

OPTIONS FOR SEXUAL HEALTH
ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23



We acknowledge the Options for Sexual Health Provincial Office is within the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and selílwitulh (Tsleil-waututh) Nations. Our clinics are located on the homelands of the more than 198 First Nations and 30 Métis charter communities throughout the province. We share our gratitude for the land keepers who care for the land we live on beautiful, bountiful, and lush year round. We recognize the oppression that persists against the Indigenous peoples in British Columbia and we are committed to activism around decolonization and oppression.

Annual report prepared by Options for Sexual Health. This annual report shares what we have been up to as an organization during the 2022-2023 Fiscal Year. We encourage readers to share this document as a means of others getting to know Options for Sexual Health.

If you have any questions about anything in this annual report, or about Options for Sexual Health, you can contact our Interim Executive Director, Jill Doctoroff at executivedirector@optbc.org

Thank you for reading!

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Options for Sexual Health
3550 E. Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V5K 2A7
Ph. 604–731–4252
Fax 604–731–4698
optionsforsexualhealth.org



changes

2022-2023 was a season of change for Options for Sexual Health. Collectively, we have all navigated so many changes over the past few years; with a pandemic impacting every aspect of our lives, we often had to be innovative, agile, and flexible. At Options, we saw firsthand how many of our services were truly essential and our team has had to change how we delivered our services to meet the ongoing needs of our clients and patients. As we transitioned from lockdown and pandemic life to opening up again while still contending with unknowns of COVID we navigated these changes together as a team.

We know that there are many changes that we will continue to contend with, and we will do it in the way we know best - with care, with knowledge, with low barrier access to sexual health services, information, and education!

DID YOU KNOW?

Our Sex Sense service initially was called the Facts of Life Line. The name was changed in 2006 to Sex Sense. Over the year our team answers over 7,000 calls and emails, supporting folks from throughout the province with all of their sexual and reproductive health questions!





A WORD FROM THE BOARD

A warm welcome to the Annual Report and thank you for your continued involvement with Options for Sexual Health. Looking back, it feels like the theme of 2022-23 was change.

Options said goodbye to a number of long-serving staff members. We first would like to acknowledge Joan Westman who passed away in the summer of 2022. There are not enough words to explain the impact Joan had on our organization. Her quiet leadership, love of elephants and immense organizational knowledge are some of the things that we miss. Lynn Trimble retired after serving the clinics and patient need for contraception, as well as clinic supplies, for many, many years with a warm and responsive presence. While not during this period, at the end of August 2023 after six years, we said goodbye to our Executive Director, Michelle Fortin. Michelle has made significant contributions to the sexual health landscape in the province, and we would especially like to acknowledge her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. She responded to rapidly changing mandates while carrying out our shared mission to ensure all British Columbians have access to safe, non-judgmental and accessible sexual health care. We thank Michelle for her service and wish her well in her future endeavours.

The flip side of staff leaving the organization is the new staff members that have joined the Options team. We welcome everyone who has joined Options over the past year and thank existing staff who have helped welcome and integrate them within the organization.

We were involved with discussions on rolling out universal access to contraception across the province and within our Options clinics. Our education program returned to classrooms and kept a virtual format for our unique SHEC program, extending our reach. Sex Sense continued to answer questions in a confidential matter both through calls and emails and added a blog feature for commonly asked questions. We started to consider what outreach and bringing volunteers back into our organization would look like given the post-pandemic and open community settings.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we thank staff, our partners, our patients and clients, and the community for 60 years of celebrating and championing the sexual health of British Columbians. Through our staff, volunteers, and donors, Options is a leader in sexual and reproductive health in the province and country. We are excited to continue on the legacy we have built!

Warmly,
Kaye Hare and Joyce Rautenberg,
Co-presidents, Options for Sexual Health



EDUCATION

What's our Education Department up to? Let us tell you!

This year, Hayley (our Vancouver field educator) and I made a true return to the physical classroom. While the delivery of sexual health education changed dramatically during COVID times, this year marks a shift into the new normal of truly accessible sexual health education. The skills we acquired while delivering sex ed online continue to serve us, and allow us to connect quickly and easily to far away or distributed learners. And while it's always been a pleasure to draw on the white board, collect those dear slips of paper with anonymous questions, and see the new epiphanies and understandings dawning on student faces in the classroom, it's truly beautiful to be able to connect with students across new platforms, and with increased accessibility. Still, Hayley's trip to Haida Gwaii this year reminded us that—while Zoom sessions can help us reach communities and classrooms more efficiently than ever before—there is still enormous value in connecting with people in person.

A rather unexpected development happened with our Sexual Health Educator Certification (SHEC) program this year. We've been offering this flagship professional development program since 2006, and it remains a truly one-of-a-kind program in Canada, marrying sexual health training with practical teaching skills and classroom delivery experience. If you had asked me prior to 2020, I would have insisted that SHEC needed to be delivered in person, and that it could never translate into an adequate online training without losing quality or reducing the teaching skills which could be acquired. Of course, in March 2020 we were under pressure to pivot quickly to online delivery and we are so proud of how well we were able to develop a comprehensive, high quality online version of SHEC. We've been waiting to return to the classroom though, and the summer of 2022 was to be the grand return to in-person SHEC.

Saira (Education Coordinator) and I opened up the application portal on our website and waited for the wave of folks who had been anticipating this revival. Instead, we were surprised to find that the appetite for online SHEC courses remains higher than ever. We were overrun with high quality applications for our online Fall cohort, and received only a few queries about the in-person Summer cohort. Clearly, online and accessible sexual health education training remains an enormously valuable option. We'll continue to meet this need as long as there is an appetite to train comprehensive sexual health educators, not just in British Columbia but across Canada, and beyond.

I've had the privilege to deliver sexual health education for Options for eighteen years, now. During that time, I've connected with tens of thousands of students in innumerable communities and have seen firsthand how access to comprehensive sex ed changes lives and gives people access to life-saving information about their bodies, their rights, and their health. It's crucial that you know about a sudden and alarming shift we're seeing lately: educators are now under pressure to suppress information about gender and identity in the classroom, as though this information about our bodily autonomy is somehow harmful, rather than being an identified and codified right. Despite this hostility coming from a small but newly-emboldened bunch, please know that Options will always acknowledge and celebrate the beauty and complexity of human sexual identity and expression. It is undeniably valuable to feel seen, acknowledged, and respected, and Options educators will always meet that need in the classrooms and communities we serve. Who you are is beautiful, and we will always affirm that.



CLINICAL UPDATE

This has been a year of choosing where to place our efforts, and evaluating how to better navigate the myriad of challenges that we face when trying to offer comprehensive and supportive sexual health care throughout our province. Although this past year has been marked with significant barriers to how we are able to continue to offer comprehensive care, we have also experienced some encouraging wins. And of course, we cannot move forward, without first acknowledging the amazing work by all of our staff throughout the pandemic: your resilience and passion is unrivalled and unwavering!

We are a main point of contact for a wide spectrum of patients, but, for gender- and sexuality-diverse patients in particular, we provide a welcoming access point to health services, which are often extremely limited in many areas of BC, especially for 2SLGBTQ+ folks. We offer a safe place to connect, and inclusive sexual health services for these communities, which has been a fundamental tenet of our mandate since the creation of Options as an organization back in 1963.

In March 2023, we received the news that universal coverage for contraception would be rolled out throughout B.C on April 8th.This signified a huge step forward in increasing access for folks who use contraceptives across the province. Making not only the birth control pill, but also long-acting, reversible contraception (LARCs) accessible for free created a reduction in barriers to accessing contraception and honoured a patients' right to choose their preferred birth control method, rather than have it dictated by cost.

Unfortunately, staffing our clinics continues to be a challenge, as the remuneration for nursing and clinical front staff is still not at competitive levels with unionized positions; even though we were able to increase the remuneration last year, we are still below market value for these critical health care positions.





Additionally, our specialized work in reproductive care means we also do not meet criteria to attract family physicians under the provincial government's new longitudinal family physician (LFP) payment plan, making Options work less attractive for the family physicians we rely on to support our work. A huge thank you to our clinicians and clinic staff!

As a result, Options has had to make the difficult decision to close 9 clinics in the past year.

Despite our challenges with staffing, Options continues to be one of the largest clinics (collectively) providing cervical cancer screening in BC and works in partnership with the BC Cancer Agency to deliver this service. Many of our patients report being unable to book appointments for this procedure with their own family doctor, or having no access to health care professionals providing this important screening with availability in their community.

Meanwhile, our physician-staffed Telehealth clinics, which run nearly every evening in parallel to our inperson clinics province-wide, keep essential reproductive care accessible for new and existing Options patients, and support Options nurses in their local clinics.

In the face of these challenges, we are proud of what we have been able to accomplish to keep inclusive reproductive health care available to our patients. We continue to strive to ensure anyone who needs this care can access it, and we remain dedicated to our mission: to champion and celebrate sexual health.

We would like to offer all of our clinical staff our heartfelt thanks, so they can continue to be the outstanding advocates that they are for our patients. There is absolutely no way that we would be able to provide the kind, compassionate, excellent level of care that we do without your dedication and commitment. We look forward to continuing to work with you, and to the next 60 years of Options for Sexual Health!

"SEX SENSE, HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?"

"I've been trying to call clinics, and you're the first real person I could talk to about this." *

This quote from a Sex Sense emailer says it all. The 2022-2023 fiscal year again proved how crucial the Sex Sense service is when the health care system falls short. In this year, Sex Sense fielded a total of 7000 calls and emails, many from people who felt that every other health contact they had tried had woefully failed them.

The pressure that clients have felt and expressed to us when trying to access basic sexual health services, information, and resources is palpable. While this is not an official statistic that we track, anecdotally the majority of our callers identify as not having a family doctor. We also heard: the distress of callers who found that their local Options clinic had closed, either permanently or temporarily; clients wanting to make or reboot an appointment but unable to get through to P.O. reception; people struggling to find a place where they could get STI testing or treatment; people who couldn't get their contraception questions answered in the time allotted for the walk-in clinic appointment; and people panicking about long wait times to get in for an abortion. The reality we are seeing played out in live action should come as no surprise to those who have been living in a post-pandemic British Columbia; the health system is buckling. Our clients were literally calling us from outside of closed clinic doors trying to figure out where to go. Without fail, we could point them in the right direction and ease their anxiety. Often callers expressed that we were the first service that they had tried where someone actually picked up. The relief!

One of the greatest gifts that our service supplies - available in few other health contexts - is time. Callers can ask us as many questions as they like. There is no limit. Complicated discussions about a diagnosis of herpes, or a sexual assault first time disclosure, can take 45 minutes or more, and we can have those longer discussions.

Clients often ask, "can I just ask one more question?", and we can always answer yes, and then ask if they have any more. This is health care information that our clients aren't getting anywhere else. The fact that callers' identities are confidential means that they can feel safe and free to ask...anything.

"Thanks so much! I wasn't comfortable asking my doctor. This helped me tremendously! Have a great night♥"

Duration of Sex Sense Responses

The care we provide, and the increased complexity of inquiry and anxiety, is reflected in our duration of contacts, i.e., the length of time spent with each client that contacts Sex Sense either by phone or by email. Over the past fiscal year, the average duration increased by 24% to 10.3 minutes, and total duration increased slightly by 4%. Regular Sex Sense emails took on average 24 minutes to complete, while regular Sex Sense phone calls took on average 10 minutes. Although we did see a continued decrease in the number of email contacts overall, our time per contact rose on average in both calls and emails, with many clients needing increased support. There continues to be a significantly higher level of anxiety and urgency among clients, and an increase in the complexity of questions. We believe this trend to be largely due to the pandemic, including the way in which it has increased barriers to accessing health care.

"Thank you so much for all the information about the appointment at Options, alternative of local pharmacy, and the efficacy of the ECP, I really appreciate your detailed response and help."

SEX SENSE CONT.

This underlies the continued importance of services like this, even in times when contacts are fewer. Many of our callers identify that they do not have a family doctor, and so without a health care provider they have more questions and need more help finding clinics that can serve their needs. With the family doctor shortage, we have become an even more necessary medical liaison as people seek sexual health care. Our service is even more crucial now with so many health care providers experiencing intense demands on their time.

Caller Concerns

"Thank you so much for your email. I appreciate your compassionate and detailed response. The information you provided has given me a better idea of what choice to make."

This fiscal year saw a significant increase in questions about abortion, the largest increase in our caller concerns. Our referrals to abortion providers increased by almost 20%: directing clients to providers 567 times. Total contacts with abortion as the caller concern increased significantly to over 800. We are very proud of becoming one of the most accessible and crucial provincial navigation services for people looking to access an abortion. Over the years, we have worked hard to connect with abortion providers across the province and can connect many clients to rural services and liaise clients with pro-choice health care providers for referrals when needed. Callers are so relieved that they can discuss their pregnancy options, learn about the difference between a medication and inclinic abortion, and find out where and how they can access abortion care all, in one phone call.

During this period, we also saw significant increases is the following client concerns:

- Syphilis
- Pap testing
- · Missed doses of oral contraception
- · Breast/chest health
- Sex work

Decline in Number of Contacts

While the duration of our calls has increased, unfortunately our number of contacts has continued on a negative trajectory.

Total contacts (emails and calls) decreased by 16% this fiscal year. Total email volumes decreased by 34% to 1394, while calls decreased by 4% to 5493.

There are several factors that we believe have impacted our overall numbers over recent years. For example, we learned that SEO can now be impacted by whether a site has regularly updated content and have concluded that there is lower traffic to our website because of this, likely impacting our email volumes. Therefore, Sex Sense made it a priority to address this by starting a blog, launched in February 2023, in honour of the 60th anniversary of Options for Sexual Health and the start of Sexual Health Week. With content posted two or more times per month, we are hopeful that this will bring our numbers up. particularly in email contacts. We titled the blog "So Glad You Asked!" and SS staff created 11 different blog postings on a variety of topics ranging from pregnancy testing, to talking with your kids about puberty, to lichen sclerosis, to the positive side of

https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/facts/blog/

Sex Sense Staff

"I don't know if this will get read, but I just wanted to say thank you. To be honest, the question I asked was about me, and with the little bit that I have tried, I feel that it has been a very beautiful experience. I cannot explain it any better than that, so thank you again."

We are a staff of eleven: 2 part-time SS
Coordinators and 9 casual SS Supervisors. We
have a beautiful complement of registered nurses
(some of whom work in our Options clinics, some
who work out in the larger community), sexual
health educators, and sexual health counsellors.
We have been lucky that our staff retention and
coverage has been excellent in comparison to
many other health care services. In fact, we are
proud to say that since before the pandemic
began, all Sex Sense staff have remained in their
roles. We have had the same team in place since
2018!

"Thank you so very much, that is extremely helpful and I feel very hopeful."

Where can I find an IUD/implant insertion/removal in my area? Have you ever wondered about the types of questions we receive on Sex Sense?

I got STI testing recently. When will the results be available and where can I find them?

How do I talk to my partner about sex?

Will these vitamins or my other meds make my birth control less effective? Here's a sample of a few common questions we get, but there are so many more! We know folks have questions about sex, and we are here to provide the answers and information!

I was just diagnosed with herpes. I have so many questions!

Where can I find

abortion services in my area?

Will it hurt and will I bleed the first time I have sex?

We're available by phone
1-800-739-7367
or email
sexsense@optbc.org

What can I do about phimosis?



COMMUNICATIONS

Changes? Every day in Communications!

When I started as the Communications Director in 2012, the world was a very different place. Our best advertisement was word of mouth, Twitter still had a bird icon, and what was this new Instagram thing people were using to filter and share their photos? Facebook was still the preferred social network for most, and TikTok? Not even a gleam in the eye of the digital stratosphere! Looking back, digital technology was like a vintage meme – charmingly awkward, slightly unpredictable, and oh-so-nostalgic!

To say things have changed is an understatement. In the present day, technology has transformed the landscape of communication into a dazzling symphony of seamless connectivity and boundless possibilities. We need to look no further than the once-humble smartphone that has evolved into a pocket-sized command centre, effortlessly integrating video calls, instant messaging, social media, and emails into our lives. The rise of social media platforms has given us a virtual megaphone to share our thoughts, cat photos, and dinner choices with the world - whether they're interested or not. Artificial intelligence lends a hand in predictive text and smart replies, reading our minds (almost) and crafting messages before we've even typed them. And as we navigate this digital sea of communication, we've learned to navigate the tricky waters of online etiquette, emoji-laden expression, and the delicate art of "read" receipts. Today's communication technology isn't just about transmitting words; it's about sharing experiences, forging connections, and shaping the way we interact in a world where everyone's voice can be heard, 280 characters at a time.

How do we fit into this landscape? As a sexual health organization, it is a delicate dance. Algorithms on the three major social media platforms do not love the words or content we use (we've even been blocked for going against the terms of use on Facebook, and shadow banned on Instagram for posting what they've deemed to be 'offensive material').

Communications at Options has also expanded, well beyond what was initially the side project of a few Provincial Office staff into what is now more than a full-time role. As the role has evolved, it has encompassed social media, website, fund development, volunteer programming and outreach, event planning, copy writing, marketing, graphic design, branding, and more! This growth has not come without hiccups; as our organization has grown and changed, the ever-changing role of communications has had to grow and adapt to meet the needs of the organization, and in many ways, has outgrown the capabilities of one person. As we continue into the next phase of our organization's lifespan, it is without a doubt that the communication needs will continue to expand.

Our website is a prime example of the journey we have been on with communications; once a fairly static website, we are constantly refining, updating, and creating new content to meet the needs of our audience. In collaboration with all of the programs and departments at Options, we have continued to build a repository of facts, stats, and questions answered, all while doing so in a way that is reflective of who we are as an organization; warm, caring, knowledgeable, lighthearted, patient, inclusive, and mind-opening. Over the course of the year, we continued to see our website numbers grow, with visitors accessing many of our information pages or our clinic locations pages.

Although difficult for us to know where the future will take us, if the past year is any indication it will almost certainly continue to expand digitally, and communications will rely on the continued advent of new technology. As an organization, we look forward to seeing what is next, and how we can continue to provide low barrier access to information, services, and care.

-Ashleigh Turner, Options' Communications Director

Did you know?

Options for Sexual Health averages
almost 400,000 visitors to our website annually with over
900,000 page views?
Our top website page is our Tips for Vaginal
Intercourse page, followed by our Clinic Finder page.

HIV/HCV PROJECT

Since 2019, Options has been part of a PHSA initiative to strengthen the provision of HIV and HCV prevention, care, and treatment services for women*. We were granted funding for the women*-specific 2a) System Navigation and Support component commencing April 1, 2020, for an initial term of three (3) years, and the option to extend the agreement for three more years.

In the proposal to secure this funding, a few areas of work/service areas were outlined:

- Creating community partnerships
- Creating a resource website featuring a communitybased service provider map
- Creating a database list of services by region
- Facilitating internal and external training for community and health service providers
- Holding a women*'s-only HIV/HCV clinic one Saturday each month at Options' Kootenay Loop clinic along with a psycho-educational group

At the beginning of the fiscal year, the HIV/HCV Project team, comprised of a Knowledge Exchange and Translation (KET) Coordinator and Peer Support Worker, collaborated with Clinical Supervisor and Executive Director to establish objectives and mandate for the funding. At that time, the KET Coordinator and Peer Support Worker had several meetings and both participated in the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) HIV and HCV online trainings.

The team partnered with various organizations such as BC Hep C Network, AIDS Vancouver, Vancouver Friends For Life Society, and the Pacific AIDS Network. The Peer Support Worker attended the annual Liver Forum and set up an information table for Options. Additionally, they attended 24th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2022) in Montréal.

Through partnership with BC Hep C Network, the HIV/HCV Project team met with the Peer Support Coordinator Daryl Luster to partner for an HCV support group. Daryl shared his insight from working on the BC Hep C Network helpline; many peers call on a regular basis after successful treatment because they need support to move forward with the trauma of diagnosis. He supported our HCV virtual focus group by referring women* to register. The HCV focus group was comprised of 4 women* from various places in BC. Due to the unavailability of any existing HCV support group in Metro Vancouver, the group was conducted virtually.

During the group, we discovered that after women* received successful treatment for HCV, all support for them ended, except for the HCV helpline provided by BC Hep C Network.

The HIV/HCV Project team started a drop-in support group at the Options Kootenay Loop clinic location and the BC Hep C Network kindly created postcards to promote it. The team also did outreach at existing HIV/HCV support groups within Vancouver. Despite these efforts, the drop-in support group had low participation, and so the team pivoted to hold two separate focus groups: one for women* with HIV and another for women* with HCV.

During the HIV focus group, we asked the five women* who attended in person what we could do to make the group more accessible for others. We learned that the location was too far for some, but that they would come if we had a closer venue. To address this feedback, in June 2022, we partnered with Vancouver Friends For Life Society in the West End of Vancouver and held the group on Saturdays. Unfortunately, attendance was still low, and we discovered that Saturdays were not a feasible day for women* to attend.

After consulting with women* living with HIV/HCV, we decided to collaborate with other HIV/HCV organizations in Vancouver order to organize a 6-week self-esteem/educational group. We've successfully partnered with YouthCO who will provide a weekly honorarium for the women*. The groups will comprise of 2 virtual sessions and 4 in-person meetings at the Kootenay Loop clinic. We are looking forward to receiving feedback from the women* and sharing the outcomes of the workshops.

As we move into the next fiscal year, we are excited about the potential and opportunities in front of us. We are looking to partner with other local organizations to provide six week educational and empowering groups, create a Saturday Safe Space clinic, and ensure that women* receive care that is informed by best practices for those living with or at risk of HIV/HCV by offering internal training to our staff and volunteers.

-Flo Ranville and Julia Morris Options' Peer Support Worker and KET Coordinator

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Options for Sexual Health

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

As at March 31		
	2023 \$	2022 \$
ASSETS		
Current		
Cash - operating	1,154,521	411,197
- gaming	91,106	105,089
Temporary investments	_	167,697
Accounts receivable [note 3]	111,660	135,323
Inventories	70,510	127,957
Prepaid expenses	16,904	19,329
	1,444,701	966,592
Capital assets [note 4]	12,200	19,688
	1,456,901	986,280
LIABILITIES		
Current		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities [note 5]	122,082	103,926
Deferred revenue [note 7]	958,941	540,564
Current portion of obligation under capital lease [note 8]	6,188	4,567
	1,087,211	649,057
Obligation under capital lease [note 8]	623	6,811
	1,087,834	655,868
NET ASSETS	369,067	330,412
	1,456,901	986,280

Commitments [note 13]

See accompanying notes to the financial statements

On behalf of the Board:

Kalthan Han

Director

<u>Gasamin Alami</u> Director

Options for Sexual Health

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

Year ended March 31		
	2023	2022
	\$	\$
REVENUE		
Provincial government contracts [note 9]	1,552,160	1,327,327
Fee for service [note 11]	369,140	398,885
Grants [note 10]	349,897	246,406
Donations and fundraising [note 12]	105,764	94,188
Investment income	887	1,993
	2,377,848	2,068,799
EXPENSES		
Salaries contractors and benefits	1,765,534	1,560,264
Medical supplies	264,822	228,405
Rent	115,376	111,335
Advertising and promotion	55,485	38,549
Office and administration	46,395	40,606
Insurance	16,906	12,576
Equipment and leases	16,664	14,647
Delivery	14,677	18,432
Professional and consulting	13,330	20,502
Conference	12,235	_
Amortization of capital assets	8,967	5,725
Fundraising	4,085	172
Interest on capital lease	3,212	4,121
Travel	1,505	716
Training and education	_	11,849
	2,339,193	2,067,899

See accompanying notes to the financial statements

Excess of revenues (expenses) for the year

38,655

900

Thank you for reading our Annual Report. We want to extend our gratitude to the many donors who have supported Options for Sexual Health to help us provide the care, services and support to those throughout the province. We look forward to many more years of serving the population with access to sexual and reproductive health services, care, information, and education!



OPTIONS FOR SEXUAL HEALTH