

Interconnected

“Spotlight”

We asked CPPN/RCPS members how they are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Bob Leahy reports.

If you are like me, you have given long lingering thought to what happens after the epidemic. In an anonymous survey, CPPN/RCPS recently asked members “What are you most looking forward to doing once social distancing rules/recommendations have been relaxed?” Turns out it’s mostly about socializing. Throwing a party, being around people and friends, volunteer work, hugging all scored high.

What else? Going to the dentist, going to a quilt store, drag, not wearing a mask, gym, groceries shopping without masks, taking the subway, movies and football games, going out for dinner and to the theatre, relaxing, travel - all were mentioned.

Then there were some more sobering answers “I can't wait to leave the house without having to think about whether or not doing so might put me or my family at unnecessary risk”. And this “I don't feel it will ever be the same as before, will have to learn the new normal.” *(Continued on page 2)*

A message from Brittany Cameron, Co-Chair of the Board of Directors

Wow! It's hard to believe that we are already halfway through 2020 already, and what a memorable year this will be as we look back at it in history. As Pride Month comes to an end, now more than ever it seems an overwhelmingly appropriate time to reflect on and reconsider many of our long-held beliefs about Canadian History. I strongly believe in revisiting history often, where we have been, and where we are going. *(Continued on page 3)*

Key messages you will find inside

“Living by yourself can bring up so many feelings like unworthy, unlovable and just the feeling of loss. The stress of being in public being a person with HIV has had an effect on my mental health.”

“Perhaps this Canada Day we will collectively come to understand the uncomfortable truths on which Canada is founded upon – racism, power, privilege, oppression and genocide – and push our leaders and ourselves to make a nation we can be proud to call home.”

“Canada must protect the rights of sex workers during COVID-19 by ensuring access to emergency income supports.”

Other Notable Quotes
"Living with HIV during the COVID19 crisis; CPPN's Member Experiences "

Challenging

"My challenges is that my HIV is being put on hold because I am unable to see my HIV team. They are important part of my over all health." (Richard)

"Securing my drugs when outside of the country. Spend six month of the year in Mexico and had my return flight cancelled still not back to Canada and meds running out." (Bill)

Celebrating

"Being autistic, most autistic people feel less anxiety because it's logical we would be anxious at this time."
(Brandon Wulff, Autist)

"The ongoing success and momentum of the Seeking Help Project." (Eric Cashmore)

Missing

"Nothing has changed for me being Autistic I built a life around home and I love that life. I'm actually advocating that since all these adaptations for covid have been made. And they are exactly what Autistic folk have been asking for that in many ways we can never fully get rid of this kind of inclusive service provision." (Brandon Wulff – Autist)

"Being with my Daughters, either in their city or mine - and when we've managed a "date" it's been while practicing Physical distancing and not being able to hug them is the worst." (Kathleen)

Looking forward to

"Throwing a party to celebrate all the wonderful people in my life!" (Randy Davis)

"Being around friends. My grandfather passed away in February and we still haven't had his funeral." (Eric Cashmore)

Bob Leahy reports (continued)

"Living by yourself can bring up so many feelings like unworthy, unlovable and just the feeling of loss. The stress of being in public being a person with HIV has had an effect on my mental health."

What have we been most missing for the last three months or more? Similar answers to the above were common, often revolving around face to face connections. Surprisingly "sex" only appeared twice. But there was also a sense of loss. "I miss not having to worry about grabbing a mask and gloves before I leave the house" said one responder. "I miss being able to go out for regular shopping (groceries, etc.) without having to self-negotiate the time of day, the store I choose to shop at, or the time it takes to get through the door."

The survey also probed the challenges members were experiencing during the epidemic. Clearly some have been struggling. "Living by yourself can bring up so many feelings like unworthy, unlovable and just the feeling of loss. The stress of being in public being a person with HIV has had an effect on my mental health." Another: "As a long term survivor I have had triggers to the AIDS nightmare in the 80's." And another: "My challenge is that my HIV is being put on hold because I am unable to see my HIV team. They are an important part of my overall health."

Themes of loneliness turned up frequently. Here's what one responder said: "While I've always been a homebody, it has always been by choice. The COVID-19 crisis has all but removed my options and that is definitely a challenge. Plus, since my lifetime partner passed away last year, I've felt very much alone and really isolated. COVID-19 has punctuated that loneliness to a fairly palpable degree."

Other challenges mentioned included isolation, cabin fever, keeping healthy and fed, getting bloodwork done - plus concerns about becoming infected with COVID-19.

It's clear though that people living with HIV often display resilience. "What is one thing that you are celebrating right now, despite the COVID-19 situation?" is a question whose answers demonstrated our ability to be positive (no pun intended), despite everything. Here are some of the things people are celebrating despite the pandemic: a high CD4 count, still living and not catching COVID-19, living in a house with access to outside, "gardening in my yard, fresh veggies", work and personal projects, collecting old age security, "my dog, she keeps me active and sane", a new apartment, a new partner, the pleasure of relaxing at home.

The very act of surviving is also a cause for celebration for some. "I'm hanging in - that's worth celebrating because days can be pretty dismal."

Others count themselves lucky. "Because I watch so much news (even before all of this started to unfold), I realize how grateful I am to be relatively healthy" said one. "While I join the thousands around the world who are mourning COVID-related loss, I can't deny that I celebrate the fact that COVID hasn't touched my inner circle of family and friends."

It has been a struggle for many, but not without a beginning, a middle and end. Right now we occupy the middle. Let's hope the end is in sight. In the meantime, our members are coping – some well, some less so. Despite an overwhelming sense of loss evident in many answers, it's clear we are nothing if not survivors. Thank you, fellow members, for sharing your thoughts. And stay strong!

Brittany's message, continued

While COVID19 seems to be the most visible crisis; I can't help but reflect that it is not the only crisis Canadians as a whole are facing. Canada Day comes this year as many Canadians absorb the confrontations and accusations of our racist and broken systems. As we strive to distance ourselves socially and save our society from the worst-case scenarios with respect to COVID-19 we are losing the battle on many other issues Canadians are facing.

In February we watched First Nations Communities and Allies from coast to coast and across the globe protest the right to self-determination and authority of the Wet'suwet'en People and Indigenous People across their traditional ancestral territories. At least five people have died as a result of Police Wellness checks across Canada since April. Regis Korchinski-Paquet. Chantel Moore. D'Andre Campbell. Rodney Levi. Ejaz Choudry. This brings back to the forefront the need now more than ever for culturally appropriate mental health supports and responses. In May the murder of George Floyd brought back front and center the message that Black Lives Matter with global protests happening over several weeks. In Canada, the Opioid Crisis continues to hit people who use drugs and we are seeing a direct increase of preventable overdose deaths due to COVID19 and the closure of various services. This underscores the critical need for supervised consumption services and safe supply across Canada. It's estimated a quarter of a million Canadians are currently homeless. People are feeling lonely, isolated and disconnected.

As COVID empowers us to slow down it is time to ask ourselves what is going on in the world today; it also empowers us to ask ourselves what is possible. Now more than ever it is important to recognize just how interconnected we are as humans. Now more than ever it is important to check in with our friends, ask them how they are really doing, and what we can do to help support them.

Reset. Revisit. Rewind. Reflect. Renew. Recommit.

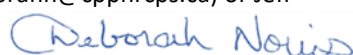
And perhaps this Canada Day we will collectively come to understand the uncomfortable truths on which Canada is founded upon – racism, power, privilege, oppression and genocide – and push our leaders and ourselves to make a nation we can be proud to call home. In the meantime you can find me on the frontlines, challenging the status quo. I don't care for the empty platitudes and I am only interested in actionable steps that move the agenda of justice forward.



From our Treasurer, Deborah Norris

We are currently working hard at completing our annual audit. We completed our quarterly report to the Public Health Agency of Canada June 30, 2020. Our Finance Committee continues to meet and review financial reports. We are meeting quarterly and reviewing quarterly reporting to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We are still looking for more members to assist with the Finance Committee so if you are interested, email me (deborahn@cpcnrpcs.ca) or Jeff (jrpotts@cpcnrpcs.ca).



Committees and working groups

The CPPN's Board of Directors has established a number of Committee and/or working group and your participation is encouraged.

Seats are available on the following:

- The Governance Committee
- The Finance Committee
- The Events Planning Committee
- The Communications Committee
- And, there are vacant seats on the Board of Directors.

Coming soon...

- The Evaluation Committee
- The Operations and Management Committee

One of our peers asked a couple of critical questions recently, thinking specifically of CPPN members who live with disabilities:

1. In terms of breaking the cycle of stigma and discrimination as related to people living with disabilities, what are the CPPN's "taboos"?
2. When will the CPPN implement a Voluntary Sector Screening Policy?

If you have feedback on these two important questions, and/or if you are interested in working with one of the Committees or joining the Board, send an email to:

BoardConseil@cpcnrpcs.ca.

CPPN by the numbers

Regrettably, 5 members cancelled their memberships since our last issue, but we welcomed 1 new member too. So, at the end of June, we have 202 members from across the country.

The first quarter of this Fiscal Year saw increases in visits to our Website (www.cppnrcps.ca):

- Returning visitors increased by 15%.
- Canadian visitors increased by 63%.
- And, visitors' direct access to our Website increased by 65%.
- Our Twitter followers increased to 650.
- Our Facebook followers increased to 508.
- And the total number of "likes" on our Facebook page increased to 15,281.

We welcome your feedback and your advice

Some of you responded to our recent survey and shared your personal experiences living with HIV and HIV co-infections during the COVID-19 crisis. Thank you for that.

Let's keep the communications channel open!

You are invited to share a bit more with us: we want to check in, and we would really appreciate your advice. Click [here](#) to complete a brief survey.

Thank you, once again!

From our Executive Director, Jeff Potts

Greetings all!

I can't believe that it's already the end of June and the CPPN is at the end of this year's first quarter. I honestly thought that COVID-19 would make the days, weeks, and months endless (and some days, it did feel that way), but the last three months are almost a blur. I read with great interest the comments that many of you submitted regarding your personal experiences during these very strange times and I truly hope that the warmth of the coming summer months and the longer hours of sunshine help to bolster your spirits and help ease up on the challenges that so many of you shared.

April, May, and June were extremely busy for me and I certainly wasn't immune to my own personal hills to climb thanks to COVID-19 and then my mother's near-fatal car accident last month. I thank my lucky stars for the very busy days (and some long nights) that my responsibilities to the CPPN and fulfilling my obligations to you, our members, helped keep me suitably focused on my work and sufficiently distant from any darkness that might have crept in to my personal life.

I have been immersed in the CPPN's operational management this past quarter – all with the incredible support and leadership of our Board of Directors and its members of its Committees. Of course, the COVID-19 crisis has forced us to re-think a work plan that we only just revised for the Public Health Agency, but I am confident that we will get the important work that we need to do together done – just in new and innovative ways. Stand by for what I hope will be some exciting developments in the ways we can engage with one another while we anxiously await our return to some sort of post-COVID normalcy.

In the meantime, though, I can share these important bits of information:

- Following some intense work with the Board and our Treasurer, the Public Health Agency approved our work plan and budget and released nearly 70% of our funding for this fiscal year.

- While I won't pre-empt our Treasurer's more fulsome report to you all in the very near future, I am happy to share that our financial audit for fiscal year ended March 31, 2020 is complete and I expect that the Auditor will present very favourable findings to the Board at its July meeting.
- The CPPN, again this year, worked closely with the Canadian Society for International Health as part of its national advisory committee with a view to the Canada Pavilion at AIDS 2020: Virtual. This collaboration opened the door for several CPPN members to attend the conference by way of participation grants. I don't yet know how many members applied for the grants and will be participating, but I am excited to know that one way or another, we will be well-represented.
- And, not without some very specific challenges, we are on track to present the CPPN's (draft) mid-term evaluation.

Of course, this isn't all of what's preoccupied my time over the last three months, but these are the highlights. I really do look forward to working with our leadership team and with you to roll out the next three months with specific attention to navigating the ongoing COVID-19 situation to ensure that we have meaningful opportunities to engage with one another and to safeguard, in some novel ways, as much of our planned activities as possible. Your wisdom, insight, and creative thinking is always welcome too... please don't hesitate to connect with me at jrpotts@cppnrcps.ca to share some of your own innovative visions. And, finally, if you haven't already visited our new Website, check it out at www.cppnrcps.ca.

Your ideas for content and contributions are encouraged. Be well and stay safe everyone.
Cheers!



Canada must protect the rights of sex workers during COVID-19 by ensuring access to emergency income supports



Picture source: [Amnesty.ca](https://www.amnesty.ca)

On May 22, over 20 women's rights and equality-seeking organizations in Canada wrote a joint letter to the federal government, calling for low-barrier emergency income supports for sex workers, who thus far have been left out of

the pandemic response in Canada. In response, rather than moving forward with a mechanism to provide income supports to sex workers, government responded in a subsequent meeting with advocates by suggesting that local organizations working with sex workers apply to the \$350 million Emergency Community Support Fund announced in May by Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development Ahmed Hussen. Most sex worker rights groups and other grassroots organizations serving marginalized communities do not fit the stated criteria to apply for such funds because they are often not registered non-profits or charities, and are made up of the marginalized individuals who have been left out of the pandemic response. In addition, the Fund does not cover income replacements.

On June 16th, 2020 the CPPN Board of Directors endorsed this letter:

May 22, 2020
Minister Maryam Monsef
Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, 22 rue Eddy, Gatineau, QC J8X 2V6
RE: Emergency income supports for sex workers urgently needed

Dear Minister Monsef,

Thank you for your steadfast commitment to women's rights and gender equality, including your prompt action to mobilize funding to address the gendered impacts of the pandemic. We write at this time to urge that—further to your mandate to ensure that GBA+ is conducted of all government decisions—you ensure that sex workers and other women and gender diverse people working in informal economies and criminalized contexts, are not left out of the COVID-19 response.

Sex workers are one of the most marginalized groups in Canada. Since the start of the pandemic, many sex workers have stopped direct-contact sex work to comply with social distancing guidelines. Others are out of work with the closure of strip clubs and massage parlours. Some sex workers—including those most marginalized—are not able to stop working and face an increased risk of surveillance. Most sex workers abruptly lost all their income, but because of the precarious and criminalized nature of their work, many sex workers do not qualify for CERB or other emergency income supports.

Internationally, UNAIDS released a public statement on April 8, 2020, highlighting the concern that “as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, sex workers all over the world are experiencing hardship, a total loss of income and increased discrimination and harassment.” The statement noted that “when they are excluded from COVID-19 social protection responses, sex workers are faced with putting their safety, their health and their lives at increased risk just to survive.” UNAIDS “calls on all countries to take immediate, critical action, grounded in human rights principles, to protect the health and rights of sex workers” such as by ensuring “access to national social protection schemes for sex workers, including income support schemes.”

Faced with this situation, many sex workers' organizations across Canada have conducted community fundraisers, in most cases providing \$100 stipends to sex workers. But \$100 is insufficient for sex workers to cover the cost of housing, food, and other essential for their families.

Sex workers are stigmatized and targeted by the public, law enforcement and government, and many workers legitimately fear discrimination and avoid contact with government and social services. More marginalized workers may not have bank accounts. The criminalization of sex work is a direct barrier for sex workers who cannot and do not want to risk interacting with government agencies. This means that any government efforts to include these marginalized communities in emergency income supports must rely on civil society organizations with strong community connections who are best placed to receive funds and directly channel them to those who need them, and can provide anonymity and safety.

The Prime Minister said that “Only by protecting each other can we protect ourselves.” To protect each other, and to ensure that human rights are at the centre of Canada's pandemic response, the federal government's pandemic response must recognize the vulnerabilities of particular communities and be non-discriminatory. Canada must guarantee equal access to income supports for sex workers.

Minister Monsef, we call on you to take action to comply with UNAIDS' urgent recommendations. As immediate first steps that should include:

- Urgently allocating funding to civil society organizations working directly with sex workers, with flexible granting mechanisms allowing organizations to transmit funds using pre-paid debit cards and other low-barrier methods to the communities they serve; and
- Meeting with sex workers' rights organizations to discuss their concerns and jointly develop response strategies.

(Continued on page 6)

The rights of sex workers during COVID-19, continued

We very much welcomed your Ministry's swift action in transferring funds to Women's Shelters Canada, empowering that organization to direct funds directly to women's shelters across the country. We are asking you to do the same to ensure that some of the most marginalized women and gender diverse people are afforded the same access to emergency income supports as other people out of work across Canada.

We hope to hear back from you soon. The Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, an alliance of 26 sex worker rights groups across Canada—the majority of which are run by and for people who sell or trade sex—is available to virtually meeting with you at your earliest convenience to further discuss this matter. For more information and to schedule a meeting please email Jenn Clamen, National Coordinator, at contact@sexworklawreform.com. We plan to release this Open Letter publicly on May 30, and look forward to being able to include updated information about the government's response to these concerns by that time.

Thank you very much for your urgent attention to this pressing human rights issue. We look forward to hearing further from you and your officials.

Sincerely, Signed by:

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights,
Amnesty International Canada (English)
Amnistie internationale Canada francophone
BC Civil Liberties Association
Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform
Canada Without Poverty
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian Civil Liberties Association
DisAbled Women's Network of Canada
Egale Canada
Fédération des femmes du Québec
International Women's Rights Project
Inter Pares
Oxfam Canada
National Association of Women and the Law
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg
West Coast LEAF Women's Legal Education & Action Fund (LEAF)
Women's Shelters Canada
YWCA Canada

Your perspective is important to us.

Let us know if you would like to contribute to a future issue of Interconnected.

Send an email to connect@cppnrcps.ca.

Are you a CPPN Member? If not, would you like to be?

Click [here](#) to complete our Membership Registration form.

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Canadian Positive People Network | Réseau canadien des personnes séropositives
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