bread                              | Regina & District Food Bank                    |
| Cosmopolitan Learning Centre            | Regina Provincial Correctional Centre          |
| First Nation's University               | Regina Open Door Society                       |
| Four Directions Community Health Centre | Regina Transit                                 |
| Gay and Lesbian Centre of Regina        | SaskAbilities                                  |
| Infectious Disease Clinic               | Saskatchewan HIV Collaborative                 |
| The Little Elves Foundation             | Sask Polytechnic LPN Nursing Program           |
| Moose Jaw HIV Strategy                  | SRx Solutions                                  |
| Moose Jaw Pride                         | Street Workers' Advocacy Project               |
| Newo Yotina Friendship Centre           | University of Regina/Saskatchewan Polytechnic  |
| The Peer to Peer Program                | Collaborative Nursing Program                  |
| Prairie Harm Reduction                  | University of Regina Social Work Program       |
| Prairie Pride                           | University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine |
| Prairie South School Division           | University of Saskatchewan Nursing Program     |
| Planned Parenthood Regina               | UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Diversity    |
| Queen City Pride                        |  |



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**AIDS PROGRAMS SOUTH SASK**

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EDUCATION • SUPPORT • FREE TESTING • NEEDLE EXCHANGE