



apss

*aids programs
south saskatchewan*

2023- 2024 Annual Report

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan

Mission

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

Vision

Reducing Harms, Improving Lives

Values

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

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan Inc.

Board of Directors

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

Board Chair

Ronni Nordal

Vice Chair

Cheryl Toth

Director

Mary-Ellen Scott

Director

Kayla Panchuk

Director

Danielle Myrah

Staff

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

Executive Director

Shiny Mary Varghese

Education & Research Specialist

Vidya Dhar Reddy - HIV/HCV/STI/Opioids

Client Care Coordinator

Morag Hurn - HIV/HEP C Program

Education Coordinator

Karlee Geiger - HIV/HEP C/Opioids

Needle Exchange Coordinator

Lynette Flamont

Program Coordinator

Erin Hidlebaugh

Peer Support Coordinator

Tashia Acoose

At Risk Support Group

Elder Janet Dufour

Facilitator Danita Wahpoosewyan

Message from the Board Chair

Writing this message for the APSS Annual Report is a bit of a sad moment for me as it indicates the end of my time as Chair and on the APSS board of directors (our bylaws contain a two term maximum). While there have been some blips and bumps, I hope that I have played some small role in assisting APSS to be the fantastic organization it was, is, and will be.

The challenges and successes APSS faced during the 2023-2024 year are set out in our Executive Director's report and I won't repeat them. What is not noted is that those successes could not have been achieved, or the challenges met, without the support and dedication of Shiny Varghese as our Executive Director and all APSS staff. While this annual report contains statistics, individuals who walk through the doors of APSS or have contact with APSS are not statistics, they are people. The number of conversations that occur on a daily basis is, to me, the most important statistic, as it is through those conversations that occur on a daily basis is, to me, the most important statistic, as it is through those conversations that connections are made. On behalf of the APSS board of directors, Thank-you!

Thank-you also to the entire board. Mary-Ellen has also completed her second term, but I know APSS will be well guided by Cheryl, Kayla and Danielle as well as incoming board members. The work of the board is behind the scenes and all board members have volunteered a significant amount of time to fulfill their governance roles, which has not always been easy, but has always been rewarding. Gratitude and thanks to all who contribute to APSS through donations, through volunteering, through their work as APSS staff and through caring about the work that APSS does. My hope is that 2024-2025 sees few challenges and great success in reducing harms and improving lives.

- Ronni Nordal

Message from the Executive Director

In FY 2023-2024, APSS experienced growth and development, with demands for our harm reduction services & programs while operating in an environment of fiscal restraints and cutbacks on harm reduction supplies. Harm reduction services are cost effective and meets people where they are at! The provision of the harm reduction supplies helps APSS to connect with people with substance use disorders to provide education, support services and treatment options. The tragedies of the toxic drug supply is a crisis among the communities in Regina. The HIV and the opioid crisis continue to affect the vulnerable population.

To stem the number of drug toxicity hospitalizations and deaths, APSS intensified efforts and looked at different approaches by responding to the opioid crisis in a comprehensive manner. Eight confirmed drug toxicity deaths were reported among our clients in 2023; a decrease from 11 reported in 2022, 20 in 2021 and 18 in 2020.

FY 2023-2024 was a big year for APSS. We launched our research project titled 'Geographic information system real time mapping of community needles data to target HIV prevention and harm reduction interventions in Regina, Saskatchewan: A community-based rapid assessment and response methodology' led by Dr. Andrew Eaton, U of R. We are continuously evolving the way we collect & use the data on reportneedles.ca. From the launch of reportneedles.ca in 2021 until the end of March 2024, APSS safely disposed of 36,443 discarded needles in the community.

Programming:

-  Harm reduction programming and services on Sundays: we distributed 42,651 needles, 2,126 meth pipes, 1,009 crack pipes, associated harm reduction supplies & education. 1,831 people accessed our services on Sundays.
-  APSS provided 4,809 harm reduction conversations through the needle exchange and 2,264 in person/virtual education and outreach.
-  Naloxone training, education and distribution: 2,554 naloxone kits distributed of which 589 were used to reverse an overdose and we trained 1,157 people in naloxone administration.
-  APSS distributed 2,029 HIV Self Test kits received from REACH/PHAC.
-  Direct Observed Therapy (DOT): a support program for 15 hard-to-engage People Living with HIV to ensure treatment compliance to achieve u=u. There were 1,295 interactions.

While we have seen success, I am certain we can do much more for people who use drugs and am confident we can reach greater heights. Our job is to ensure that APSS services and programs thrives in an arduous environment to benefit the vulnerable population. When it get too overwhelming, I feel a huge sense of pride in our staff as we successfully maneuver difficult situations. Our goal is still to provide the necessary services and care to our clients in the safest, most effective way possible.

Financial sustainability:

Balancing financial stability while increasing programming to meet the needs of the people we serve remains a priority. APSS experienced a loss of \$520 which decreased our net assets to \$207,191.00

In Gratitude:

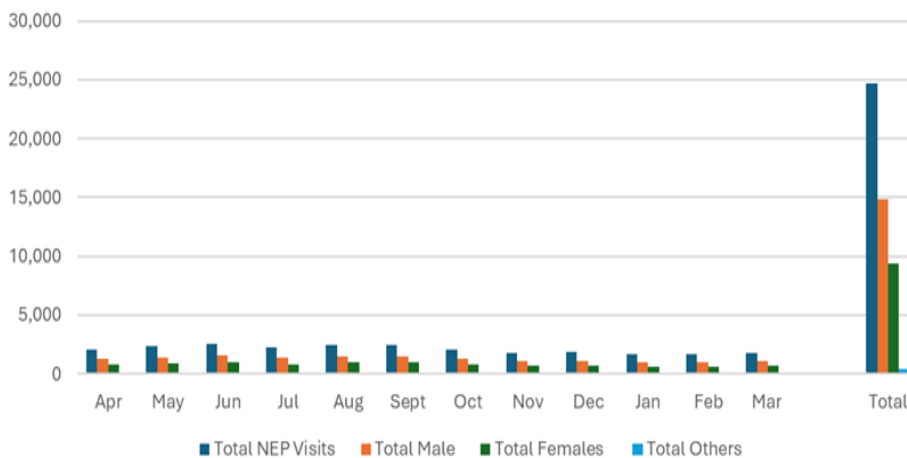
Thank you to the funders, partners, donors, for their confidence in APSS, to our APSS board of directors, to our industrious staff, practicum students from nursing, medical, mental health and addictions, and volunteers whose energy, innovation, and dedication keep APSS focused on its strategic goals, its mission, vision and in the belief that we can and are making a difference in the community to tackle challenges and seize opportunities.

– *Shiny Mary Varghese*

The Queen City Needle Exchange

AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan Inc. (APSS), in partnership with Saskatchewan Health Authority, operates one of the busiest Needle Exchange Programs (NEP) in the province. APSS is open Tuesday through Friday from 9am – 4:30pm and Saturday from 10am – 4:30pm, and Sundays, 11am-4pm. The NEP distributes clean needles, tourniquets, cookers, sterile water, alcohol swabs, cotton filters, crack/meth pipes, and condoms. The NEP also provides updated harm-reduction messaging, personal harm reduction counselling, and referrals to other agencies. We collect used/discarded needles from the community and dispose of them safely. Our Needle Exchange Coordinator, an addictions counsellor, is available daily. In 2023-2024, we conducted 4,809 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.

**AIDS PROGRAMS SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN (APSS)
VISITORS APRIL 1 2023 - MARCH 31, 2024**



Number of Visits

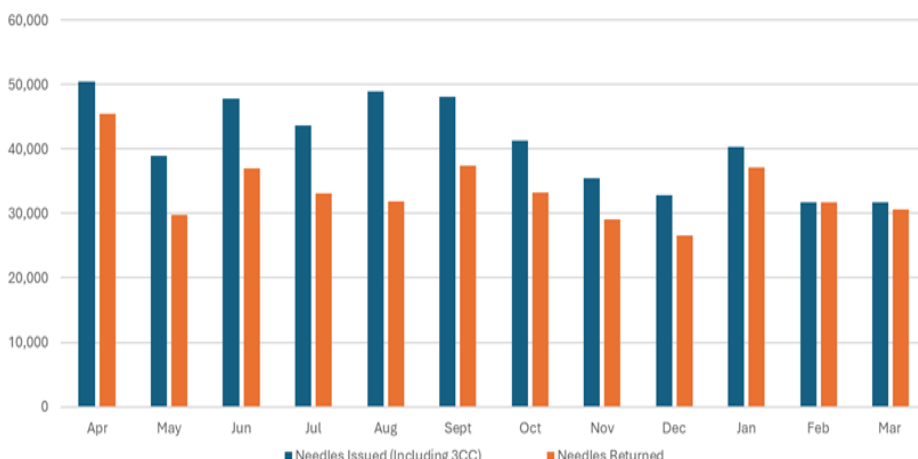
Female: 9,414

Male: 14,886

Other: 376

Total Visits: 24,676

**AIDS Programs South Saskatchewan (APSS)
Needles April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024**



Needles Distributed

Needles Returned:
402,772

Needles Distributed:
491,112

Return Rate: 82%

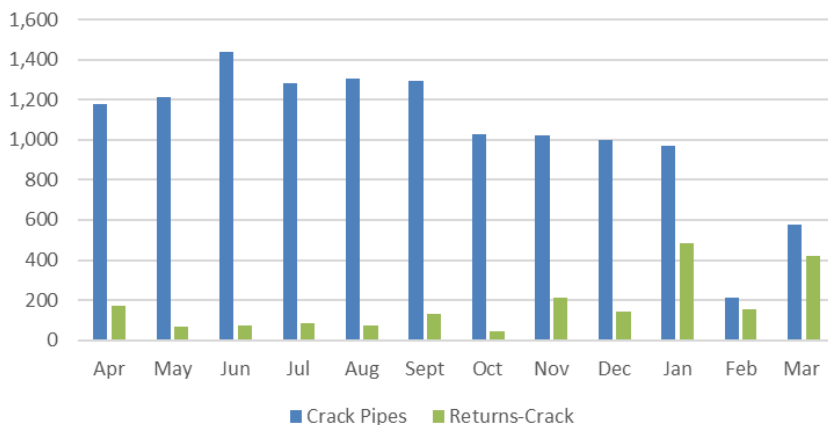
Condoms: 18,550

In March 2019, APSS started distributing safe inhalation kits in our NEP. Clients received 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 exchanged for up to a total of 5 pipes a day. When the Saskatchewan government changed the policy at the beginning of February 2024, we limited the numbers of pipes to one a day, regardless of the number of pipes beginning returned.

In FY 2023-2024 our pipe distribution decreased by 3,717 compared to our pipe stats of FY 2022-2023. We attribute the decrease largely to the last quarter of the fiscal year. Jan, Feb and March 2023 we distributed 10,703 pipes and the same time in 2024, 9,864 pipes were given out.

During our monthly survey in August of 2023 we asked 136 people if they share pipes, reuse pipes, share needles or reuse needles. 110 people use needles. Of those who inject substances, 95% do not share their rigs and 26% reuse. One person shared they have Hep C because they don't want to transmit the illness they do not share needles. Other people reported sharing with a spouse and others said they try to sanitize the rigs with bleach. 124 people smoke their substances. The majority (62%) of those who smoke do not share. Over half (58%) of people who smoke reuse their pipes. We know from conversations with visitors this because they smoke multiple times a day.

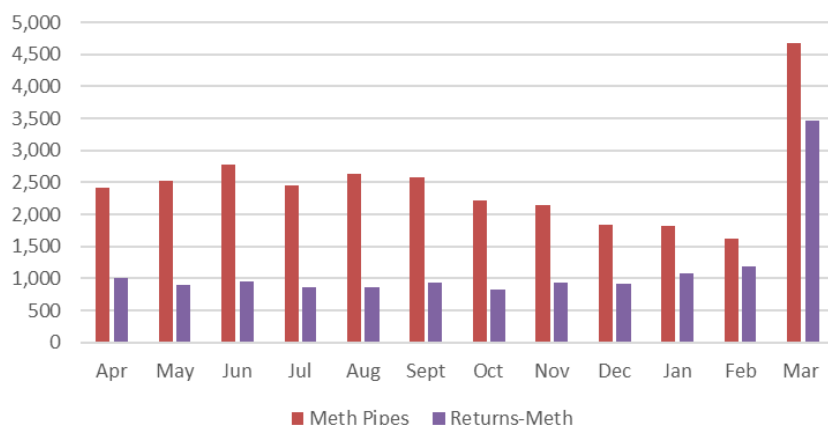
Crack Pipes April 2023 - March 2024



Crack Pipes Distributed

Crack Pipes: 12,516
Returns: 2,059
16.5%

Meth Pipes April 2023 - March 2024



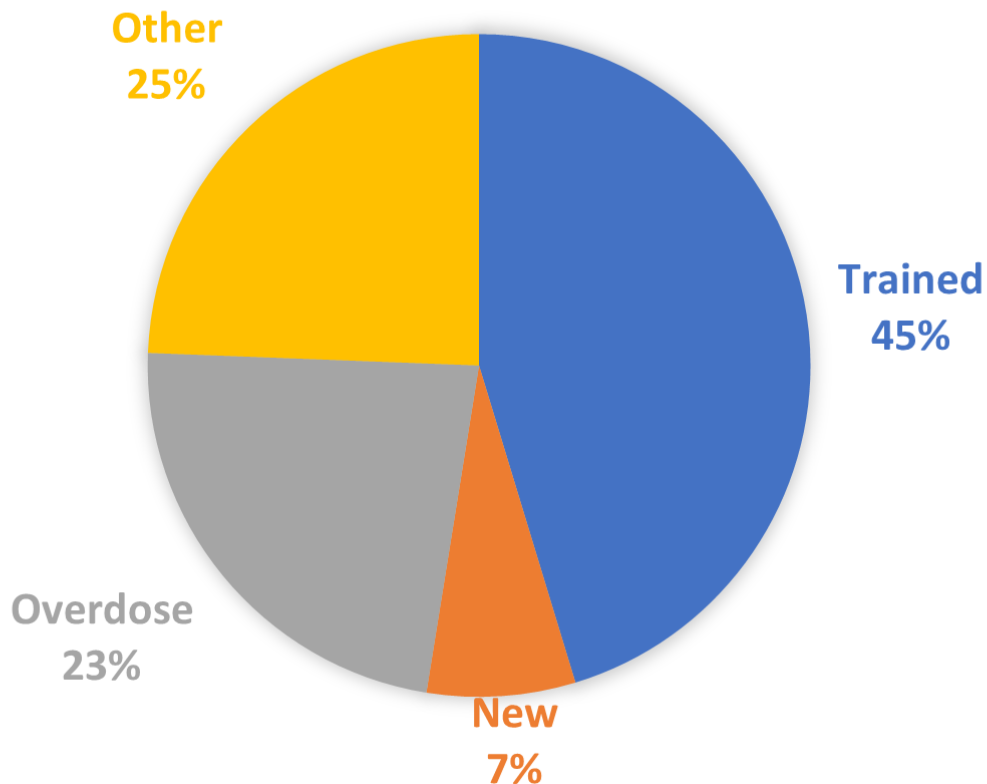
Meth Pipes Distributed

Meth Pipes: 29,697
Returns: 13,906
48.8%

Naloxone Kits

APSS continues to be a highly utilized Naloxone distribution site. All APSS staff have been trained and are able to train anyone interested in Naloxone. The training, depending on those being trained, takes 15 minutes and trains individuals on how to administer the drug, how to identify an overdose, and overdose prevention. In 2023-2024 we distributed 2,554 naloxone kits of which 1,157 people were trained and we replaced 589 kits used in an overdose. That is an increase in kits used in a poisoning from 496 last year.

NALOXONE KITS APRIL 1, 2023 - 2024



Naloxone Kits

Trained: 1,157

New: 185

Used: 589

Other: 623

Naloxone Kits

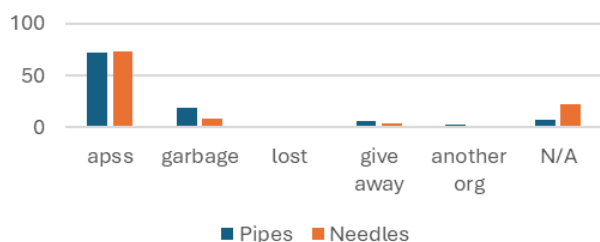
Kits Distributed: 2,554

589 or 23% Kits Distributed were
used in an overdose

Monthly IDU Survey

In 2023-2024, we surveyed Needle Exchange clients every month. We asked an anonymous question to different people and noted their responses along with the Needle Exchange ID. This was done to ensure accuracy of results and avoid duplicated data. At the end of the month, all data were collected and separated by gender, age, ethnicity, and location. The responses help gauge their knowledge and change in behaviours. People were very open with their answers, even to the point of going into detail and telling our staff their story. By providing a safe space, being anonymous and having consistent staff, needle exchange clients are more likely to trust us. The responses from our Needle Exchange clients have been informative which have helped in relationship building as well as enhance our programs and outreach to meet the needs of our clients. This could include: increased youth education on injection drug use, working with our NEP clients in a way they will understand, and creating awareness events for the public. Sample monthly surveys are indicated below.

April - Where Do You Return Pipes/Needles



May-

Would you participate in a support group?



What day of the week works best?



November -

November - Do you know about prep?



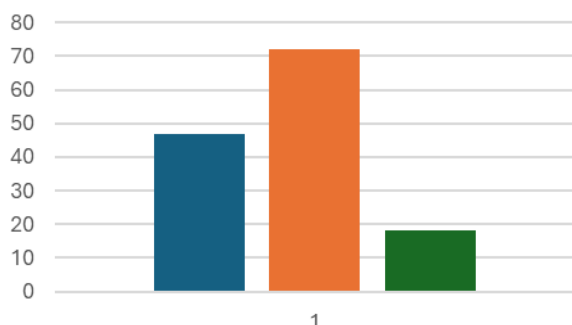
Do you know about pep?



The questions we asked were as followed:

- **April** - Where do you return pipes? Where do you return needles?
- **May** - Would you participate in a support group? What day of the week would be best for you? Where would you be comfortable having it?
- **June** - Have you been tested for HIV?
- **July** - Have you been tested for HEP C
- **August** - Do you share your pipes? Do you reuse pipes? Do you share needles? Do you reuse needles?
- **September** - Have you been tested for syphilis?
- **October** - Do you use alone?
- **November** - Do you know about Prep/Pep?
- **December** - Do you use condoms? Have you been tested for HIV?
- **January/ February** - How many hoots do you have in a day? What will you do for pipes now that we won't be funded for them?
- **February** - How many times a day do you inject? How many times a day do you inhale? Did you switch from inhaling to injecting
- **March** - Have you been incarcerated? Have you had Naloxone training? Have you been tested for HIV? Hep C? STBBI's?

October - Do you use alone?

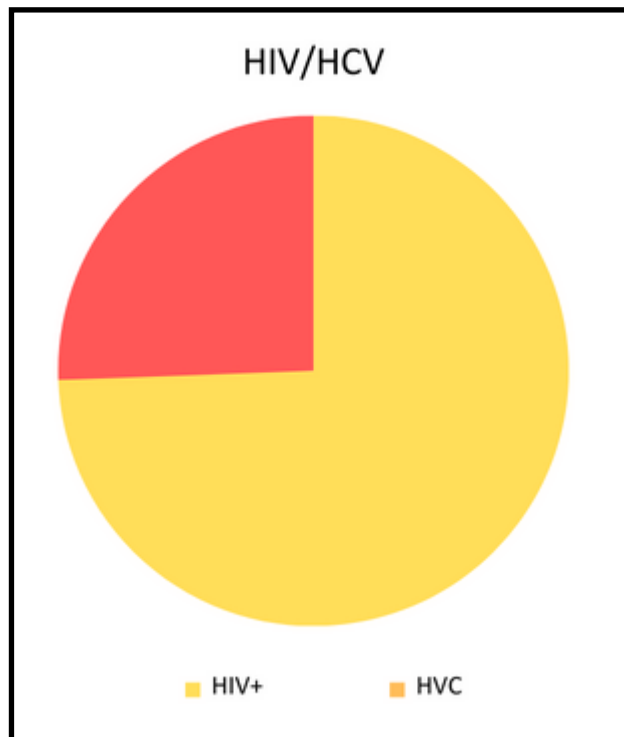


Support Services

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

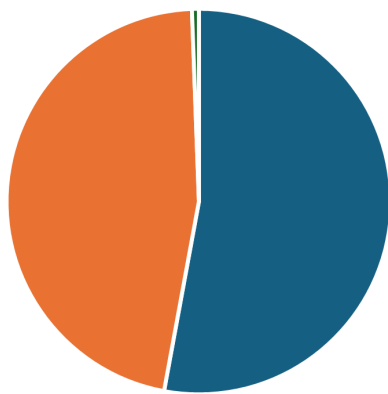
Sadly, we lost 7 of our PLWH in FY 2023-2024. They will be missed but we are grateful to have been able to provide them with support and care throughout the years. We currently have 162 clients.

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



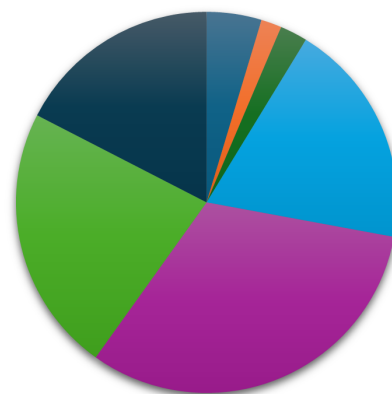
Support Services

Client Gender



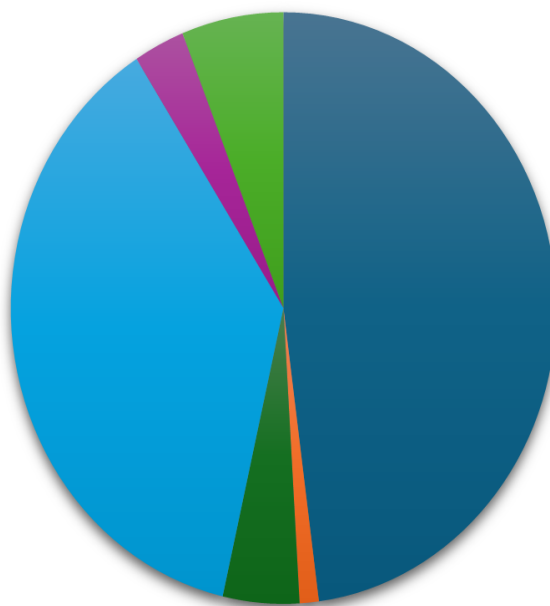
■ Male ■ Female ■ Trans

Client Age



■ Out of Range ■ >10 ■ 20-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50-59 ■ 60+

Client Demographics



■ Indigenous ■ Endemic ■ Gay/MSM ■ IDU ■ Mental Health ■ Other

Wellness Fund

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



Drop-In Centre

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

Health Care Services

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

On Tuesdays and Friday afternoons, nurses and a phlebotomist from SRX Health Solutions visit APSS for HIV/HCV/Syphilis testing. From April 2023 to March 2024, the nurse saw 191 individuals with 14 indicating a positive result and 3 new diagnoses. 11 people were connected to care. HEP C testing and treatment. 17 people were positive for syphilis. These testing days are vital for stopping the spread of HIV//HCV in our communities and linking clients to care. In 2022 Saskatchewan reported 19.0 per 100,000 new HIV cases.

Practicum Student Run TLC Program

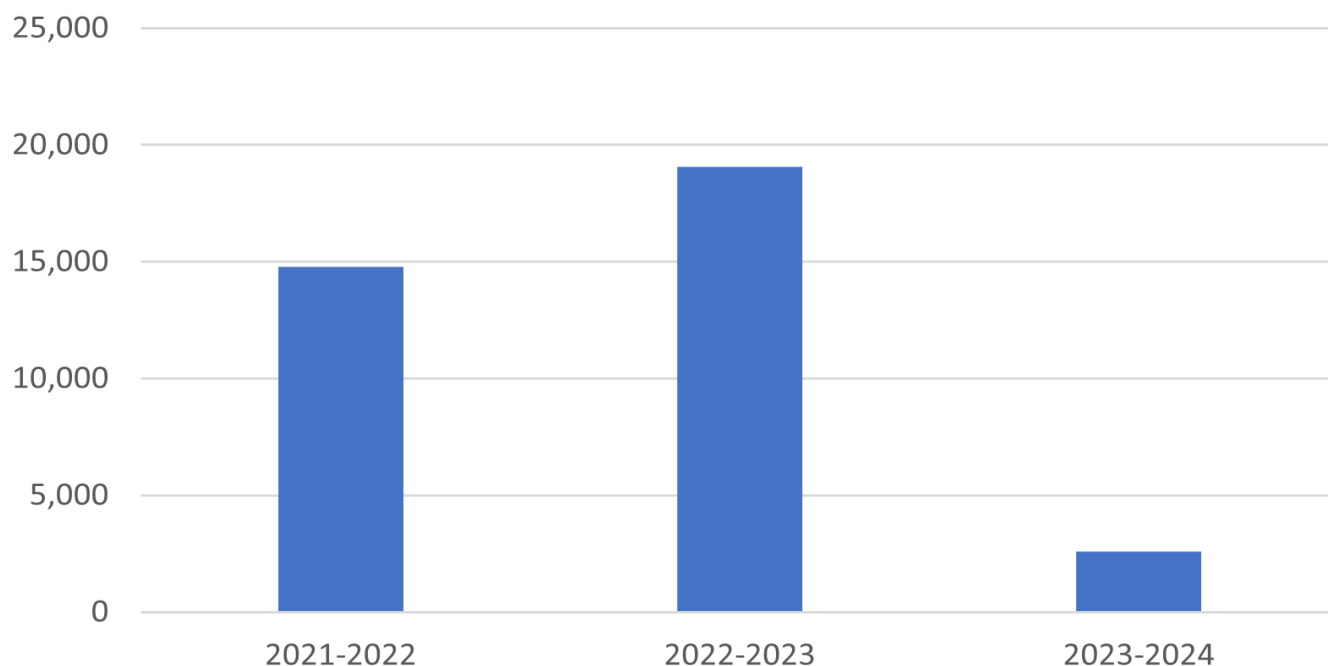
On Wednesdays, practicum students hosted the TLC program. Through this program the students connected with clients. They provided information, a connection to services and a snack. These events were beneficial to both the students and the clients. Students had conversations with 233 people through the TLC program. These events are vital for stopping the spread of HIV/HCV/COVID-19 and preventing opioid drug toxicity hospitalizations and deaths in our communities and linking clients to care people throughout the TLC program. Often students branch out to other health care topics such as: diabetes care, hypothermia, eating healthy and dental 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 2023-2024 we collected **2,610** discarded needles from the community and disposed of them in a safe manner. From the inception of the website to end of FY 2023-2024, **36,443** needles were removed from Regina.

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

Needles Safely Removed From the Community

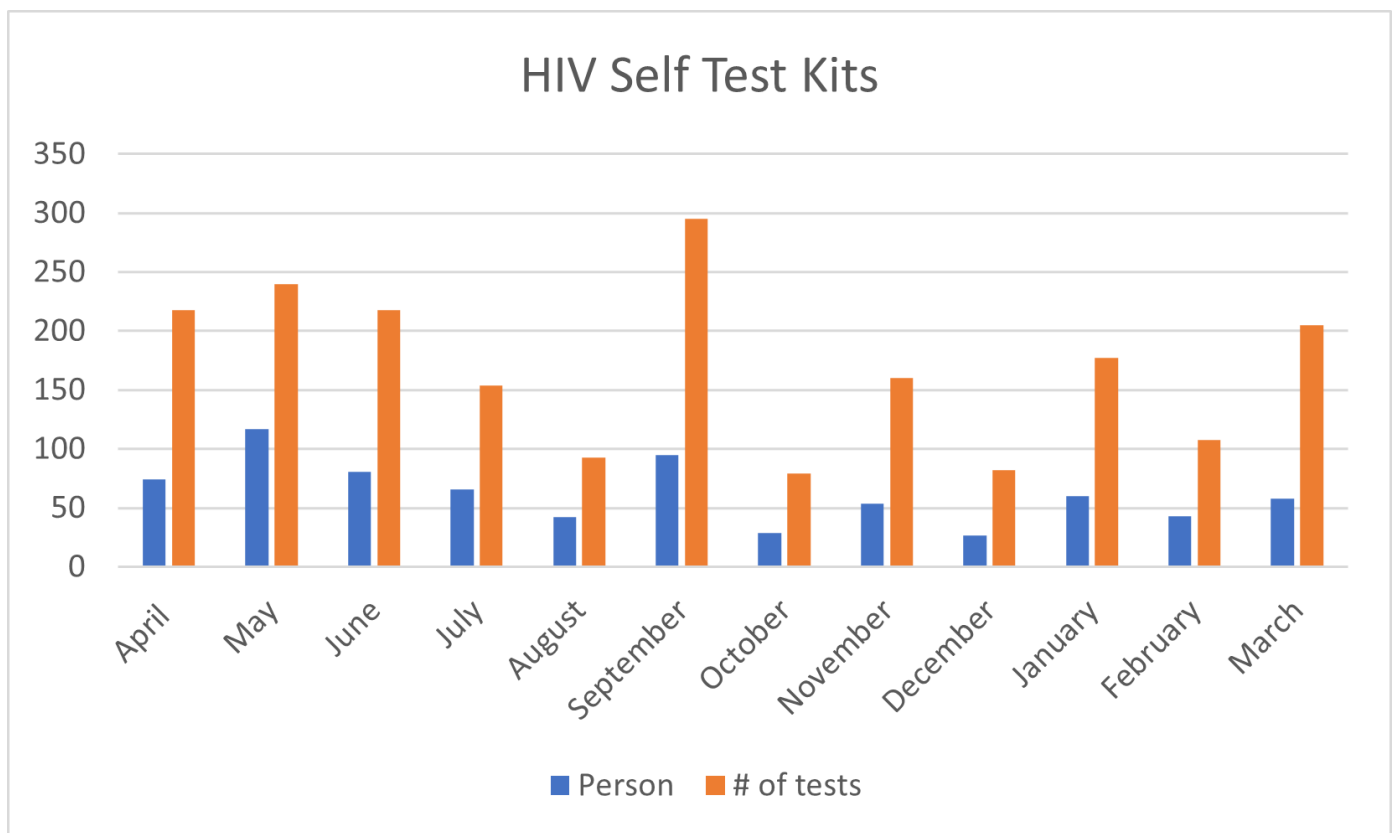


HIV Self-Test Kits

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

When those were successfully distributed APSS began to work with REACH Nexus/PHAC to distribute self-test kits to visitors, students and the general public. With this agreement each person is allowed to take up to 5 tests at a time. In 2023-2024 we were a leader in the distribution of HIV Self Tests. We had people get them at the Needle Exchange, educational outreach events, presentations, and come to the drop in times. Our staff even mailed some out to folks in smaller and rural communities where stigma is high. People who came to the drop in were largely newcomers or other people facing religious and cultural barriers to being tested.

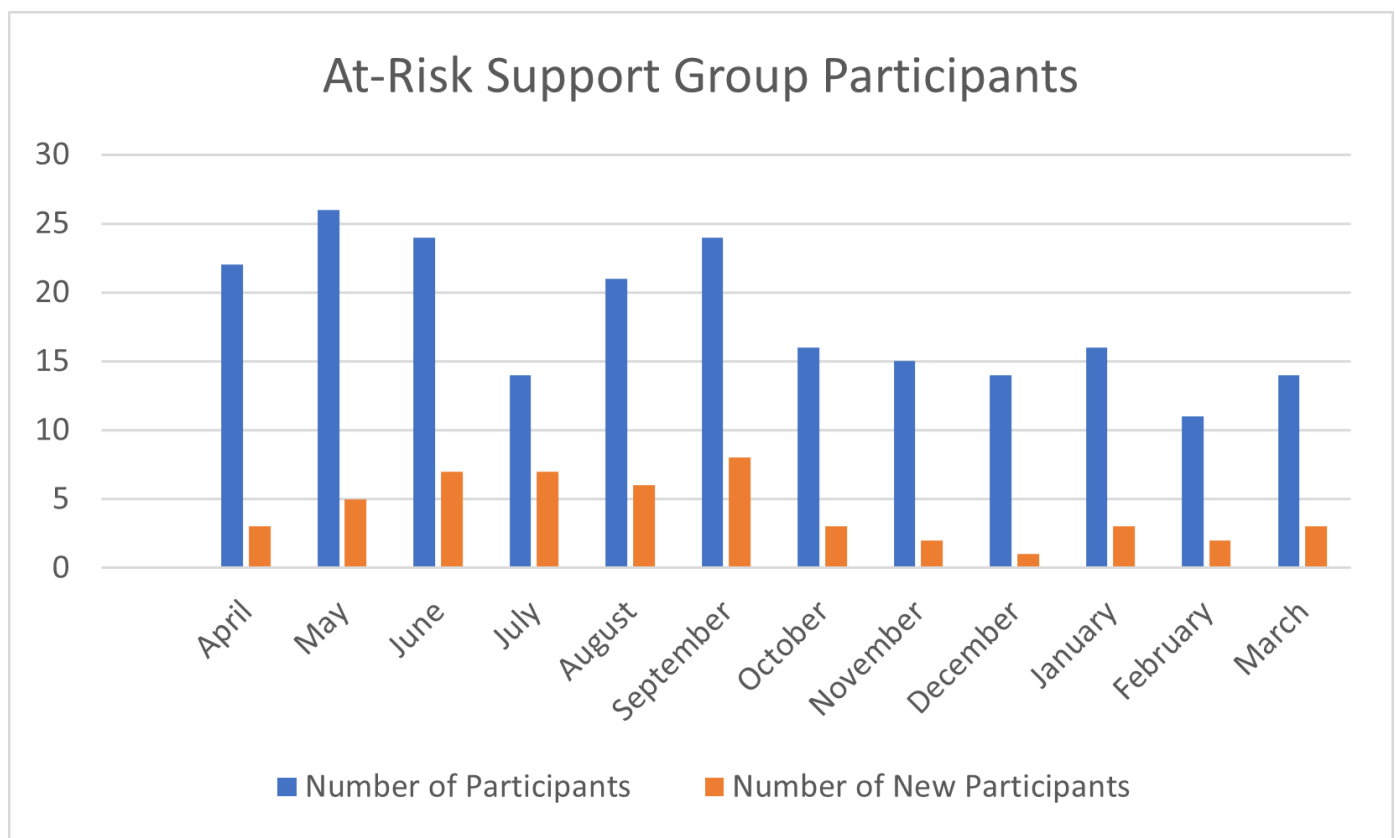
We distributed the highest number in January with 295 kits. May of last year the largest number of people received tests—117 people got 240 kits.



Anyone-at-Risk Support Group

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

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



Education & Outreach

The Education Program increased their flexibility by including presentations via Zoom, in addition to the in-person ones and education for IDU's in the NEP. The Education Program continued to improve relationships and collaboration with partner agencies, target populations and especially reduce stigma and discrimination among the general public. Over the last year, APSS has had a stronger 2SLGBTQ+ presence participating in both walking in the Pride Parade and appearing on Prairie Pride (a local community access show). The community also hosted its annual AIDS Benefit for APSS. This year APSS has made a concerted effort to provide culturally aware and safe services. To this end we now have an advisory board and have had elders take part in specific events.

Opioids Education Outreach was delivered to 1,619 people and HIV/Hep C Education Outreach was delivered to 1,402 people.

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. The Peer supporter provided support to 541 one people and the Youth Outreach worker interacted with 126 people under 25.

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

On August 31, Overdose Awareness Day, APSS was at All Nations Hope for the morning . We provided education to 75 people. In the afternoon we were at Mâdawêyatîân Centre. Staff educated 100 people. Between the two events we trained 18 people and refreshed knowledge for 7 people for a total of 25 kits distributed.

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

Education resources were accessed through our website (6,321 unique visits – which is an increase from the previous year) and our social media channels (Facebook (Likes 1566 and Followers 1495) and Twitter (Followers 1,183), Instagram (770 followers). LinkedIn Followers - 44. We post relevant and current information on HIV, HCV, STIs, Overdose Prevention, and services available.

APSS had to drastically reduce our meal program due to lack of funding. APSS provided bread on Tuesdays and Thursdays donated by COBS Bakery. We were able to continue to provide lunches on Fridays through the generous donation of bagged lunches from Ronni Nordal, APSS Board Chair until she moved away. 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. We continue to provide lunches as funding and opportunity arises.

Special Events & Donations

APSS Events: We held two fundraising events over the year. The Drag Brunch at Lancaster raised \$773.00. Tacos & Trivia at Rebellion Brewing raised \$780.00 Both events were a lot of fun and seemed to draw a crowd.

Over the past year, students have been creative in their fundraising efforts. There were raffles, 50/50s and a hot dog sale.

The Annual AIDS Benefit fundraiser hosted by **The Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina (GLCR)** for World AIDS Day was in person. \$1781.00 was raised to support people with HIV through our client care support program.

Our sincerest gratitude to our donors and supporters:

Ronni Nordal, Martine Proux-Birchard, Mahidhar Reddy, Tom McIntosh, Emily Barber, Amber Christensen, Heather Szeponski, Laurie Sampson, Dr. Andrew Eaton, Saskatchewan Union Of Nurses (SUN), Debbie Rodger, Andrew Stevens, Carla Beck, Pam Reimer, Lorraine Ulmer, Beverly Crossman, Dave Slatter, Mary-Ellen Scott, Kelly Trithart, Kayla Panchuk, Cheryl Toth, Community Engagement Unit of the Regina Police Service, Mitchell Johnstone, COBS Bakery, Tom Janisch Kirk Nordick, David Meldrum, SRx Health Solutions, John Edgar, Angels4Warmth Inc. Bruce Hesselink, Angelina Phongsavath, Nicki Clarke, Giridhar Reddy, Linda Chelico, Dakota Fae, Alysia Johnson, Jill Belanger, Jennifer Martuo and Little Elves Foundation.

Thank You!

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Infectious Disease Clinic
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Prairie Pride
Prairie South School Division
Queen City Pride
Regal Social Association of Regina
Regina Catholic Schools

Regina Public Library
Regina Public Schools
Regina & District Food Bank
Regina Provincial Correctional Centre
Regina Open Door Society
Regina Transit
SaskAbilities
Saskatchewan HIV Collaborative
Sask Polytechnic LPN Nursing Program
SRx Solutions
Street Workers' Advocacy Project
The Circle Project
University of Regina/Saskatchewan Polytechnic
Collaborative Nursing Program
University of Regina Social Work Program
University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine
University of Saskatchewan Nursing Program
UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Diversity



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AIDS PROGRAMS SOUTH SASK

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EDUCATION • SUPPORT • FREE TESTING • NEEDLE EXCHANGE