

# Positive Vibes



AIDS PEI COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP INC.

May, 2017

## Do You Know About [Innovicares.ca](http://Innovicares.ca)?

I was at Walmart the other evening (I know, I know.. I really do try to avoid the place), but I overheard a pharmacist telling a client about this website, [Innovicares.ca](http://Innovicares.ca), where you can sign-up for a card that allows you to get Name Brand medications,

such as Tecta, Locec, Prevacid, etc. instead of the generic, at no extra cost to you!

With the new protocol the PEI government adopted late last summer, anyone who accesses medication through provincial programs must take the generic, if available, instead of the original medication your doctor prescribes. Guess what? The drug companies who own these name brand medications have noticed they are now missing out on sales. Their collective answer to this, is [Innovicares.ca](http://Innovicares.ca). It doesn't

cost anything to register and sign-up for the card. However, it does allow drug companies to access some of your personal information like where you live and what



drugs you are taking. Personally, I couldn't care less - it lets you get the name brand drugs your doctor recommends - even over the counter stuff - with the same economic benefits of the generic drug program - but privacy might be a concern for some.

To give you a concrete example, if your doctor prescribes Tecta for your stomach (like me) and the government of PEI will only pay for the generic at \$17 for the prescription, this card lets the pharmacist give you the original medication (Tecta) and the government only has to pay the

\$17 cost of the generic for it.

If your up for some research, you can look-up and review the 100's of medications available through the program. You can sign up for it for free at <https://www.innovicares.ca/en/register>. I have already registered for the card, and I'm able to access the program right away - I just bring my card number to my pharmacy, and then I can bring them a copy of the actual card when it comes in the mail. I thought I'd spread the word on this because it might directly benefit you, or someone in your life who is accessing medications that are being paid for by the PEI government through whatever drug program they are accessing. The only people who wouldn't benefit from this program would be those folks who have access to a comprehensive drug plan through private insurance. From where I'm sitting, this is a program totally worth investigating.

*Thank you to Troy Perrot-Sanderson for this contribution.*

### Suggestions Wanted

Do you have ideas for the content of this newsletter?

Do you know of an upcoming community event that you would like to see highlighted here?

Do you have questions that you would like answered in this format?

Send your ideas to:

[outreach@aidspei.com](mailto:outreach@aidspei.com)

Or give us a call at:

1-902-566-2437

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## Positive Vibes

### Opiate Overdose Antidote Kits Now Publicly Available

Thanks to Murphy's Pharmacy, Naloxone has become more available in the province of Prince Edward Island. Naloxone is a drug that blocks the effects of opioids; the medication can be used to temporarily reverse an opioid related overdose. Naloxone isn't new to PEI per say - first responders like RCMP, police, and paramedics have been carrying the drug with them for almost a year. However, more recently, Murphy's Pharmacy began creating their own overdose intervention kits and have now made them publicly available. These in-house kits are available by request at all Murphy's Pharmacy locations for a fee of approximately forty dollars. Once all of the in-house kits have been distributed, Murphy's pharmacy will make the trademarked Naloxone kits, which come in a hard shell carrying case, available for purchase. Because of the packaging and branding, these kits cost a bit more and are expected to retail for approxi-



mately fifty -five dollars. Naloxone can be administered through nasal spray (which is often known by the brand name Narcan), or by injection. The kits available through Murphy's Pharmacies are administered through intermuscular injection and include everything needed to intervene in the event of an opioid overdose. Anyone who purchases a kit can expect a conversation with a pharmacist who will provide information on how to recognize an overdose situation, in-

structions on how to use the kit, and directions in terms of what to do after the kit has been used. Anyone can buy a naloxone kit, but purchasers have to be prepared to participate in that when to/how to conversation.

Naloxone gives community helpers a window of opportunity to provide a life saving intervention before an emergency response team arrives at an overdose scene. Given the jump in fatal drug overdoses reported by the PEI government, it is great that the Murphy's team has taken the initiative to get this life saving technology out into the community.



Syphilis; it's always been around, but over the last few years it's really been on the rise. This sexually transmitted infection (STI) was

a major killer back in the 1800s, but it declined steadily after the Second World War, and had almost disappeared in Canada by the 1990s. Unfortunately, over the last decade, syphilis has been making a comeback across the country - including right here at home.

In PEI, there were only 7 cases of syphilis diagnosed between 1987 and 2009 - that's 7 cases spread over twenty+ years. Today, things look a bit different. Between 2010 and 2015 there were 31 cases of syphilis diagnosed in PEI. That's 31 cases spread over just 5 years. Yep, definitely an increase! Across Canada, gay, bi, trans, and queer guys are being hit the hardest by the syphilis resurgence. And the trends seem similar here on our little Island; men make up the majority of those diagnosed -with

### Spotlight on Syphilis!

some cases of transmission linked to hook-up apps and anonymous same-sex encounters out of province. However, many transmissions are happening right here at home - and women are also experiencing an increase in diagnosis. Syphilis is commonly passed through barrier-free oral sex; both giving and receiving - and including anilingus. Syphilis is also easily passed through condomless penetrative sex of any/all kinds, and the risk of transmission is high for both receptive and insertive partners. It can even be passed when sharing sex toys!

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that attacks the body in three stages, and it is spread when your skin - especially those mucous membranes found in your mouth, throat, genitals, and anus - come into direct contact with syphilis sores or rashes. Unfortunately, these painless sores and visual cues can be hard to spot, and are

often hidden inside holes and folds. In other word, just because things *look* fine doesn't mean things *are* fine. You can have syphilis and not know it.

Barrier protection, like condoms and dams, provide the best protection against syphilis. Making STI-testing a normal part of your routine is also a great way to stay healthy. A simple blood test, which you can request, will tell you everything you need to know about your syphilis status. Syphilis is definitely an STI you want to catch and treat early; left untreated syphilis can cause damage to your brain, heart, and other organs. But a round of antibiotics - most often delivered by injection - will clear the infection. Remember folks: play safe, get tested!



It's been just over a year since Health Canada approved TRUVADA for PrEP. Despite this green light, PrEP remains largely out of reach for the average Canadian. Although there is some movement in large urban centers - like Toronto and Vancouver - Quebec is currently the only province providing publicly fund access to PrEP. In the absence of coverage, PrEP cost about \$1,000 a month - making it a non-option for many people who would potentially benefit from the drug. PrEP, which stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis, has been covered in this newsletter before, but for those of you who need a refresher: PrEP is an HIV prevention strategy in which people who are HIV-negative take anti-HIV medication in order to prevent infection. That's right folks we're talking about the HIV prevention pill!!! PrEP for HIV prevention consists of a once daily pill called Truvada. This medication prevents the HIV virus from replicating in the body. When taken as directed, PrEP protects the user from acquiring the virus if they are exposed to it. Organizations and individuals working in the HIV field continue to push for PrEP payment assistance programs and coverage at the Provincial and Territorial

## Access for All, PrEP for Prevention Reflections On Our Community Conversation

level, but we're definitely not there yet. Obviously, there are people across the country; including right here in PEI, who would benefit from PrEP access - and some of them don't even know this prevention options exists. Enter CanPrEP; an informal alliance of organizations from across Canada who have come together to increase knowledge about, and access to, Truvada for PrEP. As a part of this work, CanPrEP launched the Access for All project; a community action initiative which aims to increase awareness about PrEP within communities largely left out of the conversation. These populations include: folks who have experience with incarceration, African, Caribbean, and Black people, Indigenous communities, people who use drugs, and women who identify with one or more of these groups.

A few months ago CanPrEP put out a call for submissions to organizations interested in hosting a community conversation on PrEP with one or more of the communities identified above. AIDS PEI submitted a successful application, and received a small grant to host a discussion with people who have personal experienced with drug use. On May 18th, we gathered at Saint Paul's Church - with a couple boxes of pizza and a lot of coffee - to chat about PrEP. We covered the basics; what PrEP is, how it works, the reported effectiveness for different populations/ activities, common myths and misconceptions, and issues related to access. We also had a lot of great con-

versation about how PrEP might be relevant to people in the room - as people who use drugs, as women, and as people living with HIV. The vast majority of folks in attendance had not heard of PrEP before our discussion, and were shocked to hear that an HIV prevention pill actually existed. There were excited reactions in the room to be sure, but there was also healthy amount of skepticism. We heard a lot about stigma and drugs use in our communities, and the need to strengthen the harm reduction supports and services we already have.

People who use drugs are devalued; that is not unique to PEI, but the way that devaluation shows-up in people's lived experience is undoubtedly influenced by our Province's ruralness, small size, and interconnected social networks. How much do we (as a province or society more broadly) really care about making it easier for people who use drugs to live safer healthier lives? In light of the stigma that surrounds drug use - particularly injection drug use - where should limited harm reduction resources be concentrated? These higher order questions weren't answered though our discussion, but they were raised - and they were raised in a conversation about PrEP by people who have personal experience with drug use. Take from that what you will!

But here's my take home message: just because someone gets high doesn't mean they're not interested in their health, or in doing things to take care of themselves. Just because someone wants to get high doesn't mean they want to get sick, or get someone else sick. PrEP should certainly be available to anyone who would benefit from it, but everyone - including people who use drugs - should be able to (meaningfully) choose what HIV prevention strategies makes sense for them given their behaviors, risk factors, and personal situation.

**PrEP:**  
**HIV PREVENTION**  
**WITH JUST**  
**1 PILL A DAY**





Prevention — Support — Community

## AIDS PEI COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP INC.



On May 6, PRIDE PEI hosted what has now become the Island's annual GSA Conference. For those who may be wondering, a "GSA" typically refers to a student group that works to challenge homophobia/ transphobia in school, and provides a safe space for students to talk about issues related to sexual orientation/gender identity. Although these groups were once known as Gay-Straight Alliances, they are now more commonly called Gender and Sexuality Alliances. PRIDE's conference provides a great opportunity for Island GSA groups to get together, but it is also open to students who may not have access to a school GSA! Oh, and caregivers and educators are also invited to participate which just adds to the awesomeness.

AIDS PEI was in attendance with an organizational information booth and safer sex supplies. We also did a safer sex workshop just for youth, a Trans information session just for caregivers, and a mini youth group session just for youth.

### SHOUT: 2017 GSA Conference

Fun was most definitely had! Of course we weren't the only ones lucky enough to participate. The conference also featured sessions on youth engagement and community organizing, education sessions focused on the gender spectrum and the unique challenges faced by Trans youth, a know your rights/ human rights presentation, a LGBTQ+ history and networking session. Great stuff all delivered by members of our Island community.

Great people too! Youth from all over PEI were in attendance bringing a wealth of knowledge and an abundance of energy with them. I also met/ got reacquainted with teachers, counsellors, nurses, community activists, and a whole crew of parents who are very into supporting, and advocating for, their kids. The importance of identity affirming support at home really can't be over stated. Family acceptance is the single biggest predictor of positive outcomes for

LGBTQ+ youth - that's evidenced based friends! So it's great that PEI's GSA Conference includes sessions for both youth and adults, which helps bring our community together. We would like to thank PRIDE PEI for organizing this awesome conference which allowed students, educators, and caregivers to connect with each other - and likeminded organizations - in a welcoming and safe space. Also, shout-out to Holland College for hosting this full day event. Lastly, a very special thank you to Janet Bradshaw. Janet sits on the board of both AIDS PEI and PRIDE PEI, and she's the staff advisor for the GSA at Three Oaks high school where she works as an education assistant. This conference wouldn't have happened without Janet's concentrated efforts. Thanks Janet - and thanks to everyone who came out. Can't wait for next year!

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### About AIDS PEI

AIDS PEI is a not-for-profit organization that engages, supports, and educates all Islanders on issues related to sexual health and harm reduction in the context of drug use. Through innovative programming and educational workshops, we work to contribute to the prevention of HIV, Hepatitis C, and all sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI's). AIDS PEI strives to increase positive health outcomes by engaging and supporting those living with, and most impacted by, HIV and Hepatitis C while creating opportunities for partnerships, community engagement, and systems change. AIDS PEI provides a non-judgmental environment free from stigma in which people can access information and support .

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[www.aidspei.com](http://www.aidspei.com)

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