



# Oahas

ONTARIO ABORIGINAL  
HIV/AIDS STRATEGY

*The Sleeping Giant*

*Annual Report  
2018/2019*

# Our 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 well-being.

# Our Vision

Oahas exists to end HIV infections in Indigenous communities in Ontario

Front Cover: Sleeping Giant, Thunder Bay, ON

To the Anishnabek people, The Sibley Peninsula, or the Sleeping Giant as it's known in Thunder Bay, is a natural rock peninsula in the shape of a giant sleeping person. The rock juts into Lake Superior and forms Thunder Bay. There are many stories around this landmark. One Ojibway legend identifies the giant as Nanabijou, who turned to stone when the secret location of a rich silver mine, now known as Silver Islet, was disclosed to white men. ([https://www.cbc.ca/sevenwonders/wonder\\_sleeping\\_giant.html](https://www.cbc.ca/sevenwonders/wonder_sleeping_giant.html))

Oahas, in its own right has been through a restructuring process, and found it fitting to reference our host AGM city, Thunder Bay's Sleeping Giant, to the cycle of renewal and growth Oahas has experienced over the past year.

# Board of Directors

2018 - 2019

Jasmine Cotnam, Interim President

Jason Mercredi, Interim Vice-President

Donald Turner, Treasurer

Sarah Tilley, Secretary

William Reynolds, Director

David Drakeford, Director

Christian Wells, Director

Trisha Longboat, Director

Ma-Nee Chacaby, Elder/Knowledge Keeper

Retired Board Members:

Duane Morrissette-Beck

Meghan Young

Jessica Tabak

Ma-Nee Chacaby

# Message from the Board Interim President



JASMINE COTNAM

Greetings,

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the good work that Oahas has accomplished in the last year.

Our dedicated volunteer board of directors who reside across the province worked diligently to develop and approve a five-year strategy that will guide the organization in a good way.

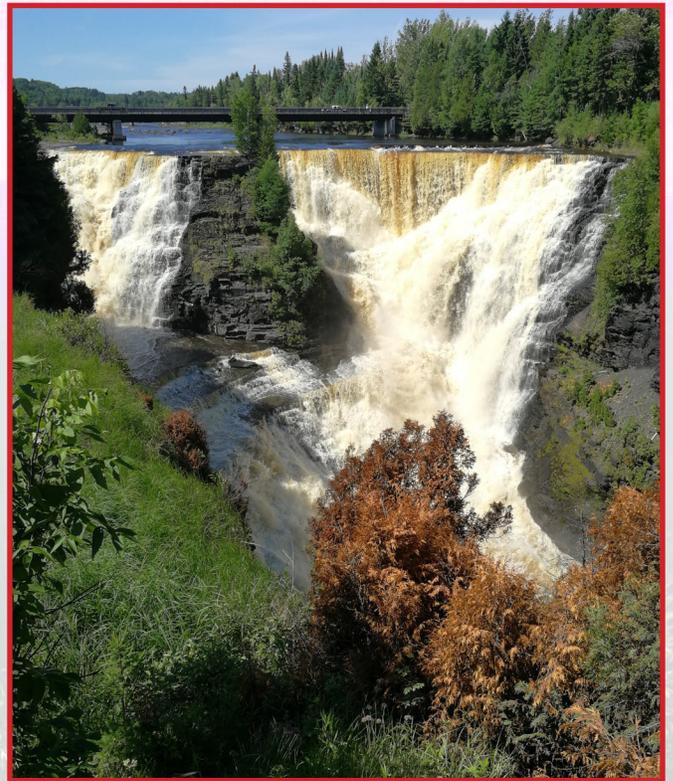
I would like to highlight some of the good work that has happened within the organization to improve how we support and serve our people.

**Lighting our homefires**

In the past year, Oahas has been, in its own way, reigniting our seventh fire by establishing some and rekindling home-fires in the communities we serve. We have worked hard to bring a welcoming feel and look of the spaces that our community members access. It was our intention to create a home-away-from-home feel and present our programming spaces to our Indigenous people with warm, compassionate, and accessible staff.

## Increasing our circle

Oahas has aimed to be an agent of change in the way all Indigenous agencies and community members view the type of services Oahas offers. In addition, we have been calling on our Indigenous communities to walk together to advocate against social and systemic barriers and support people living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and people who use drugs.



## Sharing our gifts

The road to Minobimaatsiwin (living the good life) comes from working collectively with our people with lived and living experience, asking them to be our teachers and ensuring we have lived and living experience leadership roles within our staff, volunteers, and board of directors.

We at Oahas value lived and living experience and understand that taking direction from those who know firsthand enables the organization to do the work in a good, meaningful, and effective way.

I look forward to the ongoing good work ahead that will help support the communities that we live in and serve.

In solidarity,  
Jasmine Cotnam



# Message from the Oahas Executive Director

MARK ATANASOFF



As the Executive Director of Oahas, I am pleased to present this year's operational highlights. Oahas has witnessed tremendous change with many sites being relocated and new staff joining our family. At the end of our operating year I am pleased to report we have a full complement of frontline staff. I am also delighted to report that while many of our staff are new to the sector and are building knowledge and capacity to better serve community; the staff have succeeded in engaging community, building partnerships and delivering services that are already making a difference. Staff have brilliantly navigated the complexity of the health system to offer services to our Indigenous communities that are based in culture, kindness and practical supports that serve community where they are at. Our last two hires, within the first quarter of our new fiscal year, have been our Southern Supervisor Isabelle Aubé and our Northern Supervisor Glenn Checkley. The addition of our supervisor team is the last piece of the puzzle that has positioned the organization for much needed stability, growth and success in supporting staff and the communities we serve. We operate six programming sites located across Ontario

(London, Toronto, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and Thunder Bay) and I am delighted to report that we have made considerable investments in our sites that have made our sites feel more like a home which is supporting connection within community. Additionally, during the past year Oahas has moved to a generic model of service delivery where silos of work have been removed and staff work together



as a coordinated and integrated team to offer services that focus on **(1) risk reduction services (2) HIV screening and (3) supports for Indigenous people living with HIV/AIDS.**

To support the changes at Oahas the organization has drafted a new multi-year strategy that is guiding the organization in achieving its vision of ending HIV infections in Indigenous communities in Ontario. Oahas is committed to ensuring **(1) knowledge, (2) safety and (3) care** are continuously improved for the communities we serve by striving to reduce barriers and close gaps in Indigenous HIV services. To achieve our vision, we are making investments in our organizational capacity to ensure we have a strong foundation from which to build innovative programs and services that impact individuals, families and communities in meaningful ways. Our entry into new sites and our new staff mean we are allocating our time, dollars and resources to strengthening our capacity. We have embarked on a capacity building initiative that focuses on strengthening **(1) community engagement (2) staff training (3) program development and (4) enhancing organizational processes to improve efficiencies and effectiveness.** Much success has been made in the past year and we look forward to continued improvement in the coming year as we work with our new supervisor team and staff to create a dynamic organization that responds and meets the needs of community.

To understand Oahas and our operational complexities it is important to take a moment and reflect on our current day realities. The statistics tell us that one in ten people living with HIV are Indigenous! This is a dramatic over-representation of Indigenous people impacted by HIV. Inequities are at play that are driving new infections of HIV in Indigenous communities that are linked to colonialism, historical injustices and the lasting effects of intergenerational trauma. For those Individuals with the appropriate access to resources HIV is a chronic, manageable disease with a life expectancy on par with that of the general population. Unfortunately, for



many in the Indigenous community, managing HIV is simply not a pressing concern as other urgencies of life take priority for necessities such as housing, food and income security. Combined with the impact of colonialism and the higher incidences of addictions and mental health within Indigenous communities HIV often takes a backseat. To change this trajectory, we believe the principles of GIPA/MEPA (Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and/or AIDS and Meaningful Engagement of People Living with HIV and/or AIDS) is the starting point for service delivery and programming. During this past year, Oahas invited 30 Indigenous people living with HIV/AIDS from across the province to attend a weekend gathering focused on visioning the future. What we learned was the future is bright and that those in the HIV movement are leaders. Oahas looks forward to supporting all Indigenous people living with HIV and expanding our efforts in the areas of **(1) stigma & discrimination reduction (2) expanding Individual's circle of care (3) restoring of our natural protective factors through culture and holistic practices that are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing.**

# About Oahas

Oahas began in 1995 and has consistently evolved to respond to the changing epidemics within the Indigenous populations.

Oahas is guided by and supports the Ontario HIV/AIDS Strategy, the Ontario Aboriginal Health Policy, the Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy and the Federal initiative to address HIV/AIDS in Canada.



*Founding Executive Director,  
Laverne Monette*

Oahas embraces fundamental principles:

- Understand the effects of colonization and intergenerational trauma.
- Acknowledge the distinct needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Ontario. Indigenous differences will be respected.
- Greater Involvement and Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous People living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA and MEPA).
- Community led and centred care.
- Promote autonomy and self-determination.

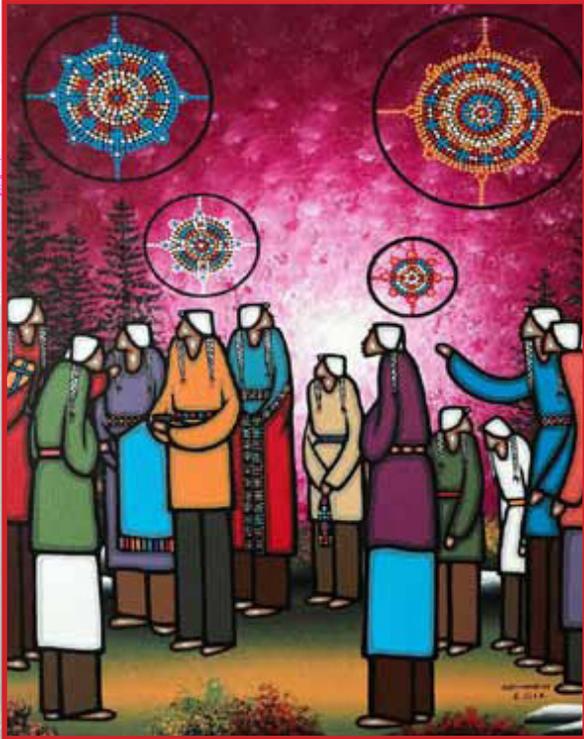


*Former President,  
Duane Morrisseau-Beck*

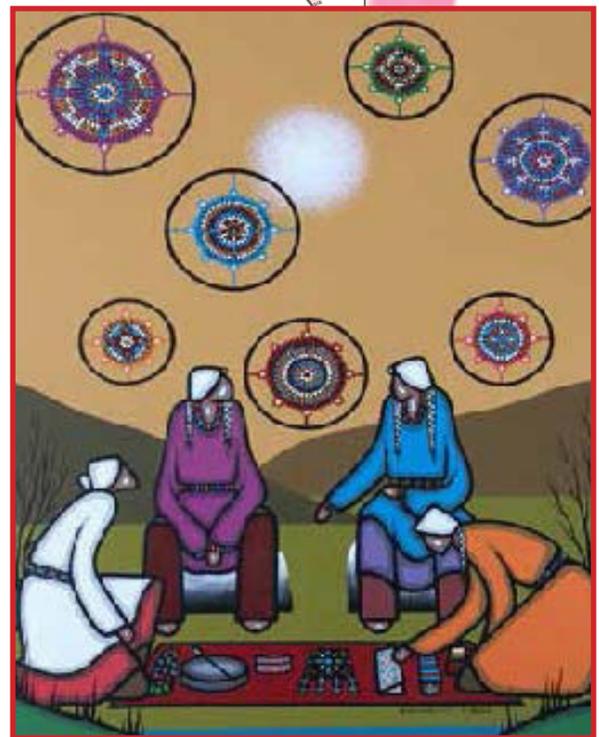
Duane Morrisseau-Beck was member of the board from 2016 to 2019; in January 2017 he became President of Oahas. We would like to acknowledge Duane's service to Oahas during one of the toughest times the agency has had to endure. He began and supported the operational changes that brought about the professional transformation of Oahas. During his tenure, Oahas hired two executive directors and undertook an organizational review and produced an organizational strategy. The restructuring required staff movement and location changes -- all of which were

directed and supported by the Board of Directors. With Duane at the helm and devoting many volunteer hours, he gave stability and clear direction, and upgraded the level of professionalism among the board and staff. We express our sincere thanks for his tireless efforts to ensure the greater involvement and meaningful engagement of IPHAs at all levels of Oahas.

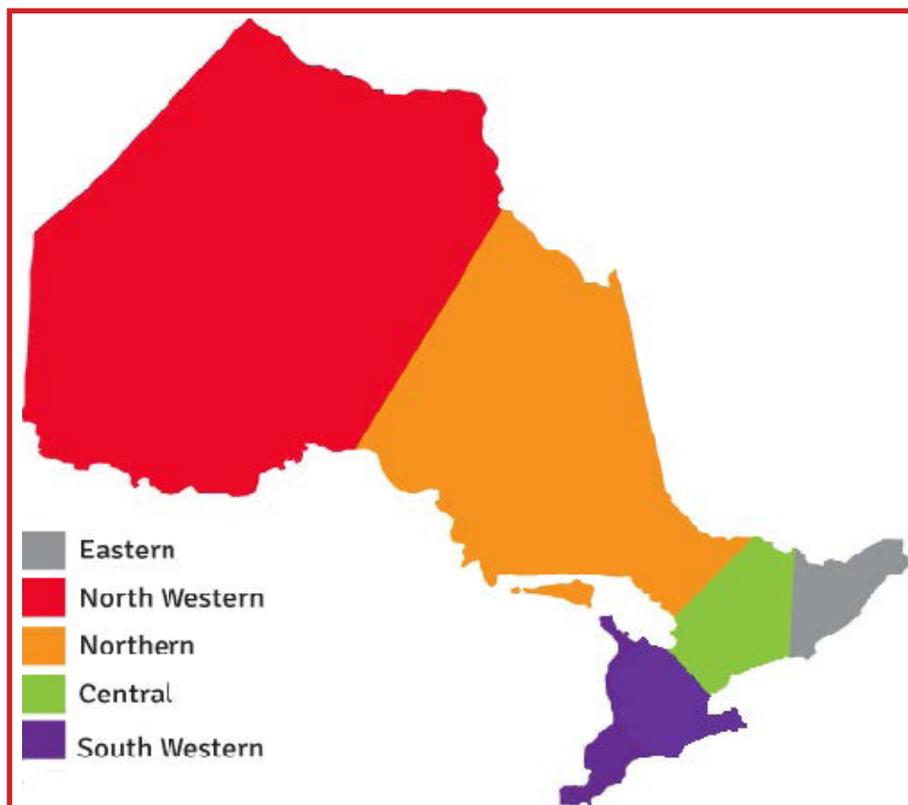




Ma-Nee Chacaby, Elder and Knowledge Keeper, is currently the longest serving Oahas Board member. Having joined the Oahas Board in 2012 and retiring in 2019, Ma-Nee has been instrumental in infusing balance in our organization by providing a holistic approach to the work of the board and the agency. She has guided the agency in culture, tradition, ceremony, reconciliation and wise-practices – the while involved in other projects and organizations. Oahas appreciates that Ma-Nee has given freely of herself, her time, knowledge and expertise not only at Board meetings but also in ceremony and milestone events for Oahas. We thank her profusely for her contribution over the years and the ripple effect of that invaluable contribution and connection to the Board, staff, volunteers, members and the community-at-large.



# Oahas Programs



Sweat Lodge



Taykwa

Tagamou Nation



Sector Reconciliation



Serpent

River Health Fair



Hand Drum Making



# Program Highlights

## Thunder Bay



Oahas is situated along the banks of Lake Superior, and housed within ElevateNWO. The community members of Oahas Thunder Bay use Art Therapy as a mode of self-care and healing. Art Therapy allows members to join in a safe space to create their own masterpieces while discussing meaningful subject matters that are of importance to them, such as, Reserve life; HIV/HEP C-related matters, and being Indigenous. We also host tranquil cultural walks with our community members, to learn and reclaim our cultural teachings together.

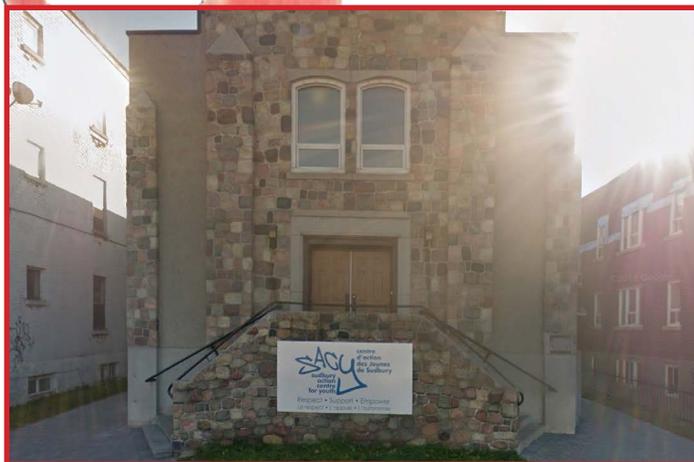
Our newest office opened in late November 2018. Housed in the Algoma Public Health, we have been getting to know the community and networking to build partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies. Within months, we set up programming in the Neighbourhood Resource Centre. We introduced a Monday brunch program at this new location, creating a place to meet-n-greet community members and provide an opportunity to introduce Oahas and the subject of HIV/AIDS awareness. We also partnered with HARP and Maamweysing for community outreach and the Oahas harm reduction program.

## Sault Ste. Marie



During our Bindegiin Kitchen days, Sudbury community members are offered monthly point-of-care rapid HIV testing and HEP-C liver scanning along side a healthy serving of "Nish" tacos. This allows street-involved people to take refuge from the elements, and participate in an opportunity to learn more about HIV, Hep C and other STBBIs. The Community get to access supplies such as condoms; harm reduction kits; and hygiene items. It is a judgment-free space where everyone can be themselves in a nurturing environment.

## Sudbury

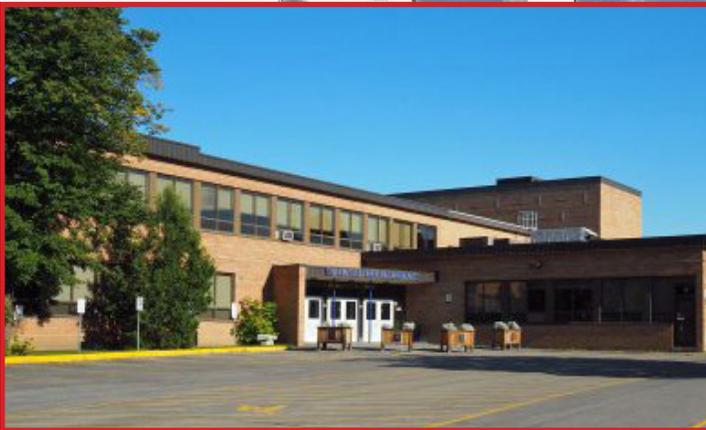


Oahas decided to relocate the southwest office from Chatham to London due to the spike in opioid use and deaths by overdose in the area in September 2018. The Oahas staff began with small steps in programming, mainly a lunch and learn program with partner agencies, such as LHIN, and ATLOHSA London. Getting to know RHAC and other agencies involved with HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention was a step in the right direction in order to partner with and begin harm reduction, outreach and community development. Due to the opioid crisis, the at-risk community includes a large number of Indigenous peoples and London is gearing up to address the needs of our community with cultural healing engagement and practices.

## London



## Ottawa



Ottawa Oahas is a rich resource for one of the largest urban Inuit populations in Canada. Street outreach is offered daily, with the aim to reach the underserved Inuit community and offer time for a chat, a warm hug, or a cup of coffee. We take the time to inquire about their general well-being. We also have a working partnership with Minwaashin Lodge, to host women's circles and provide HIV information and supports. Other acts of kindness include offering clean socks, underwear and hygiene supplies.

Toronto has a unique opportunity to be home to Oahas' first stand-alone site for all urban indigenous community members to enjoy. The drop-in space boasts comfortable home arrangements for lounging and finding refuge from extreme weather; a one-on-one counselling room for privacy, and kitchenette. Programs include: Indigenous harm reduction outreach nights, Kwe-to-Kwe Women's program; monthly Rapid Testing and Community BBQ; monthly lunch and learns; and movie nights.

## Toronto



# Thunder Bay stories... in their own words.

## Brian Thompson



My name is Bryan Thompson. I have been accessing Oahas services since early 2018. They have been beneficial in programming, assisting with my mental health and offered guidance with trying to live a more positive life as well as helping me look at myself as a human being. They provide support unconditionally, without judgement or making me feel bad. They make me feel more human about myself. They don't beat around the bush, they talk to me straight up. I enjoy going on the culture walks as well as participating in the ceremonies and feasts they offer.

Oahas to me has been my pillar of support. At first when I got involved with groups, I was mainly going for the food and to see what I could get from it. As time went on, these groups gave me different learning opportunities and I met a lot of understanding and outgoing people. I used to be withdrawn from people, but I feel so different now; feel stronger knowing I have my peers supporting me and continue my learning experiences.

## Beatrice Spade



home from Vancouver after 14 years where I was diagnosed with HIV in July 1996, since my return I have been actively involved with Elevate attending the CAAN conferences and also going on road shows for Harm reduction where I have also visited Aboriginal reserves located in Ontario. I have also been in a video called "Strong Medicine" which was made in Calgary at a conference which I attended and I have also completed 5 PLDI"(positive leadership development institute)". I have also done some speaking around Thunder Bay and have been invited to other communities to view the video we made. I have just completed a safe food handling course which I am still waiting to find out if I passed. I am also currently involved with Oahas attending groups, going on Culture walks each Monday, as well as helping out with different events like Pride and help with the cooking for their feasts.

## Yvonne Hunter



My name is Yvonne Hunter and I am from Savant lake, Ontario but I now live in Thunder Bay, but before I got my place I lived on the streets pan handling, going to shelters for food and a place to sleep, couch surfing and sometimes walking all night, off and on for 4 years. I have been a member with Elevate NWO since 2004 when I returned

## Simon Moonias



Boozhoo! My name is Simon Moonias, I'm a First Nations Person Living with HIV. I've been a member of Oahas for about 4 years. I've been growing in my journey through engagement with my other Indigenous Peers. I've been a part of a program run by ElevateNWO that engages us in Peer programming. My goals for the future are to become an advocate for First Nations People Living with

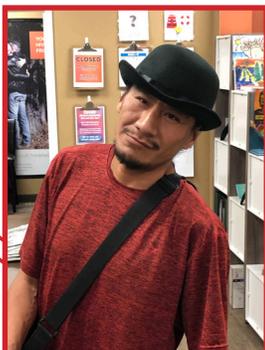
and affected by HIV. I believe that First Nations People are impacted by HIV stigma that creates barriers to testing and people wanting to learn about it. I want to be able use my own experience to generate a positive outlook about my own journey of living with HIV. That HIV gave me a second opportunity at life. Before being diagnosed with HIV my life was not balanced and as a result I put myself at risk for HIV. I want to use this teaching to prevent others from contracting HIV. Respect life and respect the opportunities you get in life. I didn't have much opportunities in life and didn't take the time to learn about myself. I've accepted my diagnosis and have turned it into a positive experience along with my family. It's not without it's challenges, but each day is a new opportunity to learn something new about how HIV impacts self, family, and community. HIV has become my greatest teacher. Miig-wetch!!!

## Rita Pichor

Hello, my name is Rita Pichor. I am new to the Oahas family as of 2019. I am also a peer ambassador for ElevateNWO. I like to volunteer for different programs like ladies' night and trips to the farm to see the animals. As I am writing this, I am preparing for surgery and with prayers, I hope all goes well.



## Charles Bottle



My name is Charles Bottle. I'm originally from Mishkeegoganmang First Nation, but am a band member of Bearskin Lake First Nation. I was diagnosed in 2015 of June with TB, Hep C, and HIV. My work with ElevateNWO and Oahas started shortly after I got released from the hospital. I've attended various conferences and seminars to better understand what I have. Today I have a better understanding of what I have, despite the stigma I see and hear from other people. My journey has been a lot in these short few years. I've met many interesting and diverse people from all races and ages, which has me listening to there stories and reflecting on my own and helped me understand I'm not alone.

# Oahas Staff

## **Administration**

Mark Atanasoff  
Carol Buenafé  
Amber Gooden

## **Research**

Jann Ticknor

## **Toronto**

Allen Woodhouse  
Amy McCloskey  
Alison Bray

## **London**

Christina Doxtator  
Delores Doxtator

## **Ottawa**

Julia Kimmaliardjuk  
Isabelle Aubé

## **Sudbury**

Steven Loranger  
Tina Rowe

## **Sault Ste. Marie**

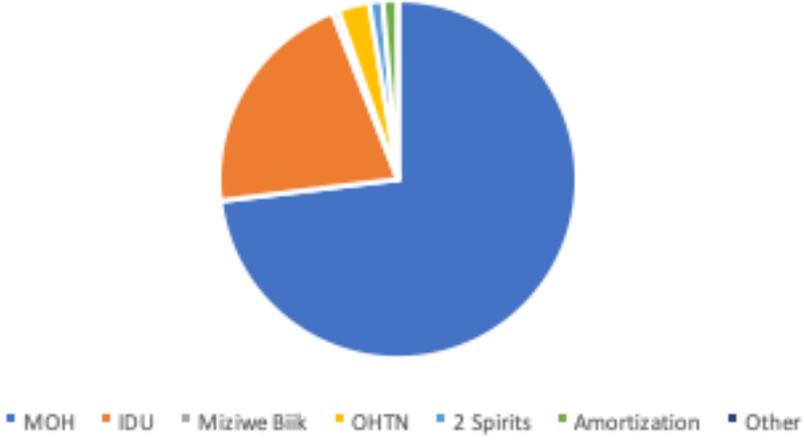
Kristine Lalonde  
Glenn Checkley

## **Thunder Bay**

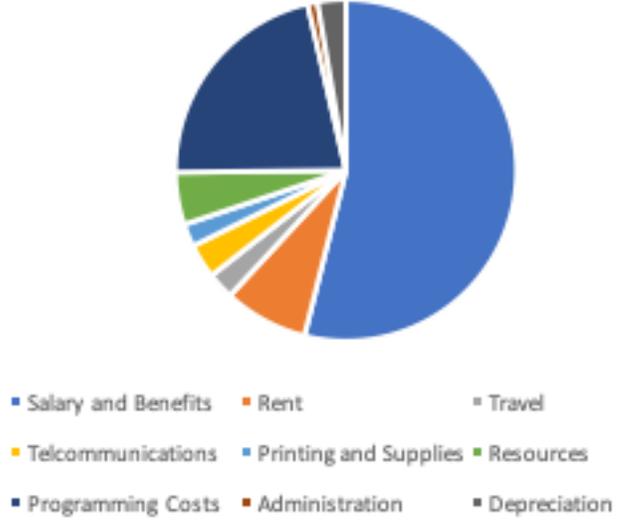
René Boucher  
Melissa Deschamps

# Financials

2018-2019 Oahas Revenue



2018-2019 Oahas Expenses



# Donations Received

The Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy acknowledges the continued support and commitment of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOH), AIDS and Hepatitis C programs.

We also extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated volunteers in each of our locations who have worked countless hours and contributed innumerable gifts to the success of Oahas this past year.

In addition, we thank the following community groups and private individuals for their generous support of our work throughout the year:

Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment & Training  
Rotary Clubs of Toronto 7070  
Toronto West Rotary Club  
Toronto Twilight Rotary Club  
The Rotary Club of Toronto  
Rotary Action for the Development of AIDS Resources (RADAR)  
Kenda Hoffer  
United Way  
African Caribbean Students Association (Queen's University)  
HealthStats Inc.



# Mii-gwetch/Thank You

RADAR founder & Rotarian attends 2018 Poker Walk for AIDS, and choose Oahas as the 2018/2019 beneficiary!



This year, RADAR has selected the Ontario Aboriginal HIV AIDS Strategy (OAHAS) to be the beneficiary of the RADAR\$139 funding. This group was the also the residual beneficiary of the 2018 AIDS Walk in Toronto, and they participated in the walk with an information table. RADAR\$139 funding will support outreach and support services, through regional outreach workers, to off-reserve Aboriginal Peoples who are living with or affected by HIV/AIDS



**RADAR - Rotary Action for the Development of AIDS Responses**  
 May 10 · 🌐

Past District Governor Bill Patchett, member of the Rotary Club of Cobourg, was a huge supporter of the work of RADAR in Rotary District 7070. Our RADAR\$139 initiative was inspired by Bill's encouragement to name the cost of saving lives so that people could help do just that with their donations. This year's RADAR\$139 is supporting the life-saving work of Ontario Oahas. Thank you Bill for your friendship and for your inspiration. May you rest in peace. ❤️



**Rotary District 7070** is at McMichael Canadian Art Collection.  
 May 10 · Vaughan · 🌐

👍 Like Page

To our Rotary Family in District 7070,

It is with a very sad heart that I share with you that Past District Governor Bill Patchett died today in hospital just before the weekly meeting of his beloved club, the Rotary Club of Cobourg.

I will let you know as soon as more details are known, but I did not want to delay in sharing this news. We will hold a moment of silence in Bill's honour at tomorrow's District Assembly.

Below is the most most recent photo I have of Bill, taken at the 2018 Rotary Foundation Walk. He was determined to be there, and I am so grateful he made it.

Yours in the family of Rotary,

Mary Lou

2018/19 District Governor, Rotary International District 7070



# Oahas

ONTARIO ABORIGINAL  
HIV/AIDS STRATEGY

Toll Free: 1(800)743-8851

[www.oahas.org](http://www.oahas.org)