



ENGAGING



BUILDING  
CAPACITY



EMPOWERING  
DREAMS

TORONTO PEOPLE  
WITH AIDS FOUNDATION  
2011–2016 STRATEGIC PLAN



## Our Mission

We engage people living with HIV/AIDS in enhancing their health and wellbeing through practical and therapeutic support services and broader social change, and we inspire them to live into their dreams and discoveries.

## Our Vision

We live in affirming, sustaining communities where we find inspiration and support for our dreams, health, well-being and meaningful contributions.

## Our Five Strategic Directions

Capacity Builder

Welcoming and  
Healing Space

Creative  
Connector

Health and  
Well-being  
Champion

Practical and  
Therapeutic  
Program Delivery

## Enablers

Engagement Cycle  
Holistic Health and Well-Being  
Client Self-Determination  
Language and Storytelling  
Partnerships

# WHO WE ARE AND WHO WE ARE BECOMING

This strategic plan was created through many rich conversations, focused on the best of PWA now, and what PWA is being called to become into the future. This was a time of reflection, storytelling, listening, questions, metaphor, and deep, insightful thinking about how PWA can most meaningfully continue to evolve.

Through these conversations, an understanding of the “essence” of PWA emerged. This nucleus is easiest to see in a few representative stories:

*“Would it be ok if I just came back for a cup of coffee and to listen to the laughter”*

*From a client after an intake appointment*

*“Increasingly, I feel that the PHA identity is losing strength and meaning, but I feel that PWA is the exception to this general trend. I feel that PWA is continuing to find the strength and the resources (and these are not financial resources I’m talking about, but rather resources that speak to the “soul” and identity of the organization and the people it exists for) to think and act creatively and inclusively about PHAs’ needs and our identity.”*

*PHA and Community Partner*

*“I came to PWA to get a jar of vitamins and shop at the Essentials Market – and this touched off waves of engagement that enabled me to start taking care of myself, get treatment for substance abuse and ultimately, find a new sense of purpose.”*

*Client*

*“Before coming to PWA, I felt very medicalized. PWA gave me back the missing pieces of overall health and well-being. As a volunteer, I’m reconnecting with the world, have validation, engagement times 50, got me out of my own HIV. It reminded me that there’s still room to grow – still things to learn and contribute. And for me, it’s a stepping stone back into a workplace setting.”*

*Client & Volunteer*

*“Through volunteering with PWA, I met a woman who was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and who had been pregnant, separated from the father and had no place to live. She told me about how PWA had guided her and made her into the mother she was today.”*

*Volunteer*

*About a client who is a sex trade worker:*

*“Her involvement with PWA increased her sense of confidence and self worth, and led to her doing a seminar with police. She came to realize that she matters and has a voice.”*

*PWA staff*

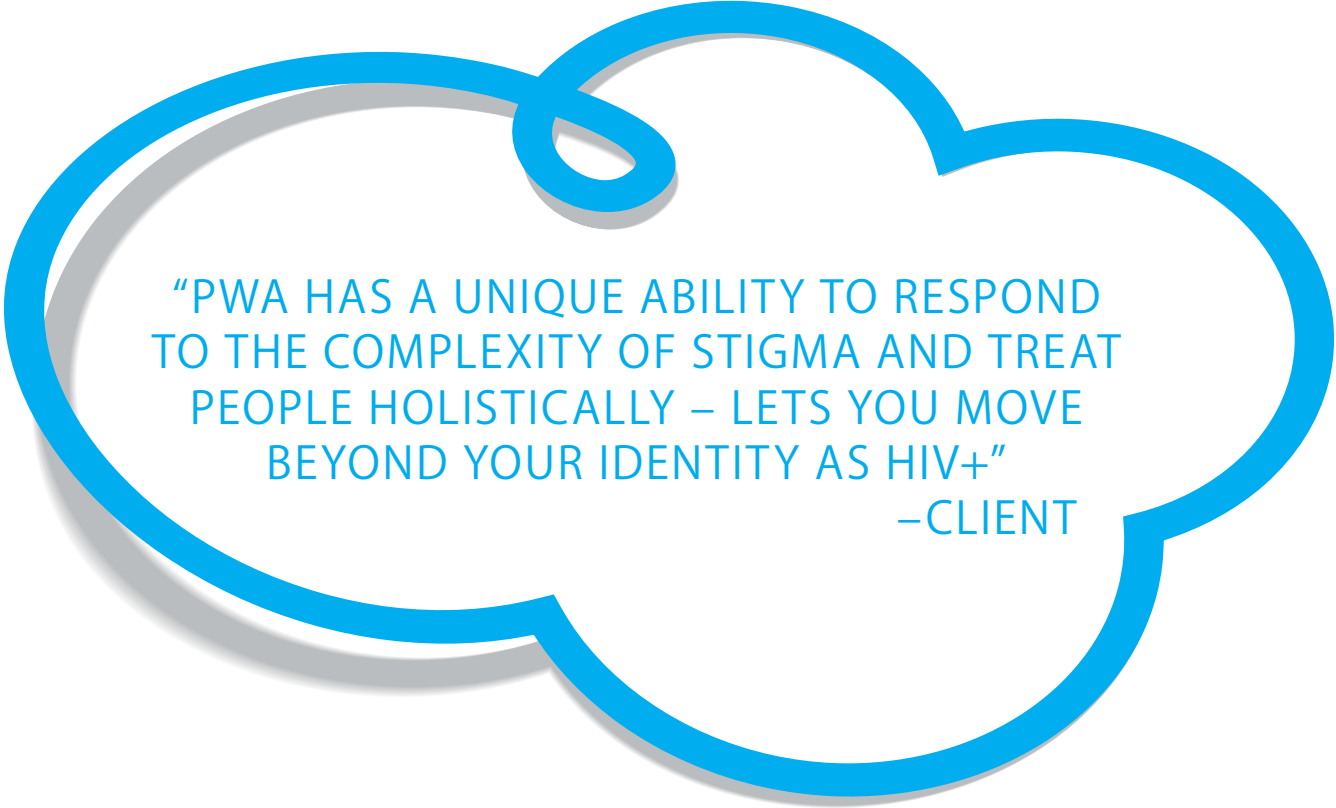
*““So many of PWA’s activities serve so many purposes – like reducing stigma. My mother’s reaction to my talking to her about my status was completely transformed by her experience of support and community on the Bike Rally.”*

*PHA and Staff member*

Threaded through these stories of PWA at its best are several core themes: welcoming; inclusive; motivating; relevant; adaptable; responsive; mutuality and collaboration; joy; safety; compassion; sex positivity; knowledge; proactivity; accessible; affirming; inspiring; empowering; practicality; voices that matter; communities; tiny steps that lead to huge transformations.

At its heart, PWA is a unique blend of practical services, welcoming space that fosters a strong sense of community, and the ability to meet people where they are in a way that enables them to make meaningful, empowering steps. In one conversation, this was described as “this agency has its own DNA, which will keep evolving long after we are a part of it... we are more than an agency serving people, we belong to the community we serve, we are theirs.”

In describing PWA, people frequently turned to metaphors to describe the emotional feel and impact of being associated with the organization. To convey some of the “essence” of PWA, we’ve included a few of the most resonant metaphors in sidebars as illustrators for both people’s connection to PWA and the emotional richness of the conversations about its future.



“PWA HAS A UNIQUE ABILITY TO RESPOND TO THE COMPLEXITY OF STIGMA AND TREAT PEOPLE HOLISTICALLY – LETS YOU MOVE BEYOND YOUR IDENTITY AS HIV+”  
–CLIENT

“WOULD IT BE OK IF I JUST CAME BACK FOR A CUP OF COFFEE AND TO LISTEN TO THE LAUGHTER” FROM A CLIENT AFTER AN INTAKE APPOINTMENT

#### **What PWA is Becoming**

Throughout the conversations, we reflected on the question, “What is PWA being called to become?” We explored what we’ve learned is meaningful to our clients, discussed global, local and national directions in working with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA), and took stock of changes we’d already made in response to emerging needs. We observed that over the past few years, we’d strengthened our foundation of practical and direct services and being a welcoming, healing space, and we’d

also started to intentionally focus on meaningful engagement of people living with HIV/AIDS, through our staff roles and volunteer involvement in our office, Board and in initiatives like the Essentials Market, the Speakers Bureau, Poz Prevention and the Peer Leader programs. We’ve also increasingly taken on a health promotion framework, in our direct service programs, our poz prevention and anti-stigma work. As we began our strategic planning work, we held engagement and health promotion as core elements informing our next strategic direction.

“PEOPLE THINK WE’RE DEALING WITH POVERTY AND FOOD – IT’S TRUE IN SOME CASES, AND WE’RE ALSO ABOUT CAPACITY BUILDING AND DREAMING, ENGAGING CLIENTS IN THE WAY WE PROVIDE SERVICES – WE LOOK FOR THE QUESTION/SUPPORT/LENS THAT HELPS THE PERSON DREAM IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY MOVE FROM “I NEED FOOD” TO “THIS TRAINING PROGRAM SOUNDS REALLY INTERESTING.”

When we stretched ourselves to imagine the PWA of the future, we envisioned continuing to be who we are now — and more.

We want to continue meeting people where they are emotionally – and to expand that to reach out more and meet them physically where they are.

We want to be even more intentional about putting the meaningful engagement of people living with HIV/AIDS at the centre of our work, pushing the curve on peer leadership, client-directed service delivery and involving PHAs at all levels of the agency.

We want to expand the diversity of people participating in PWA.

We want to integrate the idea of health and well-being into all of our work.

We want to work increasingly in strong, generative partnerships with other agencies.

We want to find the language that best expresses how we want to describe ourselves and the identity of the agency as we move forward

And we want to share our knowledge and experience far beyond PWA to continue contributing to the creation of an affirming world.

These hopes took the form of a new vision and an enriched mission:

#### **Our Mission**

We engage people living with HIV/AIDS in enhancing their health and wellbeing through practical and therapeutic support services and broader social change, and we inspire them to live into their dreams and discoveries.

#### **Our Vision**

We live in affirming, sustaining communities where we find inspiration and support for our dreams, health, well-being and meaningful contributions.

#### **Our Philosophy**

These are based on our **foundational philosophy**, which resonates more than ever and remains unchanged:

People living with HIV/AIDS play a crucial role in the governance and operation of the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation, but, most important, are its heart and soul. Although PWA seeks partnerships in support of fulfilling its Mission, its response to HIV/AIDS is, more than anything else, inspired by the voices and experience of people living with HIV/AIDS.

“Would it be ok if I just came back for a cup of coffee and to listen to the laughter” -From a client after an intake appointment

**Our mission and vision will be fulfilled through five new, interconnected strategic directions:**

#### **Capacity Builder**

*PWA will enhance awareness, resilience, strength and knowledge among the members of its immediate community and in the broader social world.*

#### **Health & Well-being Champion**

*PWA will implement a holistic approach to service delivery to enhance the health and well being of PHAs, and will spearhead opportunities to advocate for holistic care for PHAs within our communities and around the world.*

#### **Welcoming and Healing Space**

*PWA will strengthen its role as a socially inclusive, safe, diverse and open space, where people experience affirmation, joy and inspiration, and have creative and meaningful expressions of everyone’s experiences, lives and knowledge.*

#### **Practical and Therapeutic Program Delivery**

PWA will continue or enhance all core practical and therapeutic programs, increasingly incorporating people living with HIV/AIDS in defining and delivering programs.

#### **Creative Connector**

*PWA will enhance its role as a vibrant hub that connects people, creates communities, and facilitates access to diverse services.*

**Underpinning these five directions are five enablers,  
which will be incorporated into all of our work:**

**Holistic Health and Well-being**

All of PWA's work is designed to promote "whole person" health through therapeutic services, advancing knowledge about health for people living with HIV/AIDS, meaningful engagement and concrete resources such as nutritional support and housing. Holistic health is embedded in everything from massage services to the sense of community that arises from involvement with volunteering, accessing services or participating in the Friends for Life Bike Rally.

**Client Self-Determination**

As with the other four enablers, client-self-determination is threaded through all strategic directions and every service. PWA sees its role as supporting clients to determine their own pathways, naming their own dreams – recognizing that making choices and gaining a sense of control over one's life is a central aspect of health and well-being.

**Language and Storytelling**

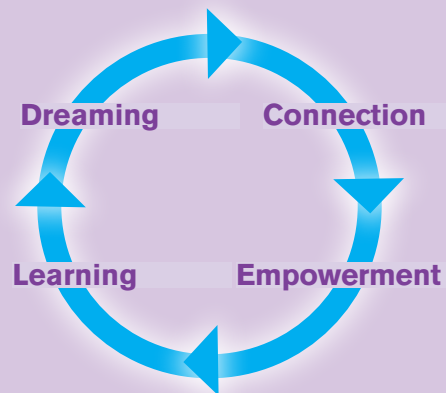
Sharing stories, recognizing ourselves in each other's stories, being inspired by self-expression, learning from our stories of strength and accomplishment, and choosing the language for what we call ourselves – these are all essential to creating community, and to connecting across diversity. Artistic expression and storytelling will be enhanced across PWA's work.

**Partnerships**

PWA's vision for the future includes many diverse partnerships, including programs that may be invented at PWA then enacted in collaboration with others, creating opportunities for organizations that offer services different from PWA's to connect more closely to our clients, finding opportunities for satellite offerings for services, and collaborating on research, knowledge development and sharing ideas.

**Engagement Cycle**

(Connection/Empowerment/Learning/Dreaming)  
PWA recognizes the transformative power of participation. Engagement runs through all elements of PWA, and is centred around providing the resources that enable all people involved in PWA to find their own pathways to meaningful involvement – involvement in their own health and well-being, in community, in providing services, in imagining and living into their dreams.



“SO MANY OF PWA’S ACTIVITIES SERVE SO MANY PURPOSES – LIKE REDUCING STIGMA. MY MOTHER’S REACTION TO MY STATUS WAS COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED BY HER EXPERIENCE OF SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY ON THE BIKE RALLY.” –PHA AND STAFF MEMBER

### **Engagement at the Core of Planning**

The strategy for the next generation at PWA has emerged through numerous diverse voices. These include: many conversations among staff; the leadership of a core team that included staff, community partners, clients, volunteers, and Board members; interviews between core team members and other stakeholders, and a planning summit that distilled and enriched the many other conversations.

All told, more than 120 people contributed to the planning, comprising community partners, current, past and potential clients, volunteers, health providers, front line staff and PWA managers, HIV+ community members, funders, managers of other ASOs, and other community members, such as queer media and business owners.

Through this process, we discovered: What people value about PWA; What PWA is being called to be over the next 5 years; Strategic Directions and Enablers. In crafting our renewed mission and vision and strategic focus for the next several years through this participatory process, we confirmed that engagement is at the core of PWA. PWA is already a leader in GIPA/MIPA (greater/meaningful involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS), and is at our best when we make space for everyone’s voices, and create opportunities for everyone to participate in identifying and implementing what we should be doing. PWA is now poised and committed to intentionally and operationally take engagement to the next level.

Naming engagement as one of our core enablers is both a statement of how we will go forward, and an acknowledgement of one of the core strengths already at work in PWA. Our planning process demonstrated how rich, energizing and connecting it is to create space for meaningful involvement of everyone in our community. In the course of creating a plan, we strengthened relationships, enhanced our respect for each other, and created new partnerships.



## The Five Strategic Directions in Detail

These five directions encapsulate where PWA will focus its energy and resources over the next five years, and lay out what people can expect to experience and see.

### Capacity Builder

*PWA will enhance awareness, resilience, strength and knowledge among the members of its immediate community and in the broader social world.*

#### **Objectives:**

By 2014: PWA will have developed forms of capacity development across all agency activities, including client services, volunteer activities and staff opportunities. We will continue to provide collaborative leadership by working with other organizations and sharing knowledge in local, provincial, national and international forums.

By 2016: In addition to capacity development across PWA's own programs and services, we will have a strong, sustainable program of capacity development, knowledge translation and training programs for other organizations and communities, and we will explore social enterprise opportunities that build capacity for individuals and communities.

#### **Goals:**

Guided by each client's self-determined needs, ensure our programming and services help each client to articulate and work toward their dreams and possibilities.

Develop a new, innovative Volunteer Program based on a life skills model that recognizes meaningful engagement and capacity building opportunities for all volunteers.

Continue to collaborate with and support other agencies across the province and country through sharing, training and capacity building opportunities.

Guided by staff voices, strengthen personal and professional development programs for staff, particularly those living with HIV/AIDS.

Meaningful and creative engagement of PHAs in program development and delivery.

Drawing on our unique knowledge base of lived experience, develop a research agenda and build research capacity and literacy among staff, volunteers and clients.

Explore opportunities for social enterprise.

Recognize the value of capacity building for individuals, regardless of whether that enhanced capacity is put to use within PWA or externally in the broader community.



**Creativity** and **empowerment** are core forces in PWA. Everyone who is part of the PWA community has unique specific needs – PWA sees its role as providing the resources and framework for people to articulate and live into their individual dreams, aspirations and discoveries. The image of art supplies and canvases available for each person's artistry underlines the respect for the individual and aspirational aspects of PWA. It also points to a growing recognition of the importance of creativity in enabling people to express their life experiences – through art, social media and through storytelling and conversations that bring together diverse voices – everyone's story has the potential to be brought to life in a community art show.

## Welcoming and Healing Space

*PWA will strengthen its role as a socially inclusive, safe, diverse and open space, where people experience affirmation, joy and inspiration, and have creative and meaningful expressions of our experiences, lives and knowledge.*

By 2014: We will have more informal social spaces and opportunities, and we will have expanded the diversity of the community using our space. We will have meaningful conversation spaces that involve staff, volunteers, Board and clients as peers. We will have opportunities for staff to share informal conversation to deepen shared knowledge and expand ideas.

By 2016: We will be regarded as a community centre as well as an ASO. We will continue enhancing the voices of PHAs and their allies through artistic programming and a robust social media framework. And we will have a profound role in dramatically reducing stigma through outreach with allied professions and through social media.

### Goals:

Determine how to enhance meaningful spaces for clients, staff, volunteers, Board members, and other community members to participate in peer conversations.

Explore opportunities to further improve access.

Renew the language we use to describe the people connected to PWA and the services we offer.

Incorporate welcoming and healing space into satellite programming and services partnerships.

Develop a creative and social media strategies to increase opportunities for artistic expression and storytelling, and bring the voices of PHAs and their allies into public conversations.



### PWA as community garden

The image of a community garden encapsulates two of PWA's essential forces: *inclusivity* and *engagement*, while effectively reflecting the important role of nutrition on overall health and well-being as well as its role in creating community and a welcoming space. A community garden is a shared space where individuals are given free rein to grow whatever is most meaningful to them – vegetables, flowers, grasses, vines. At its best, PWA makes space for diverse people to develop what is most important to them, in community, creating a revitalizing patch of earth.

## Creative Connector

*PWA will enhance its role as a vibrant hub that connects people and communities and facilitates access to diverse services.*

By 2014: We will be proactively reaching out to potential clients and underserved communities to increase participation in our services. We will have strong partnerships in place for new and enhanced shared programming with allies to work with clients with complex issues.

By 2016: We will expand our community reach beyond our own physical space to include other delivery channels and locations. We will have a strong network established to support our clients to access diverse services from other organizations, and we will have a rich program of multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral services and opportunities.

### Goals:

Identify needs and mutually meaningful partnerships with other entities for clients with complex situations.

Further explore satellite partnerships and creative opportunities to go beyond the ASO 'silo' and develop critical multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral programming that improves overall health and well-being of PHAs.

Create a program to do intake at locations where possible clients are – coffee shops, streets, diagnostic results sites, etc.

Create a strategy to expand reach to underserved communities (youth, mental health, addiction, homeless, women, non-gay) as well as unreached populations (professional, beyond the community of HIV/AIDS)

Enhance current outreach programs to broaden engagement of PHAs.



### PWA as a vibrant hub

Many people reflected on PWA's critical role as "more than an ASO," as the soul of a **community**. The images of a highway cloverleaf, busy railway station or airport represent PWA's role as a **connector**. Like an airline hub, PWA is a source of resources and pathways, a convergent point where many different people find their unique routes, a place where people come together on their own journeys. Like some familiar commuter routes, PWA provides reliable, practical services. And like more exotic options, PWA offers the opportunity for each individual to explore and embark on the voyage that will take them to the destinations they've always dreamed of.

## Health and Well-being Champion

*PWA will implement a holistic approach to service delivery to enhance the health and well being of PHAs, and will spearhead opportunities to advocate for holistic care for PHAs within our communities and around the world. PWA will enlarge its role in supporting individual, holistic care for PHAs and in spearheading a conversation about patient/client empowerment and overall health and well-being.*

By 2014: We will have developed evidence and programming opportunities that acknowledge the mutual value of PHA involvement in educating health care practitioners. In addition, we will have expanded health and well-being programming within PWA, and will have partnerships in place with other organizations to raise the profile of health promotion related to HIV/AIDS and sexual health.

By 2016: We will have a recognized voice on issues of health promotion and wellness related to HIV/AIDS, through research, social media and participation in public conversations and forums.

### Goals:

Support PHAs in determining what health and wellness means to them as individuals, and support them to have more control over their health.

Champion the inclusion and program development for PHAs in the education of healthcare providers.

Develop a storehouse for the stories of PHAs to support research and social media (e.g., dialogue, video-blogging, message boards, etc.)

Build strength of health providers through direct support and through enabling our clients to work with health providers.

Review and enhance Speaker's Bureau and other outreach programs to further integrate health goals.

Explore opportunities to join and lead local, provincial, national and international conversations to strengthen health champion programming and messaging.



## Practical and Therapeutic Program Delivery

PWA will continue or enhance all core practical and therapeutic programs, increasingly incorporating PHAs in defining and delivering programs.

By 2014: We will have intentionally incorporated opportunities for engagement into all aspects of service delivery and agency programming. Client follow-up programming after intake will provide opportunities to engage in a more meaningful way and to support improved service navigation.

By 2016: We will have linked practical and therapeutic programming opportunities to satellite and partnership programming.

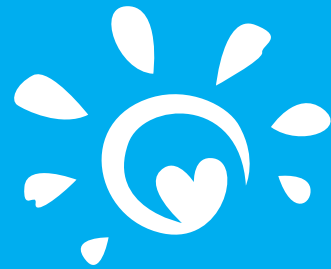
### Goals:

Develop program growth and adjustments that incorporate the Engagement Cycle into all program delivery through both staff and volunteers.

Consciously explore therapeutic programming opportunities with new, multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral partners that build on the holistic health and well-being approach.

Create expanded wellness space inside PWA, building on and beyond complementary and alternative therapies to include diverse opportunities that keep us healthy.

Create partnerships with agencies like Fife House for shared programming on health and wellness.



### PWA Services – transactional to transformational

In one of the sentinel stories of PWA at its best, someone described how his initial request of PWA was simply for a jar of vitamins, and how this basic act of caring for his body moved him in the direction of making multiple choices to improve his physical and mental health – and ultimately, to re-engage in a meaningful way in the broader world. PWA assumes that only you can define what **transformation** and living into your dreams might mean for you – but will provide whatever small steps might help you move toward that. These steps include practical supports like food and vitamins, and they also include recognizing and supporting the **whole-health** and well-being needs of everyone who participates in the PWA community.

**T**he strategic planning process was generated as PWA is entering its 25th year of existence. During that time, what it means to be a person living with HIV/AIDS has transformed multiple times, and PWA has adapted as different community needs have emerged. Our planning for the future is planted in the assumption that the shape, composition and needs of our community will continue to evolve. Over two and a half decades, we have provided services to over 8,000 clients. We commit to staying embedded within and connected to the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS community needs, and adapting who we are and what we offer.

The Board of Directors would like to thank everyone who engaged in the process of developing Engaging, Building Capacity, Empowering Dreams: Toronto People With AIDS Foundation 2011-2016 Strategic Plan. A special thank you to:



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