

Embracing Complexity

2023 Board Letter



Sagesse's work has never included easy questions or simple solutions. This complexity was in sharp focus in 2023, as we continued to work through the impacts of the pandemic and the ongoing affordability crisis.

The need for Sagesse's peer support programs remained high, with demand for services being 46 percent higher than pre-COVID numbers, despite the numbers of clients decreasing 17 percent over the previous year. At the same time, clients presented with more complex trauma, with fewer experiencing an improvement in their wellbeing and personal empowerment, even with an increase in the average number of peer support sessions attended (6.7 session per client, versus 6.1 in 2022).

This demand was mirrored in Clare's Law referrals, as 288 Albertans were connected to relevant local supports through the Sagesse-run Clare's Law Social Service Network. We are very proud of the success of this program, after advocating so long for the law to be enacted in our province. Through 2023 we were happy to share what we've learned with jurisdictions across Canada.

Our volunteers remained fantastically committed to our cause, contributing almost 40 hours per volunteer. But the fatigue within the sector was reflected in a 22 percent drop in the number of volunteers and committed volunteers were difficult to recruit.

In 2023 we also struggled to find a balance between hybrid and virtual programming. The number of people participating in REAL Talk decreased by 13 percent, as interest in virtual sessions slowed while in-person numbers failed to rebound to pre-pandemic levels. To bolster public engagement and combat complacency towards the continuing epidemic of abuse, we massively increased our outreach efforts, with our in-person awareness raising more than doubling, reaching approximately 15,610 people in 2023 compared to 6,250 in 2022.

While we ramped up our public engagement, our work to build a movement to address domestic abuse reached an important milestone. The IMPACT collective, backboned by Sagesse, partnered with Shift (University of Calgary) and the Government of Alberta to release a primary prevention framework for our province. The collective followed up with a Summit in March, and the development of a new strategy at the end of the year.

While the release of the primary prevention framework was an important milestone, efforts to kickstart systemic change were hampered by a lack of investment in primary prevention. This underinvestment also impacted Sagesse's revenue, which decreased 8 percent to \$3,076,499. While this isn't a large drop, it does not match the reality of the work that needs to be done.

To address a shortfall in investment, particularly in the areas of innovation and prevention, Sagesse met with provincial leadership through the budget consultation process, and brought back our signature fundraiser, Eat Play Love. The Board also approved an investment in ByDesign, Sagesse's social enterprise, focusing on our domestic abuse screening program. While we have offered screening at a nominal fee for years, this expansion will better serve family law practitioners, who are required by the Divorce Act to understand the impacts of abuse and coercive control when advocating for their clients.

That wasn't the only way we saw legislation impacting our work. Our advocacy for the criminalization of coercive control bore fruit, as we lent our expertise to the formulation of a new private member's bill. Bill C-332 was introduced in the House of Commons in May 2023, and our advocacy continues as it advances through the parliamentary process.

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We were also happy to see the governments of Canada and Alberta sign a bilateral agreement to invest \$54.1 million over four years to support the implementation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence in our province. Since then, Sagesse has eagerly participated in the engagement process to encourage funding for data-driven, innovative and community-based approaches to ending abuse.

On the other hand, our advocacy for a national plan to address sexual exploitation did not move the needle, as it has not become a policy priority for any party. On the provincial side, we did see the establishment of the Alberta Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons. While we support this move, it does not address the full breadth of sexual exploitation that exists outside of trafficking, nor does it protect persons engaged in voluntary sex work.

I invite you to dive further into the complexity of this work by reading our first annual State of the Field report. A product of our revamped evaluations program, it looks at the trends, cycles, systems and shocks felt within Alberta that are shaping the impact and outcomes of Sagesse programming.

Last, an important way we manage and embrace complexity in our organization and on our board is by supporting equity. To that end, we welcomed three new voices to the table in 2023:

- Ashleigh Baird is the associate director of corporate relations at the University of Alberta, bringing a wealth of experience in fund development and philanthropy to our board. Alongside her work at the university, Ashleigh is also a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and serves on an Employee Resource Group for Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Indigeneity.
- Denita McKnight is a senior leader in the field of strategic public relations planning and execution across multiple disciplines including stakeholder, community and Indigenous relations, social performance, as well as media, crisis, marketing, and internal communications.
- Tessa Penich joins us from Vibrant Communities Calgary, the stewards of Calgary's Enough for All poverty reduction strategy. She brings with her a strong background in qualitative research and a passion for effective leadership, feminist research, policy advocacy, and non-profit governance.

I look forward to adding their expertise and counsel to our work to end domestic abuse in our province.

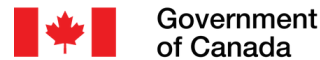
Rebecca Stephen

President, Sagesse Board of Directors

THANK YOU!

2023 Funders & Donors

A sincere thank you to the funders, donors and supporters who made a vital contribution to our success in 2023.



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