

A vibrant photograph of a forest stream. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and a blue sky with white clouds. Several large, fallen tree trunks lie across the stream, partially submerged. The banks are densely packed with various green plants, ferns, and trees. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022



What is Oahas

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy is a provincially mandated AIDS Service Organization (ASO) that provides outreach and support services to Indigenous people (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) who are living with or affected by HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBIs) by way of a network of community prevention workers. The Strategy was created by a steering committee composed of government representatives, researchers, community representatives and people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Mission

Oahas leads culturally distinct and sensitive programs and supports to prevent the transmission of HIV and other STBBIs through safety, knowledge and care with Indigenous people to achieve wellbeing.

Vision

Oahas exists to end HIV infections in Indigenous communities in Ontario.

Oahas operates based on the principles of Greater Involvement of People living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA), Meaningful Engagement of People living with HIV/AIDS (MEPA), Indigenous harm reduction, and respect for our cultural knowledges and teachings. These foundational principles guide all aspects of our relationships and work, and support our community prevention workers in providing culturally safe and trauma informed approaches related to prevention, education, outreach, testing, and treatment supports and services for Indigenous peoples living in Ontario.

Message from the Board Chair & Executive Director



Lindsay Kretschmer
President & Chair

Meghan Young
Executive Director

The 2021-2022 fiscal year carried many challenges and opportunities with it. The COVID pandemic continued to impact communities, but along with it came the opportunity to access additional resources to increase communities' access to food security, housing, mental health supports, traditional medicines and cultural programming. Over the year, Oahas supported communities with nearly \$820,000 in additional resources across the province. This included:

- Distributing 50 cell phones with one year's worth of calls, texts and data to people experiencing houselessness or financial hardship so they can continue to connect with their healthcare providers, reduce social isolation and virtual access programming.
- Providing over \$173,000 in food support, including food cards, food baskets, hot meals, and a virtual cooking program.
- Building capacity through our provincial peer programming by providing training, mentorship and support to 44 unique individuals who provided peer outreach support, warming centre and drop-in support, cultural support, and lead harm reduction kit making. In addition, we were able to hire four individuals from the peer program in full and part-time positions to increase our community COVID response & recovery efforts.
- In partnership with Elevate NWO, we funded and operated a warming centre in Thunder Bay between November 2021 and March 2022, which provided services to 12,000+ visitors, including 10,000+ meals, access to 8,500+ PPE and hygiene items and provided over 8,000+ interactions with the Elder for cultural supports.

In addition to the COVID pandemic, we also experienced a number of intersecting crises, including continued loss of life and significant harm caused by our current drug policies, and a continued housing crisis across the province. In order to combat these challenges, we have increased our advocacy efforts and have been supporting drug decriminalization efforts across Ontario. We have made efforts to increase both staff and community access to culture, medicines, ceremonies, and land-based initiatives over the past year. These efforts include ceremonies to remember our loved ones who have died as a result of the toxic drug supply.



Message from the Board Chair & Executive Director Continued



In addressing racism and oppression, Oahas' senior leadership has been actively participating in the sector's Reconciliation in Action Working Group and a Toronto-specific working group to address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism within Toronto-based AIDS Service Organizations. We also conducted an internal review of both staff and board recruitment processes. We revised our interview questions to better assess a candidate's anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices related to service delivery and governance. In addition, the Board of Directors has continued their work to address anti-Black racism by establishing a working group.

Concerning Oahas operations, we saw several changes over this past year. Due to the intersecting pandemics and crises, we have seen increased staff burnout and turnover across the sector. To respond to these sector-wide human resource challenges, Oahas has committed to a restructuring plan that supports stability and sustainability. Through innovation and a slight increase in harm reduction funding, we were able to add 3 new FTEs to the organization. However, with our renewed focus on sustainability, we also had to make the difficult decision this past year to conclude all service delivery in Ottawa at the end of March 2022 so that we could strengthen our service delivery in our other 5 program sites across the province.

Adding to changes in services, we also saw some changes in facilities. The Central Office located on Eglinton Avenue in Toronto was relocated to Barrie, ON, in March 2022. This move allowed us to reduce our rent costs and reinvest these savings into programming. In addition to office changes, we could also purchase 2 custom outreach vehicles – one in Toronto and one in Sudbury. The vehicles are designed so that we can provide some basic medical support, including access to testing, wound care and the potential to expand medical services in the future.

Lastly, in 2021-2022 we engaged in activities to build capacity and increase knowledge and awareness in the sector. This included supporting the planning of a seven-part speakers' series focusing on Building Enhanced (HIV & HCV) Treatment Responses in Northern Ontario. Oahas organized and delivered one of the seven workshops, which focused on addressing anti-Indigenous racism in health care and increasing primary health care's ability to provide culturally safer services. We also solidified a partnership with CATIE and 2-Spirited Peoples of the 1st Nation with the focus on delivering a 4-part webinar series on Indigenous sexual health and HIV prevention.

We are looking forward to the 2022-2023 fiscal year, which will bring with it a number of new developments. This includes a project expanding our peer programming into the Algoma District, the hiring of a Provincial Indigenous Research Lead, a new Indigenous harm reduction research project, and the development of both a Community Steering Committee and an Elder/Knowledge Carrier Network. We are also looking forward to re-establishing our annual staff capacity-building gathering. In June 2022 we brought together the Oahas staff team together in for relationship building, a ceremony on the land, and skill development training.



Lindsay Kretschmer

President & Chair

Jason Staats

Treasurer

Erika Pulfer

Secretary

Bella King Reynolds

Director

K'Mesha Maloney

Director

Sarah Tilley

Director

Tricia Longboat

Director

Jasmine Cotnam

Director



The 2021-2022 Board



Oahas would like to recognize two outgoing board members for all of their passion, time, energy and heartfelt contributions over the years.



Firstly, we would like to say chi-miigwetch to Sarah Tilley! Sarah completed a three-year term on the Oahas Board of Directors, which included serving as the Board Secretary as well as holding the Oahas Board Chair role for two years. During their tenure as Board Chair, Sarah helped Oahas navigate recruiting new board members, hired a new Executive Director, renewed the organization's commitments to address anti-Black racism, revised the organization's policies, and supported multiple Executive Directors to navigate the COVID pandemic. Sarah, we are truly grateful for your leadership, guidance, passion and big heart!

Sarah Tilley

Director



Bella King Reynolds

Director

Next, we would like to acknowledge Bella King Reynolds for being one of the longest-standing board members on the Oahas Board of Directors!

Bella has served for six years (two 3-year terms) on the Board of Directors and has supported the organization through some of its most challenging times. During her tenure on the Board of Directors, she has supported four Executive Directors and two interim Executive Directors. She has sat on a number of different committees, including two different Executive Director hiring committees, the Executive Committee, and the Governance Committee. She is a fierce 2-Spirit and Trans advocate and blessed us with a number of prayers to open and close our different meetings. She is an active community member, and always reminds us that Oahas needs to be accountable to the communities that we walk alongside.

Bella, we are truly grateful for the wisdom, honesty, love, leadership and humour you have brought to us over the years!



We are wishing both Sarah and Bella all of the best with their future endeavours!



Our Locations



Our Team

Thunder Bay

Sarah Kaukinen
René Boucher
Melissa Deschamps
Sarah Racine

Sault Ste Marie

Desireé Beck
Janice Keating

Sudbury

Lisa Toner
Steven Loranger
Leisha Neuman
Albert Plant III

Barrie

Meghan Young
flint givogue
Colin Green
Fiona Proctor

Toronto

Alison Bray
Alana Gordon
Jackie King
Sioux Lamure
Sara Luey
Pesokas McKay-Loescher

London

Destini Millar (on leave)
Christina Doxtator (on leave)

PROGRAMMING



OUTREACH

Oahas staff and peer participation in outreach is a critical and life-affirming practice in the community. Outreach teams meet people and members on the streets, in neighbourhoods, at events, hospitals, schools, pow wows, and more. We are grateful for the many peers who support outreach as their contribution allows for a grounded and community-centred approach to outreach. Outreach teams meet people where they are and provide support in many ways, including the provision of harm reduction supplies. The work of outreach is three-fold: 1) increase community members access to Indigenous harm reduction services, 2) strengthen our relationships with community, and 3) decrease stigma related to HIV, HCV, drug use and sex.



CONNECTING TO CULTURE

Key to the delivery of our program and services is our ability to connect our members and service users to Indigenous culture. Over the past year, Oahas has connected people through:

- Smudging kits and medicines
- Beading, ribbon skirt and shirt making workshops
- Feasting the change of seasons, spring equinox, summer solstice and full moon ceremonies
- 2-Spirit gathering our bundles
- Sharing/drumming circles
- Grieving tree and letting go ceremony
- Baking bannock
- Community fires



HARM REDUCTION

Oahas delivers programs and services through the lens of Indigenous Harm Reduction (IHR), which aims to reduce the harms of colonialism by weaving together the following:

- Reclaiming harm reduction as a way of life that is rooted in traditional ways of knowing, doing and being.
- Taking a holistic approach to community care and wellness that aims to restore connection, agency, and safety.
- Decolonizing and Indigenizing systems; eliminating stigma and discrimination in accessing services.
- Supporting individuals through culturally rooted, community-led and evidence-based practices that save lives.

We do this work by building relationships in community, delivering cultural and land-based activities that focus on connection and traditional skill building, host sharing circles and ceremonies, build community partnerships to facilitate access to services, and provide harm reduction kits (traditional medicines and safe equipment) made with love and intention.

HIGHLIGHTS



New Horizons for 2S-LGBTQ+ Older Adults

It's been a busy year for the New Horizons for 2S-LGBTQ+ Older Adults program! Over the last year they have developed multiple new in-person programs, along with a brand-new website (<https://www.newhorizons2slgbtq.ca>). The website acts as a one-stop shop for everything New Horizons participants might need. Participants can access old newsletters, see what programming is going on, learn about various topics, and access any resources that have been previously shared. The new in-person programming has been very well received, as many folks are craving that interpersonal connection after isolating for years. In

June, the team was able to come together and attend one of the province's first Two-Spirit pow wows and can't wait to take part in more!



All Staff Gathering

In June, Oahas staff were able to get together in person, on the land, for an All Staff Gathering. After two-year forced isolation, we could be with one another, meet new staff and have fun. In total, 19 staff gathered at the Fern Resort outside Orillia.

In addition to training on statistics and new equipment, the agenda included a sunrise ceremony, unburdening our bundles and feasting of drums ceremony, the miikaans 7 stages of life teaching, and a plant-based connection walk. A mindfulness yoga session and a very competitive trivia game kept minds and bodies active!

COVID-19 By Numbers

In the past year, with funds made available during the pandemic, Oahas provided:

- 10,888 meals
- 1,171 people with transportation support
- 14,238 pieces of personal protective equipment
- 1478 people with first aid supplies
- \$173,000 + in distributed grocery cards & food supports
- \$3,119 given to members for support with bill payments
- 10 people with rent support
- 50 cell phones with call, text and data distributed to community members across the province

FINANCIALS

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy Statement of Financial Position

As at March 31	2022	2021
Assets		
Current		
Cash	\$ 559,159	\$ 875,367
HST receivable	71,680	33,188
Prepaid expenses	19,800	36,111
	<u>650,639</u>	<u>944,666</u>
Equipment and leasehold improvements (Note 3)	<u>354,114</u>	<u>94,499</u>
	<u>\$ 1,004,753</u>	<u>\$ 1,039,165</u>
Liabilities		
Current		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities (Note 4)	\$ 279,122	\$ 97,720
Deferred revenue (Note 5)	280,251	775,144
	<u>559,373</u>	<u>872,864</u>
Deferred capital contributions (Note 6)	<u>354,114</u>	<u>94,499</u>
	<u>913,487</u>	<u>967,363</u>
Fund Balances		
Operating Fund	31,881	26,285
General Reserve Fund	59,385	45,517
	<u>91,266</u>	<u>71,802</u>
	<u>\$ 1,004,753</u>	<u>\$ 1,039,165</u>

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy Statement of Operating and Reserve Funds

For the year ended March 31	2022	2021
Operating Fund		
Balance, beginning of the year	\$ 26,285	\$ 21,160
Repayment of prior year surplus (Note 7)	-	-
Excess of revenue over expenses	5,596	5,125
Balance, end of the year	<u>\$ 31,881</u>	<u>\$ 26,285</u>
General Reserve Fund		
Balance, beginning of the year	\$ 45,517	\$ 40,067
Excess of revenue over expenses	13,868	5,450
Balance, end of the year	<u>\$ 59,385</u>	<u>\$ 45,517</u>

FINANCIALS cont'd

Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy Statement of Operations

For the year ended March 31

2022

2021

Revenue

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care	\$ 1,734,474	\$ 1,833,026
TASSC COVID funding	434,628	248,669
Indigenous Services Canada	240,827	-
The Gilbert Centre funding	60,744	56,055
TUHF funding	24,722	25,179
Elizabeth Fry Toronto funding	-	30,000
OHTN research grant funding	-	29,274
Miziwe Biik	-	5,852
Other revenue	7,240	-
Amortization of deferred capital contributions	49,732	40,491
	<u>2,552,367</u>	<u>2,268,546</u>

Expenses

Advertising and community relations	7,079	1,841
Amortization	49,732	40,491
Bank charges and interest	3,027	2,907
Insurance	6,489	6,646
Supplies	85,871	51,446
Postage and courier	9,203	6,242
Programming costs (Note 8)	725,135	585,835
Rent	192,134	161,270
Telephone and utilities	42,639	40,800
Travel and accommodation	25,203	28,064
Wages and benefits	1,400,259	1,337,879
	<u>2,546,771</u>	<u>2,263,421</u>

Excess of revenue over expenses

\$ 5,596

\$ 5,125



Re-Structuring, Renewal and Change

2021-2022 was a year of significant change for Oahas, from office moves, closures, restructuring and new roles, Oahas has emerged as a stronger, well-positioned organization to better serve our members and clients.

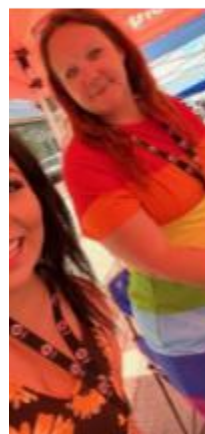
In January, the agency restructured its leadership to eliminate the two Supervisor roles, and created Team Leads for each site. This change not only increased support at each site but increased the number of staff at the locations. The three sites across the North now have a complement of four staff at each site.

Increasing staffing at locations is a priority which had a direct impact on our ability to staff other locations and as such, with only one staff person in Ottawa, the decision was made to close that location in March 2022. This was a difficult decision for the organization, and Oahas is grateful for the support of community partners in Ottawa who we have worked alongside for these past few years.

A cost savings measure moved our Central Office (administrative) from Toronto to Barrie in March, 2022. Not only does this save the agency money, but also makes the central office more centrally located. Oahas now is situated in the same office complex as the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, the Gilbert Centre and future Barrie CTS site.

Our Central Office added new staff as well. The past year saw Oahas strengthen its ability to support the sites and staff with the addition of two new senior management positions: a Manager of Human Resources and Administration, and Director of Operations.

Oahas saw new offices for our Thunder Bay and London locations as the agencies with which we share space (Elevate NWO in Thunder Bay and RHAC in London) underwent significant renovations. Looking forward to next year, we hope to see new office moves to find better and more accessible locations for our Sault Ste Marie and Sudbury locations.



REMEMBERING OUR FRIENDS



In partnership with Elder Linda, the Thunder Bay site hosted a grieving tree activity, where staff and the community were invited to share names, memories, or other meaningful messages in memory of those we have lost. There was a feast, with a burning of the leaves letting go ceremony that was very well received by over 60 community members.

Bonnie Dowdle

March 10 1973 - May 14 2022

As a peer since 2008, Bonnie was one of the founders of the outreach program. Bonnie's knowledge and expertise changed how Harm Reduction was provided and she made the Oahas kits legendary. She will be deeply missed by the entire Oahas team.



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