

# Options

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024





We acknowledge the Options for Sexual Health Provincial Office is within the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkwə́yəm (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 2023-2024 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 Executive Director, Tiffany Melius at [tmelius@optbc.org](mailto:tmelius@optbc.org)

Thank you for reading!

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# annual report



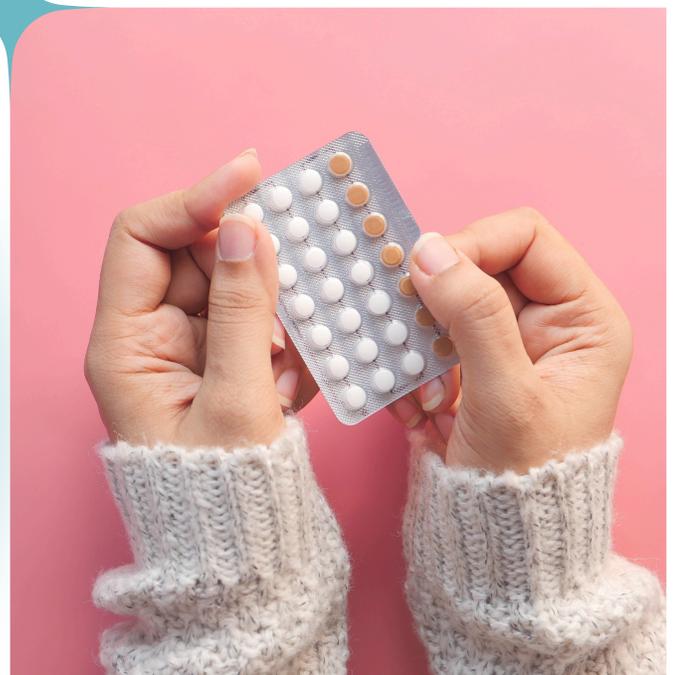
# A YEAR IN REVIEW 2023-2024

Our fiscal year of 2023-2024 had some wonderful highs and tremendous lows. One of the most exciting things that could happen in the world of sexual and reproductive health happened on April 1st 2023. British Columbia announced that contraceptive products would be available for free to all, becoming the first province in Canada to do so. This is an absolute game changer! Birth control users are no longer limited to methods that they can afford, and instead are able to decide what is best for them without financial limitations. For us, this is incredible news as we believe having true choice means that someone has access to all available methods. Rather than being forced to make a less than optimal decision based on affordability, people being able to choose the method that works best for them and their bodies and this actually predicts better outcomes for users. This is a fantastic move for BC!

Although this is a decision that brings us joy, it also has caused us to re-evaluate one of our revenue streams. Although our contraceptive sales had been declining for years, mostly as a result of long-acting reversible contraceptive methods, the complete cessation of this revenue stream has had an impact on Options.

We also celebrated our 60th anniversary in 2023. We had the opportunity to look at where we have come from and where we are going and enjoy many of the moments and accomplishments from the past six decades. Some of the highlights was the first clinic opening in 1969, our education starting in 1963, our Sex Sense service starting in 1996 (initially known as the Facts of Life Line), and in 2003, a rebrand from Planned Parent Association of BC to Options for Sexual Health. We're looking forward to what the next 60 years will bring!

Last but not least, we had a change in leadership at Options for Sexual Health. After five years with Options, Michelle Fortin decided to move on from her position as Executive Director. We wish her the best in her future endeavours. Jill Doctoroff, a long time board member of Options and an experienced nonprofit Executive Director stepped into the role of Interim Executive Director for the duration of the 2023-2024 fiscal year.



# BOARD CHAIR UPDATE

Hello Supporters, Staff, and Stakeholders,

Thank you for joining us for another year at Options for Sexual Health. Above all else, our 2023-2024 fiscal year was a period of review, reflection, and re-direction.

Standing on the shoulders of countless hours and efforts, Options celebrated our 60th anniversary of championing sexual and reproductive health in BC and beyond. The formal event, held at Heritage Hall in May 2023, featured a multi-part installation created by Options' Board of Directors and staff. This installation focused on advances in policy, advocacy, and practice over the last six decades, as well as a "Mad Them" themed evening gala. It was wonderful to have champions, advocates, and supporters from both the past and present gathered in one room. Sixty years is a massive accomplishment that cannot be overstated.

In a related success, Sex Sense, with 20 years of answering questions confidentially through calls and emails, added the 'So Glad You Asked' blog to celebrate Options' 60 years. We also recognize the many contributions of all of our dedicated clinicals services staff across the province, our resourceful Provincial Office team and our Education team, who always stand tall.

At the end of August 2023, we said goodbye to our previous Executive Director, Michelle Fortin. Michelle has been a vital advocate for sexual health and rights in British Columbia, with Options, Vancouver Pride, and through her various partnerships. She led Options in its mission to ensure all British Columbians have access to safe, non-judgmental, and accessible sexual health care. We thank Michelle for her time with Options.

Former Board President Jill Doctoroff stepped into the role of Interim Executive Director, providing guidance and support to the staff and board. Jill made significant contributions in a short amount of time.

As Options seeks to position itself strategically to respond to the current challenges in the healthcare and non-profit sectors in British Columbia, Jill helped lay a foundation for change. She was also instrumental in the search for our new Executive Director, Tiffany Melius, who was hired for the 2024-2025 fiscal year (more to come next year!).

We welcomed Sandeep Jawanda back to Options as Clinical Resource Nurse and Emma Herrington as Medical Director. With these hellos, come goodbyes: Blanka Jurenka left the role of Medical Director, and Jan Turner and Brandi Scales departed from the Executive Committee. We welcome Sandeep and Emma and thank Blanka, Jan, and Brandi for their contributions. We also extend our thanks to everyone else who moved on to new opportunities in the past year.

The hard work continues as we navigate a challenging funding atmosphere while providing best practice healthcare, education, and organizational services, and appropriately and ethically compensating our staff. But after 10 years of involvement with Options, I have learned that we are always ready for a challenge. I am confident that, together, we can accomplish many more great things.

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

Respectfully,

Kaye Hare  
Board President  
Options for Sexual Health



# JILL DOCTOROFF

Returning to Options three years after my Board of Directors term ended was like coming home. It has been a pleasure to work with and learn from so many talented, dedicated staff members that continue to find creative and effective approaches to delivering (and supporting the delivery of) sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and information. Options continues to be an SRH leader that is sought out to collaborate with and on new and existing projects, engage in research that will later inform practice, and to share evidence-informed, non-judgmental and pro-choice information.

As the year was an externally busy one for Options with the rollout of universal contraception, introduction of self-swab HPV tests and leadership transitions, I mainly focused on internal Options operations, working with the Board of Directors on an organizational scoping review, supporting staff and programs, and helping define what was needed in a permanent Executive Director. Our 60th year went by quickly and we took the time to celebrate our history. I'm confident that Options will continue to be a trusted leader in British Columbia for many, many more years to come.

Jill, interim ED



# TIFFANY MELIUS

I am excited to be joining the committed, passionate, and knowledgeable folks at Options as their new Executive Director. I look forward to supporting the teams to continue to deliver high quality services and patient care through our clinic, education, and Sex Sense programs. Looking ahead, we will be crystallizing the future vision for Options through a new Strategic Plan in early 2025, and working to strengthen our internal systems and processes in the meantime. Thank you for being a part of the Options community!

*Although Tiffany didn't join us until June 2024, the process of hiring our new Executive Director was well underway in 2023-2024 fiscal! We wanted to give you a brief introduction to Tiffany, and look forward to sharing more about her first year with us in our 2024-2025 Annual Report!*

# SEX SENSE UPDATE



*“Thank you so very much for your thoughtful and very helpful reply. You touched upon so many truths and realities with care and insight. Already, I have made use of the links you thoughtfully sent. This is a rather rushed letter to thank you for all the time and effort spent on answering and again, to thank you with all my heart.” ~An email from a Sex Sense client*

This fiscal year Sex Sense definitely heard and felt the pressure that our clients are under when trying to access timely, sex-positive, pro-choice, youth-friendly, and non-judgmental health care. Sex Sense continues to be the bridge over the fault lines that have cracked in the over-burdened pressures on our health system.

Sadly, our call volumes continue a downward trend this fiscal year: total contacts (emails and calls) decreased by 14% to 6199 in 23-24. Total email volumes decreased by 14% to 1212 while calls decreased by 11% to 4932. The decrease in phone calls may be related to the general trend of communicating and accessing information by means other than phone calls, such as text messaging and social media. We have also not had a Sex Sense specific ad campaign in many years. We are looking at ways to broaden our reach, and, as a team, we actively took on a promotions campaign, brainstorming avenues to pursue increased Sex Sense exposure, from adding a QR code and reprinting our posters, to connecting with nurses who work in post-secondary institutes, making sure our Options field educators have Sex Sense posters and cards at the ready, and more.

**Duration of Contacts:** During this time the average duration of contacts has remained consistent at around 11 minutes, maintaining the increase we witnessed in recent years. Our Sex Sense emails took on average 26 minutes to complete, while regular Sex Sense phone calls took on average 10 minutes. Many clients needing increased support. There has been a significantly higher level of anxiety and urgency among clients and an increase in the complexity of questions. We believe it to be largely due to the post-pandemic environment and overstretched health care system, leading to increased barriers to accessing health care.

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 and multiple clinic closures, we have become an even more necessary medical liaison as people seek sexual health care.

## **Staffing**

We are so lucky with our amazing staff of compassionate, caring, and knowledgeable Sex Senses. We are a staff of eleven: 2 part-time SS Coordinators and 9 casual SS Supervisors, consisting of registered nurses (some of whom work in our Options clinics, some who work out in the larger community), sexual health educators (a number of whom are teaching in the school system), and sexual health counsellors. In this fiscal year, we had a few shifts to our staffing:

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we brought on another sexual health educator to our team, had a staff member retire, and another staff member downshift their commitment to Emergency Coverage for the line. The Sex Sense Coordinators have joined the Options P.O. Leadership team, and being present for those meetings helps buoy the goals of both Sex Sense and the whole organization, and helps ensure better wrap-around care for all our clients.

### **Caller concerns**

During this period, we saw the most significant increases in the following client concerns: abortion, syphilis, Pap testing/cervical cancer screening, missed doses of oral contraception, breast/chest health, and sex work.

We continue to grow as one of the most trusted and go-to resources for abortion information and resources and referrals. We see significantly more calls and emails on this topic year after year. In this fiscal year we fielded almost 800 calls about abortion (up from 709 from the previous year) and 360 calls and emails specifically about medication abortion. We had 704 contacts where we referred clients to an abortion provider, up almost 25% from the previous year. Clients express relief when: a) someone actually picks up the phone when they call! b) we are pro-choice, c) we can walk them through what to expect with either an in-clinic abortion or a medication abortion, d) we can suggest decision-making resources, e) we can direct them to the closest abortion provider, f) we can connect them with Options clinics or Telemedicine to acquire a needed referral.

We look forward to increasing our reach and exposure this year, and to continue to be the go-to source for medically-accurate sexual health information in an internet world of misinformation and fear-mongering!

Did you know that our team of Sexperts on our Sex Sense team are available Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. to answer questions about sexual and reproductive health topics by phone or by email?

We know people have questions about sex. We want you to ask us. Internet searches only get people so far, and often times, can leave them with more questions than answers. We provide information that is fact based and scientific, well-researched, and nonjudgmental. So the next time you or someone you know has a question, reach out to us! We're here for you!

# EDUCATION UPDATE

I'm writing this annual report in June, as the school year draws to a close—always the very busiest time of year for us in the Options Education department. Though sexual health education is mandated in British Columbia, it is often in the last few months of the school year that we are called on to help schools and teachers meet these crucial learning outcomes. We've continued our strong presence in BC schools this year, teaching over 9000 students throughout the Lower Mainland, Whistler/Squamish, and Nanaimo, which is about 5% more than last year and the first time our numbers have increased since the pandemic.

Most of our school-based sessions were in elementary school classrooms (355 of them), where we talked with students about safety, health, trusted adults, and all the changes that come with puberty. In the 110 sessions we delivered to secondary students, we covered all aspects of consent, identity, sex and the law, resources, and healthy relationships. We supported students' decisions about abstinence, effective contraception, and we addressed their concerns about sexually transmitted infections. We rounded out our work this year with teacher training in two districts, staff trainings in the larger community, and (my favourite thing to deliver) several offerings of our parent program, the Askable Adult.

Our Sexual Health Educator Certification (SHEC) program is running strong. Last year I shared that we hoped to start alternating between online and in-person delivery of the program, but we learned again during the last application period that the desire for online training eclipses requests for in-person learning. We have again accepted two exceptional cohorts of SHEC students who are joining us across five time zones and from as far away as India and the Netherlands. When we conceived of the SHEC program in 2006, we were hoping to help train BC educators to fulfil the mandate of comprehensive sex ed throughout the province. Eighteen years and 23 cohorts later, we have expanded to support educators throughout Canada, and beyond.

If we've ever met—whether it was in the classroom, as part of a professional training program, or during one of our parent presentations—I imagine it was quite clear that I love my job. Perhaps you're familiar with the Japanese concept of *Ikigai*, which is about finding the ideal 'sweet spot' in life, doing something you love, something you're good at, something the world needs, and something you can sustain as a career. I feel extremely lucky that our Education team operates so beautifully within these principals. Saira, our Education Coordinator and Hayley, our Field Educator are both so skilled and dedicated to the work that we do together. I'm proud of the sexual health education and support we've delivered this year, and hope to connect with many more of you as we continue to do this thing we love, this thing we're good at, and this thing the world needs more of.

Kristen Gilbert, Education Director

## Did you know?

Options for Sexual Health (Options) provides informative presentations for all different kinds of groups and individuals on a variety of sexual and reproductive health issues. Our workshops offer comprehensive, nonjudgmental information in our accessible, signature style. We create the workshop you are looking for.

# CLINICS UPDATE

This year has been another busy one for Options clinics, as we navigate the ever-evolving healthcare system in BC, which constantly presents new demands, challenges, and advancements. We continue to make our voices heard and advocate for high-quality, accurate, and inclusive sexual health care and resources for all.

Our clinics remain a safe place for a variety of folks accessing sexual health and reproductive healthcare services. Notably, we see many gender- and sexuality- diverse clients, particularly those identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+, and provide them with a space to freely express themselves and their needs. This accomplishment is undoubtedly a testament to the kind, compassionate, and non-judgmental clinic staff that are found in our clinics all around the province.

Last year, we saw the huge advancement of universal contraception coverage coming into effect, and its impact is still evident in our clinics today. Clients continue to be able to have freedom over their contraceptive choices, without a monetary barrier. Accordingly, there has been an increased demand for long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) in our clinics. IUDs remain the most popular LARC, although there has been a noticeable new demand for Nexplanon insertions. However, these new demands come with new barriers, as there are not enough trained providers available and the wait times for access continue to grow.

In addition, with free contraception, we have seen less clients attending in-person clinics to obtain their birth control. Rather, Telehealth, our physician-run phone clinic, has become the ideal place to discuss and obtain prescriptions for contraceptives. In addition, our Telehealth clinic, that runs parallel to in-person clinics, provides real-time physician support to all clinics all over the province who are being run solely by nursing staff.

New this year is the rollout of HPV self-screening, changing and advancing the landscape of cervical cancer screening for British Columbians. The new screening technique is not only more effective than other methods but allows people the freedom to collect their own swabs, eliminating the actual or perceived barrier of speculum exams. Our clinic staff has been quick to adopt this new screening system and have seamlessly incorporated it into their practices. Providing this testing and education on cervical cancer screening is a big accomplishment for Options clinics and clients, as it provides early detection and prevention of disease.

Unfortunately, staffing continues to be a major struggle seen in our clinics. With nursing wages well-below those of competitors, and our inability to qualify physicians for the longitudinal family physician payment plan, clinical staff are hard to recruit and retain. As a result, many clinics are not able to maintain their schedules and are often found closed on clinic nights.

However, our current staff of dedicated nurses and doctors are some of the most passionate and engaged people working in the sphere of sexual and reproductive health. They continue to advocate for quality care for all clients and uphold Options' mission of championing and celebrating sexual health. Without these empowering people, Options would not be the largest the non-profit sexual health organization in Canada. Therefore, we want to extend a heartfelt and sincere thank you to all clinical staff who work hard every day to support, care, and advocate for our clients.

# COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

2023-2024 was an exciting year at Options. It was a time filled with challenges, growth, and rewarding achievements that set the stage for our future. This year, our focus on internal communications took center stage, as we prioritized supporting our operational needs. While this might not align with the traditional notion of "communications," it proved to be exactly what our organization required. Much of my time was dedicated to fostering transitions and enhancing our internal processes, ensuring we were well-prepared for the challenges ahead.

As one of the longest serving Options' staff members, I had the privilege to work closely with Jill Doctoroff as she stepped into the interim Executive Director role, helping to provide knowledge and support to her while she became familiar with our organization's operations. Jill and I faced several interesting obstacles that we have had to overcome together. Our efforts focused particularly on revitalizing our IT systems to streamline processes and elevate our technological capabilities.

With much of our focus being on internal communications, we had limited external communications and engagement opportunities. We are looking forward to building this back up for the next year with the foundation we have put in place this fiscal. It is an ongoing challenge to be able to produce content; with a small team (of one!) and colleagues who are stretched thin within their own departments, we struggle to be able to remain consistent in our content. As we move into the next year, and look to step into our mission and vision, we are looking at how best to utilize opportunities to support our digital impact. I am keenly aware of our need to increase our social media presence; while this is an area that has a lot of potential for us in terms of activating on our mission and vision it also seems fragmented and somewhat aimless at this time without clear objectives and strategies and during a time where several social media platforms shadow bans sexual and reproductive health content (yes, that's why you see words like "seggsi" and "abo\_tion" - a sad state of events when we cannot freely share fact based information on socials!). I am very much looking forward to creating a plan to move forward with in a strategic manner that allows us to share this important content. Our website remains a consistent resource for people both in BC and world-wide. With over 700,000 page views, we are still seeing our website act as an important resource in sexual and reproductive health, however, we are also recognizing that we need to take action to boost engagement and will be prioritizing this for the next year. We have already applied for funding to help support us with this initiative.

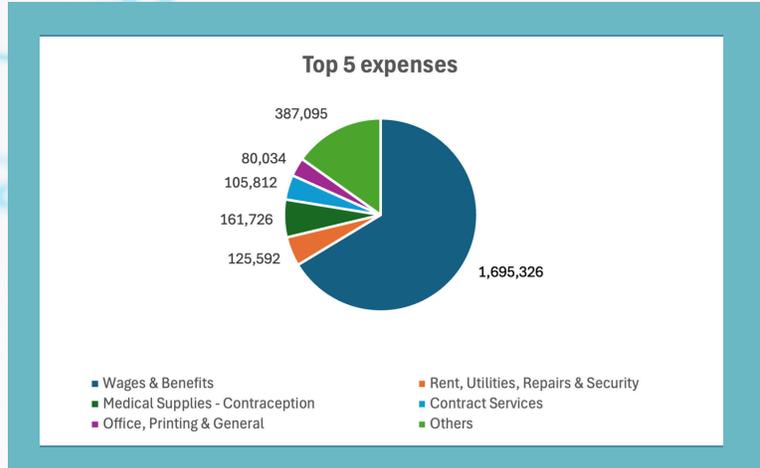
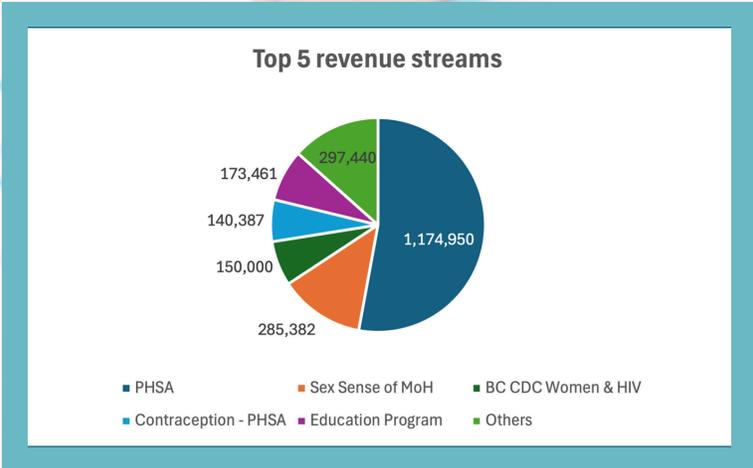
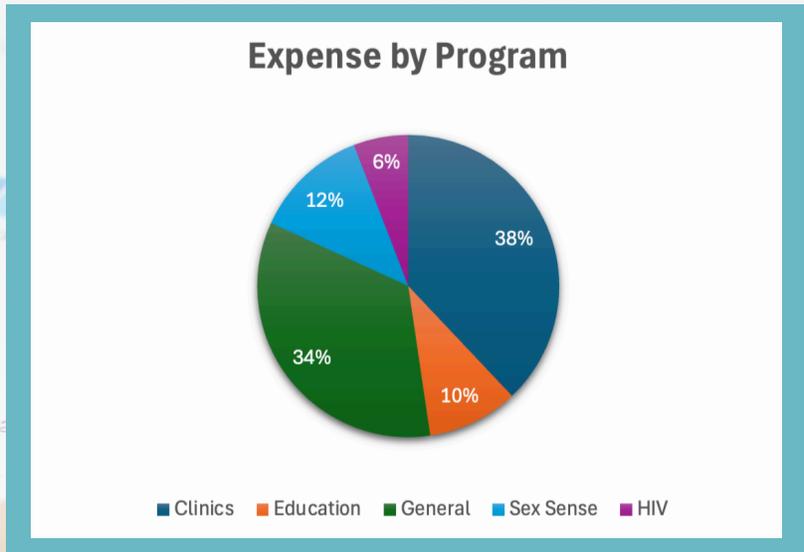
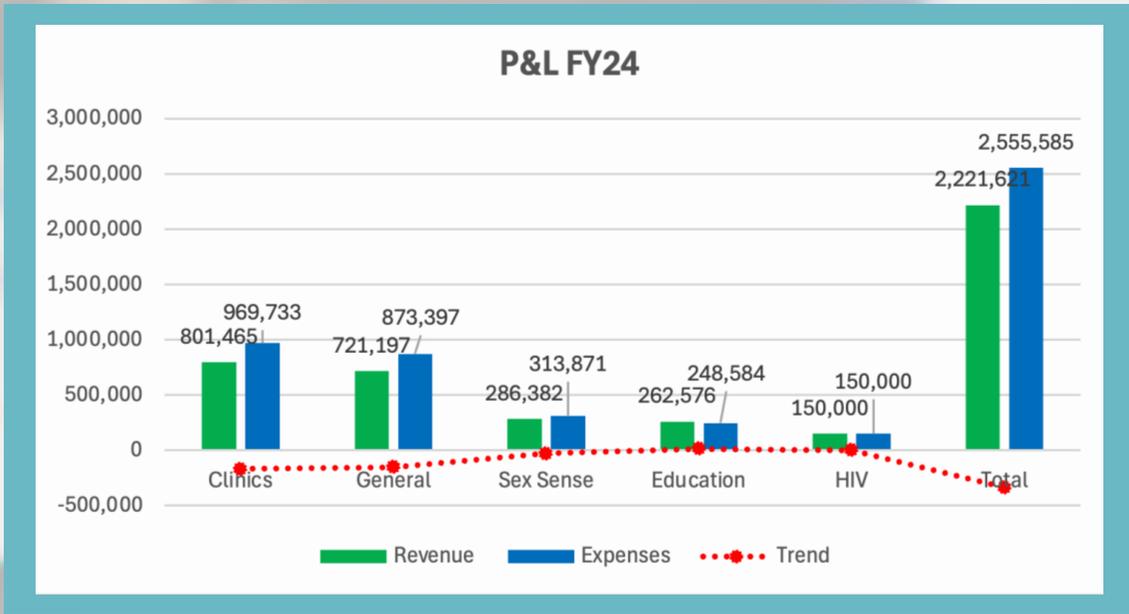
On a very positive note, I was able to participate in a media training for leadership provided through one of our funders, the Houssian Foundation. This invaluable experience allowed us to refine our communication strategies and align them more closely with our mission. As we embark on strategic planning in the coming year, I believe this training will be a tremendous asset to our organization.

Overall, I feel like communications was in a transitional position this year; one that allowed us to review our internal systems with optimism that solidifying those pieces will create the structure to improve over the next several years as we enter the strategic planning cycle. I'm looking forward to what we can create, and hope you check in on us as we move forward!

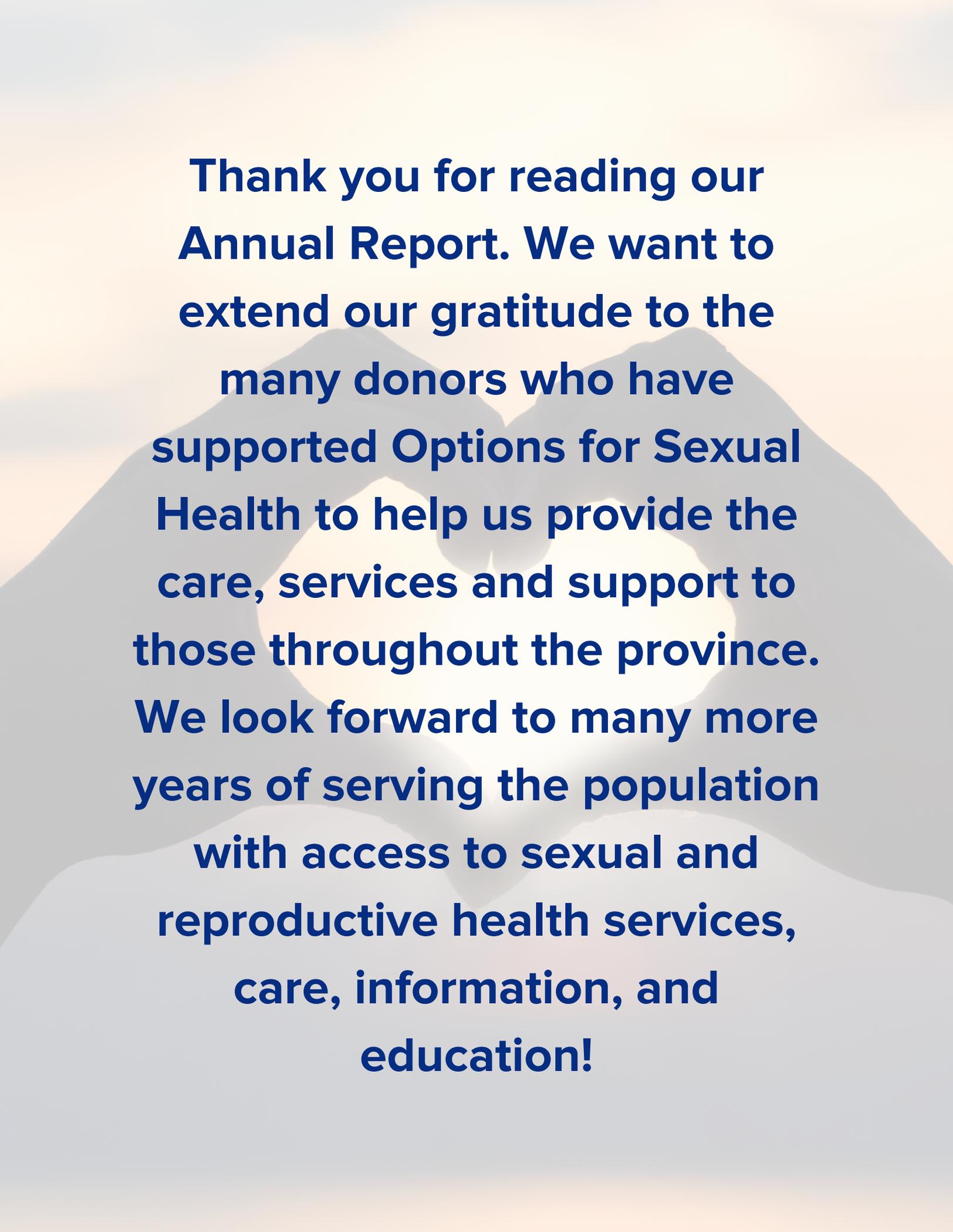
Ashleigh Turner, Communications Director



# FINANCIAL UPDATE



*Our audited financials are available on request.*

The background of the slide features a soft, warm-toned image of two hands cupping a heart. The hands are rendered in a light, semi-transparent grey, and the heart is a pale yellow. The overall aesthetic is gentle and caring, with a gradient background transitioning from light yellow at the top to a pale blue at the bottom.

**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!**



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