

FROM THE FRONT LINES

What's happening across Canada



ASOs Go Viral

Canadian AIDS service organizations are using online social media to connect with their clients. CATIE educator **Melissa Egan** shares her favourites folder.

AIDS service organizations (ASOs) have seen the future—and it's online. On the way out are newsletter-mailing parties with free pizza. Keeping in touch and connecting with clients and community are getting easier with the widespread use of online social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. This issue of From the Front Lines goes online and points you to ASOs from your region and across the country.

Facebook



After becoming one of the most popular social networking sites on the Web, Facebook is growing in popularity as a way for ASOs to promote their events, fundraise and build community—both virtual and real. Once a person or group has signed up for a free account, they can create pages that are then used to post information, make connections and interact with other users.

Vancouver-based **YouthCO AIDS Society** uses Facebook to announce its events. Fresh graphics and detailed information on activities are available to all and it's tough to resist their sweet and sassy invitations, such as the one to their 16th anniversary party Acquired Taste. The group doesn't just promote sexual health and HIV/AIDS awareness through near-daily status updates, it also uses this virtual world to make real-world changes, as when it gave away a year's supply of condoms (365 to be exact) through the page.

www.facebook.com and then search for YouthCo

AIDS Saskatoon's Facebook page has more than 400 fans. The tight-knit community keeps in touch through the site's status updates and members frequently post messages to each other, maintaining a vibrant and connected volunteer base. Updates include enthusiastic calls to join the agency at local events such as Saskatoon Pride and tempting tickets for raffles and other fundraising efforts. Posting pictures of agency activities, such as its volunteer party or annual community needle cleanup day, makes everyone want to stop by the page to see the action!

www.facebook.com/aidssaskatoon



Blogs

Blogging, a unique approach to online writing, hit the Net in the late 1990s, with people posting what were often personal diaries. While no longer created only by individuals, blogs still provide a personal perspective on a topic. Several ASOs write blogs that provide both information and an HIV-positive view on life. The ability for readers to add a comment on each post allows people with HIV to share their experiences and for a community to form around the storytellers.

Vancouver's **Positive Women's Network (PWN)** has an appealing blog on its sunny website. Blog posts are consistently interesting, informative and inspiring. The blog is written by Monique, Janet and Miriam—three women who each bring their unique experience of HIV to the site. Monique posts stories about online dating as a positive person and moving beyond survival and learning to thrive. Janet, PWN's communications coordinator, keeps the blog lively with links to other websites and new support groups available in the city. Miriam brings a thoughtful analysis of multiculturalism and posts notices of events for women with HIV.

pwn.bc.ca/blog

A vital and energetic community of HIV-positive bloggers can be found at **positivelite.com**, a website by Toronto's Brian Finch, whose vision has created a robust roundup of resources and personal stories. Finch shares his experience of everything from improv workshops to facial fillers with honesty and humour. Each contributor to the site, aimed at positive gay men and their friends, writes with their own unique style and personality. Don Short, an artist and case worker at AIDS Durham Region, is one of the bloggers. He muses on happiness and travel and frequently shares his artwork with readers.

www.positivelite.com



Twitter

Twitter is one of the newest forms of social media, and it pushes the boundary of short and sweet. With Twitter, messages—called “tweets”—contain just 140 characters and are sent out to subscribers. To follow your favourite ASO all you need to do is set up a free account on twitter.com

The **AIDS Committee of Toronto** uses Twitter to stay in touch with its community members and volunteers via creative one-liners. Updates about recent HIV-related news stories from local and national media, callouts for help at events and even job postings are sung by this creative birdie. Whoever’s in charge of those 140 characters uses them well!

twitter.com/ACToronto

AIDS Moncton has personalized its Twitter page with a laundry line of colourful condoms, and the breezy updates are a perfect match. Subscribers receive links to HIV news and information, invitations to events such as the annual AIDS walk fundraiser and updates about other sexual health resources. Known to her Twitter subscribers simply as Kate, special events coordinator Kate Doyle’s talky tweets make the organization’s twitter feed a handy way to keep up with this energetic group.

twitter.com/AIDSMoncton

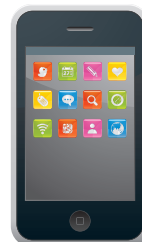


YouTube

Home to millions of videos, this site is the most popular online video community. A quick search will turn up film clips, music videos, home movies and the incredible work coming out of ASOs in Canada and around the world.

The YouTube page of **AIDS Community Care Montreal** is actually a channel, meaning it’s updated regularly. You’re encouraged to subscribe so when a new chapter of its “Safer Sex News You Need” series is online, you’ll be the first to know. The videos, which begin with a tongue-in-cheek history of sex, are refreshing in their approach to sexual health education. Snappy dialogue, bold visuals and great music all come together successfully to make safer sex interesting and entertaining.

www.youtube.com/user/ACCMontreal



iPhone Apps

Apple’s iPhone has taken the cell phone market by storm and the applications (or “apps”)—programs that make use of the phone’s computing ability—used with them have turned the cell phone into a rich source of mobile information.

Toronto Public Health has come up with an original application that’s sexy and informative. M2Men is a health resource for gay men. Install the application on your iPhone and quickly locate local ASOs, popular clubs and bars with free condom dispensers and access lots of great information, ranging from which sexually transmitted infections can be transmitted during specific sex acts to tips on HIV disclosure. The application is well designed, easy to use and, above all, right at your fingertips!

Search for M2Men in the App store.

This is not a complete overview. If there’s an ASO using social media that you think we should know about, send the info our way at info@catie.ca.

Other Online Resources and Communities



AIDS Calgary blog
aidscalgary.blogspot.com

Health Initiative for Men
www.checkhimout.ca

AIDS Committee of London
Twitter feed
twitter.com/AIDSLondon

The following ASOs have Facebook pages. Search for them by name on www.facebook.com:

- **AIDS Committee of Guelph and Wellington County**
- **AIDS PEI**
- **AIDS Vancouver Island**
- **HIV Edmonton**
- **Rézo**