



apss

*aids programs
south saskatchewan*

2021- 2022 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

Board of Directors

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

Board Chair

Pam Reimer

Vice Chair /Treasurer

Ronnie Nordal

Secretary

Mary-Ellen Scott

Director

Tom Janisch

Director

Martine Proulx-Birchard

Director

Kelly Tritthart

Staff

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

Executive Director

Shiny Mary Varghese

Education & Information Specialist

Vidya Dhar Reddy

HIV/HEP C Program

Client Care: Morag Hurn

Education: Chantel Smutt

Needle Exchange

Coordinator: Lynette Flamont

Administrator: Karen Kaip

Opioid Overdose Prevention Program

Education: Rolly Aurora

Client Care: James Lukowich

Harm Reduction: Sarah Ross

Program Coordinator

Erin Hidlebaugh

Peer Support Coordinator

Ta-Tashia Acoose

At Risk Support Group

Facilitator Danita Wahpoosewyan

Elder:: Janet Dufour

Message from the Board Chair

The 2021-2022 fiscal year continued to be impacted by the constantly changing restrictions and learning what our new normal would look like after throughout the experience of the COVID-19 on AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan (APSS). However, as reflected in this year's report, APSS met these challenges head on and continued to provide exceptional service in our community.

As outlined in last year's report, APSS experienced an increase in the reserves in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. With support of the board, the APSS staff continued to increase their efforts on obtaining additional grants and unique fundraising opportunities to meet the realities of COVID-19 with a focus to continuing a balanced budget this year. We are very pleased to report that these efforts have paid off, resulting in a surplus for the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

As our province was faced with constant changes in restrictions because of COVID-19, APSS had to continuously adapt to changes in how the organization operates. Due to the amazing leadership and caring staff, APSS was able to continue to provide exceptional services and expand its service to include programming focused on the opioid crisis currently affecting our communities by providing overdose prevention specific education, client care services, and peer support services. Additionally, the staff and board worked with CAMBIAR Consulting & Emmanuelle (Em) Morin to create a 2022-2026 Strategic Plan for APSS. With great consultation with service users, funders, staff, and board members, I am excited for the direction APSS is headed for and the growth that will come.

I would like to give a huge thank you to our wonderful staff, students, and all of our exceptional funders, partners, and donors. Without your support and perseverance, APSS would not continue to exist, and with your continued efforts, we will continue to persevere and serve our community. In particular, I would like to thank our Executive Director, Shiny for keeping us running and expanding in this situation. All your time and efforts do not go unnoticed.

I truly appreciate all the time and effort all of our board members have given throughout this past year. I would like to thank our current board members who are continuing for the upcoming year, including those who have indicated their willingness to serve for another term. For those board members that will be leaving us this year, APSS thanks you for your dedication to our organization and we hope that wherever your journey takes you that you know that you will always hold a special place in APSS' heart.

I have enjoyed my time as the chair over the past two years and I look forward to working with APSS in my remaining time as a board member and continuing to support this amazing organization in the years to come.

—*Pam Reimer*

Message from the Executive Director

FY 2021-2022 continued to have unprecedented challenges for APSS and the vulnerable population we serve. Masks, PPE's and frequent cleaning protocols remains mandatory at APSS.

APSS Board and staff worked with Emmanuelle (Em) Morin of CAMBIAR Consulting to design a strategic plan for 2022-2026. Through the strategic planning the vision, mission and values were updated to reflect the health crisis in Regina. The opioid and HIV crisis were overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic which magnified the gaps and exacerbated vulnerabilities. Besides the COVID pandemic, Saskatchewan is faced with concurrent public health crisis with the increase in HIV rates, opiate overdoses and its impact on the families and the community. There were **39** overdose deaths among the people we serve: 20 confirmed and 19 suspected overdoses. APSS supports **259** people living with HIV. It is heartbreaking to see of the trajectory and tragedy of this preventable public health crisis.

Programming:



APSS continued providing harm reduction programming and services on Sundays. **1,868** people accessed the needle exchange on Sundays, and we distributed **74,050** needles, **1,555** meth pipes, **997** crack pipes, associated harm reduction supplies and education.



APSS launched reportneedles.ca which allows anyone to submit a report of discarded needles including precise GPS coordinates to the location of the needles. APSS collected **14,776** discarded needles from the community and safely disposed of them.



APSS provided **4,375** harm reduction conversations through the needle exchange and **3,565** in person/virtual education and outreach.



Through the generous grants from Community Food Centres of Canada, APSS provided over **8,800** hygienically packed meals to address food insecurity.



Regina reported record numbers of opioid-related deaths and hospitalizations. We distributed **2,250** naloxone kits of which **1,453** were used to reverse an overdose and trained **797** people.



APSS continued partnering with the Community Engagement Unit of The Regina Police Service to promote positive interactions to reduce barriers that prevent calling 9-1-1. (In a recent survey 60% of people did not call 9-1-1 during an overdose.)

Financial sustainability: APSS continued to seek new funding sources to meet the changing landscape in the health crisis experienced in Regina. In these unprecedented times due to the pandemic, 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 third year in a row, the fiscal year ended with a surplus and our unrestricted net assets rose to **\$190,588.00**. This surplus will help APSS in its financial sustainability and our ability to support clients' long term.

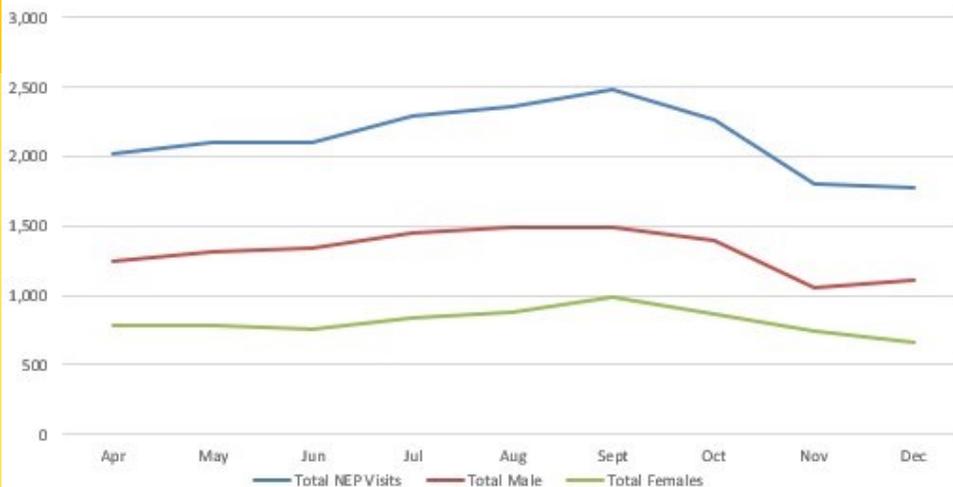
In Gratitude: Thank you to our funders, partners and donors for their confidence in APSS, to our dedicated Board of Directors, versatile staff, social work, nursing, medical, mental health practicum students and volunteers whose energy, innovation, and dedication keep APSS focused on its strategic goals, its mission, vision and in the belief that we can and are making a difference in the community.

– *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 also collect used or discarded needles from the community for a safe disposal. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, an addictions counsellor, is available daily. APSS remains open and maintains basic COVID protocol, wearing PPE, sanitizing high-touchpoints. At a time of uncertainty, we wanted to ensure that essential harm reduction programs and services continued so that our client's routines were not disrupted by our closure. In 2021-2022, we conducted 4,375 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. The decrease in needles distributed is due to the increase in meth and crack pipes.

**AIDS PROGRAMS SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN (APSS)
VISITORS APRIL 1 2021 - MARCH 31 2022**



Number of Visits

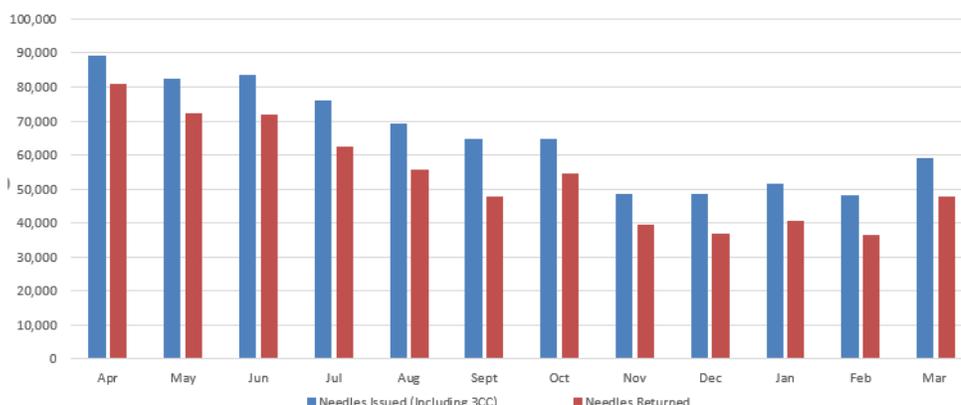
Female: 9,673

Male: 15,925

Other: 28

Total Visits: 26,626

**AIDS Programs South SaskAtchewan (APSS)
Needles April 1 2021 - March 31, 2022**



Needles Distributed

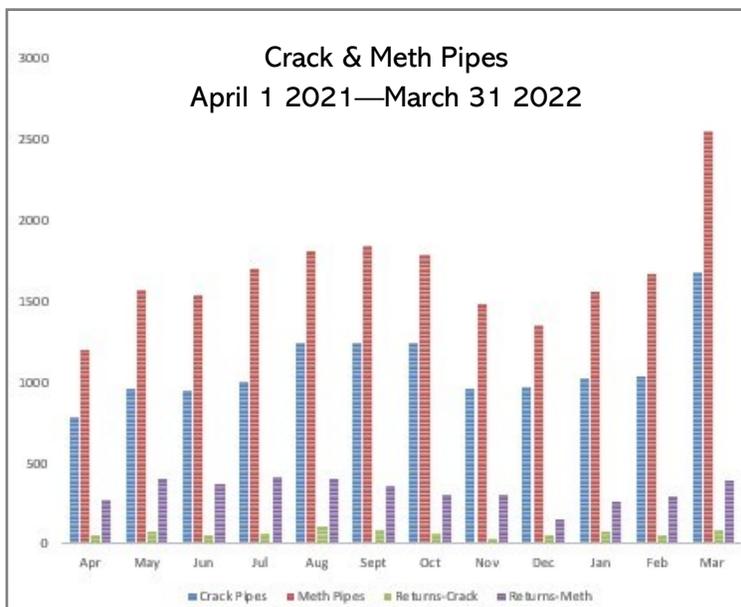
Needles Given out:
791,617

Used Needles Returned:
651,851

Return Rate: 82%

In March 2019, APSS started distributing safe inhalation kits in our NEP. Clients could receive one crack and meth pipe per day and were encouraged to bring back the pipes to reduce the number of pipes in the community. Pipes can be hard to return as they break after a few uses but clients can receive up to 5 pipes if they return their broken pipes.

In FY 2021-2022, our pipe distribution went up 15%, compared to our pipe stats of last year. Our monthly survey in January 2022 saw some extreme changes compared to previous years in the substance usage profile among NEP clients. In the past, we had 27% Morphine users, 34% Crystal Meth users, and 27% Fentanyl users (Cocaine and Heroin making up the other 12%). This year Crystal Meth was drug of choice with 60%, Fentanyl was used by 51% and Cocaine and Morphine was 17%.



Pipes Distributed

Crack Pipes: 13,053

Returns: 805

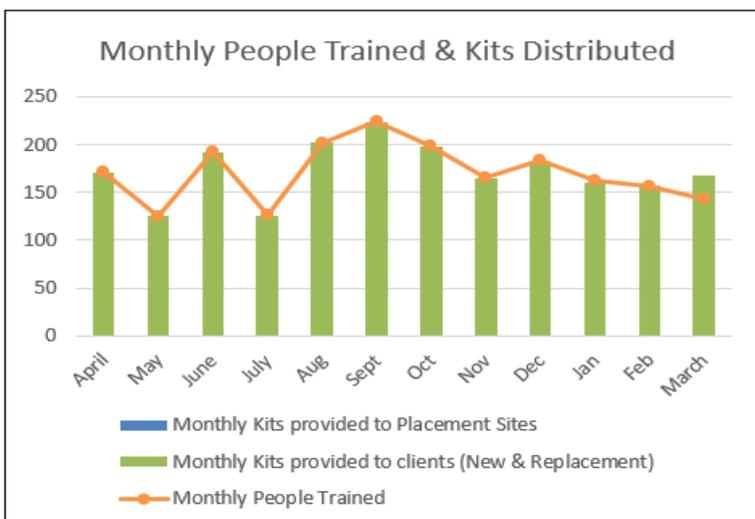
6.2%

Meth Pipes: 20,011

Returns: 3,918

19.6%

APSS continues to be a highly utilized Naloxone distribution site. All APSS staff have been trained and will be 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 2021-2022, we distributed 2,250 naloxone kits of which 797 people were trained and 1,453 kits replaced that were used in an overdose.



Naloxone Kits

Trained: 797

Used: 1,453

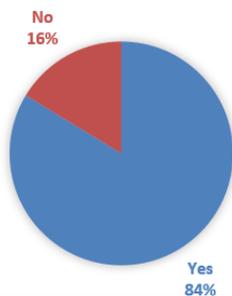
Kits Distributed: 2,250

Monthly IDU Survey

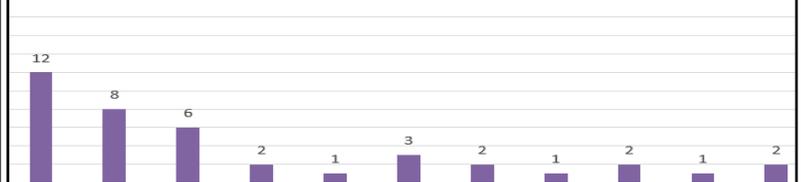
In 2021-2022, we surveyed Needle Exchange clients for 3 weeks every month. We asked an anonymous question to different people and then took down their answer and their Needle Exchange ID. This was done to ensure accuracy of results and avoid duplicated data. At the end of the three weeks, all data was collected and separated by gender, age, ethnicity, and location. (Graphs were made depending on relevance).

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 to meet the needs of our clients. The data collected is used for needs assessment and turn what we have learned into where we need to focus. 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.

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS OVERDOSED?



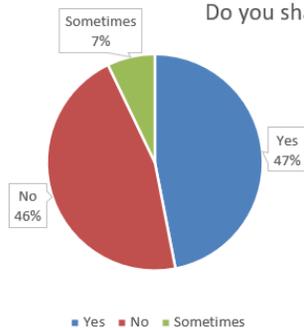
How often do you smoke/inject per day?



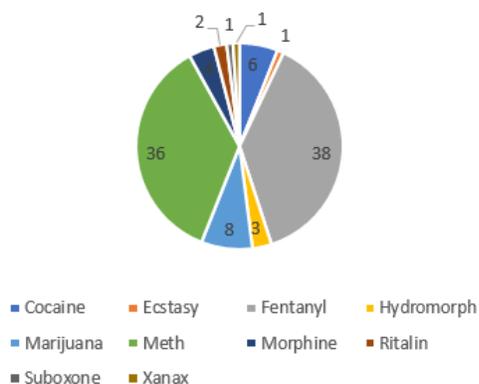
The questions we asked were as followed:

- April- Do you know someone who overdosed?
- May- Have you been tested for Hepatitis C?
- June- Have you been tested for HIV?
- July - Do you share pipes?
- August- Do you reuse cookers (supplies)?
- September- Smoking/injection frequency
- October- Do you use alone?
- November- Treatment options
- December- Have you been tested for HIV?
- January – What is your drug of choice?
- February – Have you ever used the drug testing strips?
- March – Do you know someone who overdosed?

Do you share pipes?



What is your drug of choice?



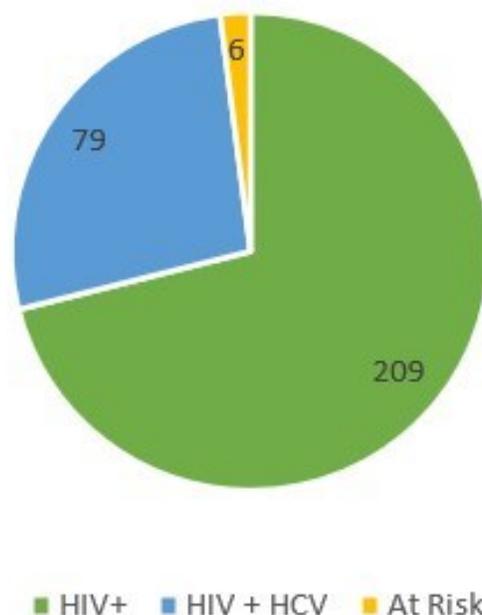
Support Services

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.

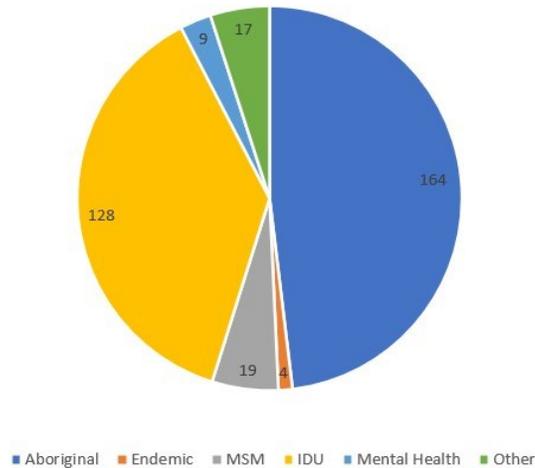
Sadly, we lost **17** people living with HIV in FY 2021-2022 - one person was murdered, one died by suicide, four people overdosed and 11 died of related illnesses due to the ongoing opioid epidemic. They will be missed but we are grateful to have been able to provide them with support and care throughout the years. We currently have **259** clients (198 active 14 live out of town.)

Our client care 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)

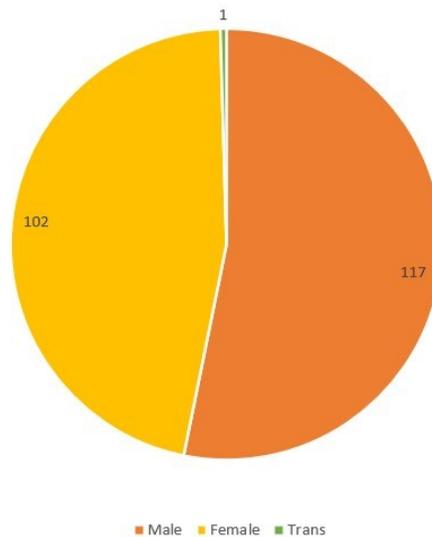
HIV/HCV



Client Demographics



Client Gender



Wellness Fund

The Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund was started to provide financial assistance for health care related expenses to people living with HIV and AIDS. The Jerome Nagel/Ric Ranger Wellness Fund is supported by many fundraisers hosted by community agencies and businesses. The COVID pandemic has been a barrier in our fundraising efforts but APSS was able to provide financial assistance to pay for medications, massage therapy, 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 and donors. 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, HCV and substance use disorders. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, who is also an addictions counsellor, is available to consult with clients daily.

Health Care Services

On Thursday afternoons, Public Health Nurses from Four Directions provided vaccinations for both COVID and the flu 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. COVID-19 pandemic hampered access to care including HIV testing. From June 2021-March 2022, health nurse, Pam Ford and a phlebotomist, Brian from SRx Pharmacy provided HEP C and HIV testing. They tested 102 people for HIV (26 tested positive, 7 were new HIV+ status, and 18 were connected to the ID clinic.)

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 366 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.

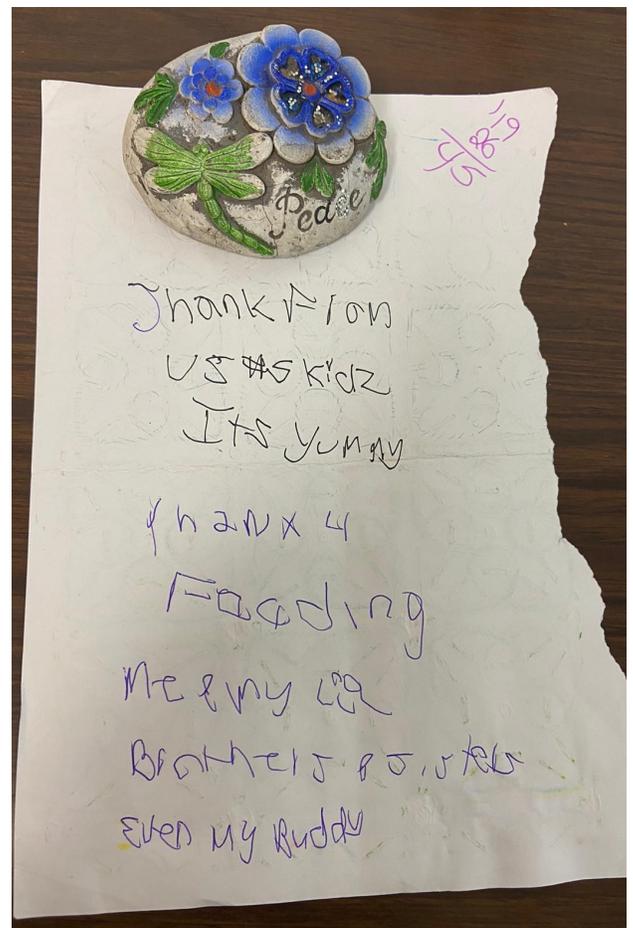
reportneedles.ca

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 2021-2022, we collected **14,776** discarded needles from the community and disposed of them in a safe manner.

Food Security Program

This initiative was created at the start of the pandemic when we saw an increase in people coming to our services looking for food as other services had closed. APSS, through a NEP survey, identified many of our clients were struggling with food security and responded by providing them with breakfasts and lunches.

1,571 meals were given out without other supplies to people who were experiencing food insecurity and over 8,900 meals to our clients. 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. With the funding received, APSS gave back to the community businesses who supported us previously. We worked with COBS Bread for breakfasts and CO-OP for meals. Thank you to our board member, Ronni, who made lunch bags on Fridays!



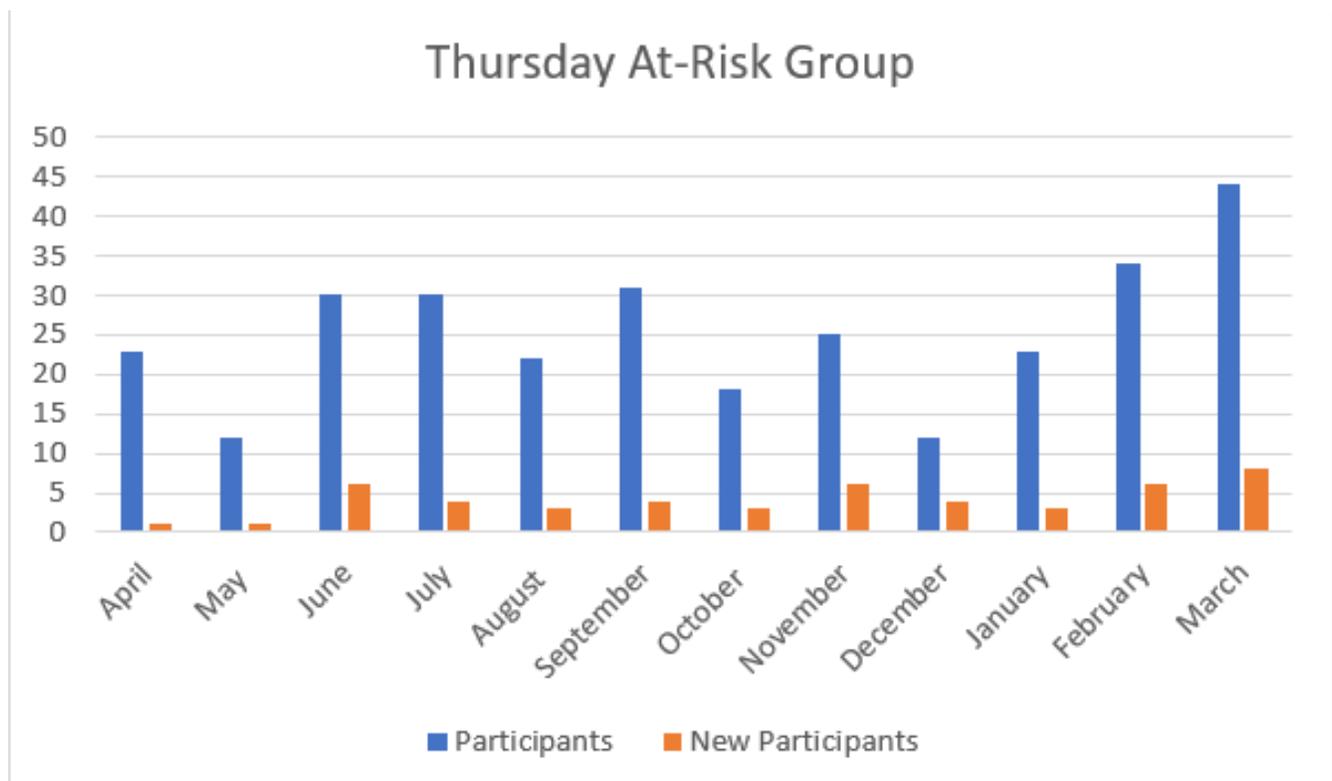
Thank you pictures and note from young people who received hot meals with their parents. The note reads: 'Thanks you from us kids. Its yummy! Thanx 4 feeding me & my lil brothers and sisters. Even my buddy.'

Anyone-at-Risk Support Group

Funded by the Saskatchewan Health Authority HIV Strategy, the “Anyone-at-Risk” support group meets at All Nations Hope each Thursday evening starting at 5pm. Participants are provided with a nutritious meal. Danita Wahpoosewyan facilitated the 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.

The Whose Down Group held weekly funded by Health Canada provided support to people who are actively using substances. This group provided information on treatment, referrals, housing and also a nutritional meals.



Education & Outreach

The Education Program increased their flexibility and added back in-person sessions to the Zoom presentations, educational videos, online education, and education for IDU's in the NEP they were holding in the previous year. The hybrid model worked as the province changed regulations and safety protocols. The Education Program continued to improve relationships and collaboration with partner agencies, target populations and especially reduce stigma and discrimination among the general public. APSS had a strong 2SLGBTQ+ presence participating in both motor pride parades. APSS also connected more impactfully with the South Asian population, visiting temples and mosques providing harm reduction messaging.

APSS was able to distribute education through our NEP to Substance Users through our meal program. Education included information on Harm Reduction, HIV, HCV and COVID-19. 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.

Education resources were accessed through our website (5,670 unique visits – an increase of 87% from the previous year) and our social media channels (Facebook (Likes 878 – 1014 and Followers 881 – 1183) and Twitter (Followers 1169 – 1192), Instagram (299 – 559). In January, APSS added LinkedIn to the social media platforms. (Followers - 49) We post relevant and current information on HIV, HCV, STIs, Overdose Prevention, and services available.

The Education Team added 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), the team created information pages on drug test strips, safer Benzo/Fentanyl use. As a way to reach out to our target demographic, APSS translated several brochures into Cree. (APSS Service brochure, Phoning 911, The Good Samaritan Law and HIV 101).

We were honored to be chosen to speak on Harm Reduction at the College of Medicine Saskatoon to future doctors . We were able to address the stigma our clients face as well as how to care for those who use drugs. 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.

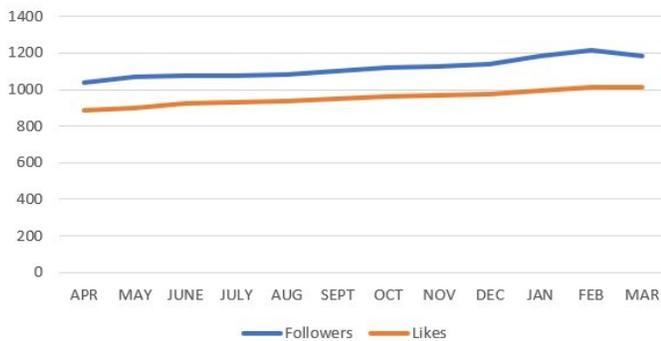
Education & Outreach

Our educators also spent time speaking about how addictions and mental wellness impact Indigenous wellness. We are confident that these future doctors will pave the way in Harm Reduction practices. APSS took part in a HIV research project, Test Now Project. This allowed us access to HIV self-test kits. Our HIV educator was also asked to speak at the Global Health Conference as a breakout session guest speaker and CWCLE Plurge as a Guest Facilitator.

On August 31st, Overdose Awareness Day, APSS was at Mâdawêyatitân Centre in Regina during the day and Moose Jaw in the afternoon. Between both locations 28 people were trained to use Naloxone.

This year **3,565 people** benefited from the in person/virtual Education and Outreach program as well as **63,560 people** viewed the online social media.

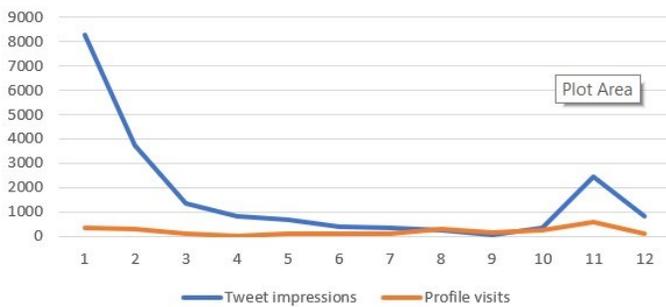
Facebook Followers & Likes



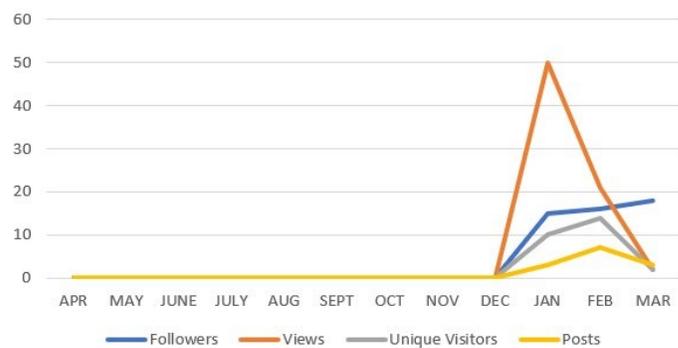
Instagram



Twitter @aidsprograms
Tweet Impressions & Profile Visits



LinkedIn



Special Events & Donations

APSS Events: The COVID pandemic curtailed our ability to hold the annual fundraiser—**Amazing Race Against HIV**.

The Annual AIDS Benefit fundraiser hosted by **The Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina (GLCR)** for World AIDS Day was in person. \$1,000,00 was raised to support people with HIV through our client care support program.

Our sincerest gratitude to our supporters:

Heather Szeponski, Laurie Sampson, Martine Proux-Birchard, Lorraine Ulmer, Beverly Crossman, Barb Larratt, Roxanne Brown, Mona Hill, Michelle Bilan, Ronni Nordal, Debbie Rodger, Pam Reimer, Mary-ellen Scott, Tom Janisch, Steve Togerson, Kelly Tritthart, Tom McIntosh, The Community Engagement Unit of the Regina Police Service (RPS), Pam Ford, Brian, Angels4Warmth Inc., G Murray and Edna Forbes Foundation and Little Elves Foundation.

APSS was the charity of choice for **COBS Bread Grasslands** hot cross bun fundraiser on April 2021, and raised a total of \$1,361. We truly appreciate the continued support we receive from the COBS team every Tuesday/Thursday with their bread donations and thinking of us for their fundraiser. **A & W South Regina** raised \$1,119 through a fundraiser for APSS.

Anita Merk and the deli team at COOP on Parliament Avenue who provided healthy and delicious meals for our clients.

Coney Island Poutine for their weekly poutine donated to our clients.

Thank You!

Our Funders



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



Health
Canada Santé
Canada



Saskatchewan
Health Authority



Saskatchewan
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Health

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Our Partners



Community Partners

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



apss

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AIDS PROGRAMS SOUTH SASK

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EDUCATION • SUPPORT • FREE TESTING • NEEDLE EXCHANGE