

ACCESS Community Health Services Centre*

A partnership for community health care

FOR SOME, VICTORIA evokes images of beautiful gardens, heritage architecture and afternoon tea. But like any major metropolitan centre, Victoria faces complex social issues like homelessness, exclusion and marginalization. Access to quality health care for the city's homeless and HIV/AIDS communities is a significant challenge. Consider these facts:

- > A majority of homeless people in Victoria report multiple health problems and over 70% do not have a doctor.
- > Over 30% of the estimated 3,000 injection drug users in Victoria do not access primary health care services.
- > There is a 22% HIV prevalence rate among injection drug users in Victoria.
- > Approximately 70% of injection drug users in Victoria are infected with hepatitis C.

The city's poorest residents urgently need better access to health and support services, and two of the city's leading community service organizations are joining forces to address the issue for residents of Victoria and Vancouver Island: the Victoria Cool Aid Society and AIDS Vancouver Island.

A history of helping Victoria's marginalized communities

AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI) has provided comprehensive, accessible and effective education, prevention, care, treatment and support services to residents of Vancouver Island for more than twenty years. At the time of its founding, HIV was raging through the gay community, and people infected with the virus were rapidly progressing to AIDS and dying in a short time span. Initially, our activities centred on education and prevention, but were soon expanded to include care, treatment and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

AVI has responded to the changing demographics of HIV infection as the virus has moved into the injection drug using population, Aboriginal peoples, women and youth. Increasingly, hepatitis C has

*AIDS SERVICES, COMMUNITY HEALTH, CARE, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT



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infected or co-infected the people that AVI serves. Therefore in response to a growing unmet need for education and support, AVI added hepatitis C education to its mandate in 2003.

AIDS Vancouver Island has a history of developing targeted and innovative interventions designed to prevent the transmission of HIV and to ensure healthier outcomes for those living with the disease. Some of the programs we currently operate include:

- > The Positive Wellness Program, which offers short-term and solutions-based counselling for HIV infected and affected clients, as well as advocacy and assistance regarding income security, housing, legal and family issues.
- > Street Outreach Services, providing a needle exchange, health promotion and harm reduction information, and anonymous HIV, hepatitis C, pregnancy and STD testing through the Vancouver Island Health Authority.
- > Health Promotion and Community Development programs, including an Infoline, Speaker's Bureau and Resource Centre.

Today, AVI continues to be a leader in the prevention of HIV and in the support and care for those infected and affected by the virus.

Victoria Cool Aid Society works to eliminate homelessness and improve the community's quality of life by working with others to build a community where:

- > No one is forced to sleep on the street or go hungry.
- > Everyone who needs supportive housing is getting it.
- > Integrated health care services are provided to treat illness and promote wellness.
- > A range of services and resources are provided to those with mental health and addiction issues.

Cool Aid advocates for and provides integrated health care services, supported housing and emergency shelter to marginalized adults. We operate two emergency shelters: Streetlink, a 65-95 bed shelter for men and women where clients also receive hot, nutritious meals, referrals, hygiene services, health care and life skills counselling; and Sandy Merriman House, which provides 20-25 beds for women and similar services. We manage a supported housing program, providing 208 units of safe and affordable housing including: Swift House, Pandora Housing, Mike Gidora Place, FairWay Woods, and Hillside Terrace; and operate the Downtown Community Activity Centre, an important resource for downtown residents.

Cool Aid also manages a comprehensive range of health services. Our Community Health Centre includes a full-service dental clinic, a pharmacy, and specialized services such as nutrition, alcohol and drug counselling. The REES Network provides Resources, Education Employment and Support to mental health consumers and their families and manages a casual labour pool.

Helping those in greatest need

The marginalized populations our agencies serve include people who are street involved or homeless, injection drug users, aboriginals, youth, sex trade workers and gay and bisexual men. Many of those who are street-involved or homeless also live with HIV and/or hepatitis C, as well as mental health challenges, drug and alcohol dependencies and unstable housing. Our clients require intensive psychosocial and case management support and confront multiple barriers in accessing traditional health care services.



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Growing pains

As AIDS Vancouver Island and Cool Aid have grown and expanded our services to address these needs, and as the communities we serve have increased in size and complexity of challenges, both organizations have become increasingly constrained by the size of our facilities. Some of the ways in which this is seen include:

- > Cool Aid's Community Health Centre currently turns away six to ten potential patients per day due to lack of space. The results of a patient satisfaction survey, while praising the clinic service overall, detailed significant complaints about overcrowded waiting rooms and long wait times.
- > Medical staff at the Cool Aid Community Health Clinic estimate that 20% of their patients have serious impulse control disorders. In an overcrowded environment explosive situations arise too frequently, which in turn discourages others from seeking medical treatment.
- > Medical professionals who want to work at the clinic — even on a volunteer basis — cannot be accommodated. There are limited opportunities for education of students in medicine, nursing, social work and dentistry, due to space restrictions.
- > In 2000, AVI's Positive Wellness Program served 147 clients; in 2004 that number had risen to 352 — growth of almost 150% in four years.
- > Among AVI's programs is a lunch program for its HIV positive clients, providing a high-nutrient meal specifically designed for people living with HIV. For many of the clients, this is the only meal they have all day. Currently, over 40 clients use the lunch program on a daily basis and there is a demand for more; however, AVI's facility can only seat 18 to 20 at a time.
- > AVI's space restrictions also mean that the provision of ancillary services such as drug and alcohol counselling, support groups and training workshops is limited.

The ACCESS Health Services Centre

When AVI and Cool Aid realized that both organizations needed bigger and better facilities, we put our heads together and started looking for a downtown property that could meet the needs of all our client groups.

Together, the two organizations have purchased a three-storey building at 713 Johnson Street in downtown Victoria to create the new **ACCESS Health Services Centre**. Bringing together both organizations' major health outreach programs under one roof, the facility will also house other complementary non-profit and government tenants, such as the Vancouver Island Health Authority, Native Friendship Centre and PEERS (Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Resource Society) with NGO rents set at below market value.

The guiding principle for the ACCESS Health Services Centre is that ease of accessibility of multi-disciplinary services will result in enhanced health outcomes and quality of life for our clients. Not only will our organizations serve more people with primary health, education and support services, but the entire community will benefit from lower demands on ambulance, emergency and acute care services, and a reduction in transmitted diseases. Hospitalizations will also be reduced, as health problems will be addressed sooner, saving dollars overall for the health care system and taxpayers.



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Big plans for a small building

TOP FLOOR – AIDS VANCOUVER ISLAND

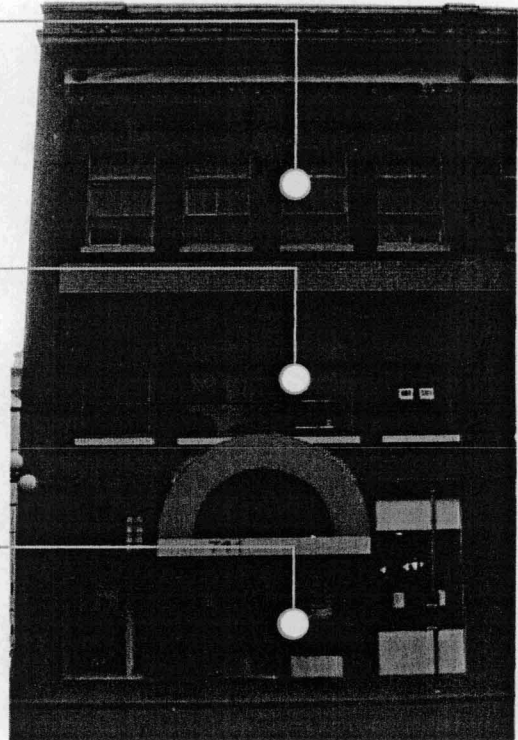
AVI will move its Victoria-based services (except for the needle exchange) into the new ACCESS building. Integrated health services will include comprehensive education and prevention programs, care, treatment and support.

SECOND FLOOR – COOL AID DENTAL CLINIC & OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS

With access by a new elevator and stairs, the second floor will include a community boardroom, the Cool Aid dental clinic and partner tenants, such as Together Against Poverty Society, Pacific AIDS Network and the Vancouver Island Persons With AIDS Society.

MAIN FLOOR – COOL AID COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

The first floor will be occupied by Cool Aid's Community Health Centre, providing a wide variety of integrated services with physicians, alcohol and addictions counsellors, a nutritionist, psychiatrists, pharmacist, nurses, acupuncturist and podiatrist.



Ten percent down, it's a go!

Collaboration among service providers is recognized by all levels of government as essential to successfully addressing the determinants of health. Research shows that when multi-disciplinary agencies partner in the provision of health services that it results in greater accessibility for clients. The guiding principle for this building is that increased accessibility will result in enhanced health outcomes for both individuals and the community.

The goal for our partnership is increased health and safety for the people we serve, resulting in benefits for the whole community.

Together we are better

When the previous owner of 713 Johnson Street supported the ACCESS vision by making a \$350,000 charitable donation, and Vancity stepped up to the plate with a mortgage, the organizations moved ahead with confidence that the community could help build this dream. The building remains rented out to tenants while we raise the funds necessary to install an elevator, add seismic and structural improvements, complete the extensive repurposing necessary to turn an ordinary downtown building into a modern Health Centre, and pay off the small mortgage so that more funds can be devoted to operations — allowing longer hours of service and improved health resources for the downtown community.



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C O M M U N I T Y H E A L T H S E R V I C E S C E N T R E

THE TOTAL COST OF THE PURCHASE AND RECONSTRUCTION IS ANTICIPATED TO BE \$4.4 MILLION, BROKEN DOWN AS FOLLOWS:

Reconstruction of interior spaces and improvement of courtyard	\$2,362,280
Professional fees	\$211,382
Furnishings and equipment.....	\$100,000
Finance, contingencies and other costs	\$183,221
Acquisitions costs	\$1,189,121
Construction inflation contingency	\$357,110
TOTAL CAPITAL COSTS	\$4,403,114

Already the societies have jointly contributed \$100,000 and set aside an additional \$300,000. The project has been short listed for the \$1 million Vancity Award and the Vancouver Island Health Authority is considering a request for \$1 million in capital support. Other grant and donation prospects are also in various stages of research and development; however, the need in the community is urgent, and we must begin planning our project independent of this potential funding. Consequently, the two organizations are now assessing the feasibility of a \$4 million capital campaign to fund the project.

Investing in a better future

Cool Aid and AIDS Vancouver Island have been the leading service providers to the most challenged populations in the capital region and Vancouver Island for decades and both organizations have a long history of innovative service delivery. Our vision for the ACCESS Health Services Centre is one of collaboration and complementary partnership. Studies show that clients have improved access to services and better health outcomes when agencies work together. Partnership is also the vision of a smart community that recognizes that health care is less expensive when dealt with on the ground rather than through overtaxed emergency services, and that an ounce of health prevention is worth a ton of care.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR TIME IN CONSIDERING THIS NEED AND WELCOME YOUR ADVICE.

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