



Executive Summary

To mark its 20th Anniversary, the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation led a community-based, collaborative series of conversations to engage the broad community of people who most care about PWA in creating a vision and strategy for an energizing future.

Through these conversations, we heard many moving stories of what PWA has meant to our clients, volunteers, staff and other community partners. We heard over and over again that PWA is “**home**” to people who struggle to find affirmation, acceptance, and warmth. We heard that PWA’s strength is our grassroots client focus.

Most of all, we heard that PWA is a critical site for connection, for practical support that people can count on, and a space for people with HIV and AIDS to see “**life after HIV.**” PWA is a “**welcoming space**” in the sense of being both a real place and a welcoming community.

The stories from our community helped us realize that PWA can be a permanent version of the PHA Lounge at the World AIDS Conference in Toronto in August 2006. Building on our experience at the Conference, we re-imagined PWA as “**a place to be positive.**” We see PWA as a comfortable, revitalizing, safe space where PHAs can feel affirmed and gain access to practical services, a warm, welcoming environment and sense of community, and physical space that can be used for many purposes, including social connection.

To continue creating this space, PWA will focus our work in three strategic elements:

1. An Affirming Connection Place
2. A Point of Access
3. A Practical Direct Support Services Provider

At PWA, I feel accepted, I feel safe. It’s where I knew for the first time that there are other people like me. Who I am is okay – more than okay, I feel strong.

— a client and volunteer

making a positive difference

Mission: The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation exists to promote the health and well-being of all people living with HIV/AIDS by providing accessible, direct, and practical support services.

1. An Affirming Connection Place

Creating the experience of a permanent zone that reflects the “PHA Lounge” means building on and expanding the aspects of PWA that our clients tell us feel like a safe harbour, a second home, and a comfortable place of acceptance where they feel connected and less isolated.

To formalize this welcoming, positive space, we will:

- a. reconfigure the physical space of PWA,
- b. ensure that clients have access to services in multiple languages,
- c. reinforce the internal culture of care and concern, and ensuring staff and volunteers act and use language in ways that foster acceptance and welcome,
- d. reshape our existing health promotion and social support programs to increase peer support connections and opportunities.

2. A Point of Access

Clients can expect to be welcomed, and to be supported in accessing the broader PHA network of support as seamlessly as possible and in response to the full range of needs that span the diversity of all PHAs’ experience.

We will sharpen this role by providing clients with:

- a. information about what support is available,
- b. the means to access it,
- c. support to navigate key sources for basic needs like income support and access to treatment.

3. A Practical Direct Support Services Provider

Along with resources and guidance to access the broader PHA network of support, we will continue to be a responsive grassroots agency providing Practical Direct Support Services – food, income support, access to medication and health promotion services — and to provide immediate crisis support.

To strengthen and streamline core practical services, we will:

- a. conduct an analysis of our programs, to ensure that they are best serving our clients’ needs,
- b. continue to build on staff skills to support immediate crises for clients, either psycho-social or related to concrete needs such as income, access to medication or food.

“When I first started using the services at PWA, I had all three of my kids living with me. The support services at this organization really kept me and my family together. I believe that the food bank at PWA has literally kept me alive at times. And I also believe that through PWA’s support, I found my strength to live. I really believe it saved me from suicide. Knowing that I could go to PWA and see others with the same diagnosis, with no fear of being ostracized, just plainly being able to be us, is more than I could put into words. All that PWA offers has made me a survivor, made me who I am today.”

— a client since 1989

