

Fostering Positive Change for People Living with HIV and Other Episodic Disabilities through Education, System Change, and Community



**ANNUAL REPORT
2024-2025**

realize

FOSTERING
POSITIVE CHANGE
FOR PEOPLE LIVING
WITH HIV AND OTHER
EPISODIC DISABILITIES

Land Acknowledgement

Realize acknowledges the land on which we work, Turtle Island, is the territory of diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on this land. Within the cultural mosaic of Canada, we acknowledge the many peoples, and their traditions, and backgrounds, who have contributed to this place we call home.

You, your families, and your ancestors all have roles to play in making this an inclusive and welcoming space that upholds people's rights. For that, all of us at **Realize** say, Thank You!

Beyond the Land Acknowledgement

Realize recognizes the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and we will play our part in putting those recommendations into effect in our spheres of influence in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. This commitment goes far beyond land acknowledgements, extending into our programs, ways of working and the outcomes we seek. **Realize** is committed to weaving these findings into the fabric of our organizational DNA and our commitment to IDEAL (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Leading to belonging).



Cover Photo: **Realize** Board members and staff gather at a joint learning session in Toronto, October 17, 2024.

Vision Statement

Realize envisions an equitable future in which people living with HIV, and/or other episodic disabilities¹ can build a life of optimal health and well-being across the life-course².

¹ Episodic disabilities are defined as chronic health conditions characterized by fluctuating periods and degrees of illness and wellness. These periods can be unpredictable in duration, types of symptoms and frequency of recurrence.

² Life course perspective is an approach that "looks at how chronological age, relationships, common life transitions, and social change shape people's lives from birth to death" (Hutchinson, 2011).

Mission Statement

Realize is a leader and catalyst for the improvement of the health and well-being of people living with HIV, and/or other episodic disabilities, across the life-course, through research, education, policy, and partnerships, that have systems-level impact.

About *Realize*

Realize is the leading national, charitable, organization working to improve the health and wellbeing of people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities, across their lifespans, through integrated research, education, policy, and practice (www.Realizecanada.org).

Realize promotes innovation and excellence in rehabilitation in the context of HIV and other episodic disabilities with a primary focus on healthy aging, optimal health and wellbeing, and meaningful social inclusion.

Realize is multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary in its membership and activities. Members come from across Canada, as well as internationally, and include people living with HIV and other chronic conditions, members of community-based HIV and disability organizations, national associations of health professionals, government agencies, private businesses, universities, and the employment sector.

HIV and Aging

The increasing number of people aging with HIV, and the complexity of aging with HIV, present new challenges for care, treatment, and support. **Realize** is working as a catalyst, bringing together the HIV sector and the aging sector to respond to these challenges.

Realize hosts the Secretariat of the National Coordinating Committee on HIV and Aging (NCC) addressing issues affecting older adults living with or vulnerable to HIV in Canada through information exchange, collaborative initiatives, and awareness-raising.

Optimal Health, and Wellbeing

Realize plays a leadership role in investigating what optimal health and wellbeing means for people living with HIV. Our goal is to better understand the supports and circumstances that contribute to optimal health and wellbeing for people living with HIV as well as the issues, barriers, and gaps that interfere with attaining it. **Realize** hosts the National Community Advisory Group on Optimal Health and Wellbeing in HIV (NCAG) to address the quality-of-life gap in global and national HIV/AIDS programs.

Meaningful Social Inclusion for People Living with Episodic Disabilities

Episodic disabilities are chronic health conditions characterized by fluctuating periods and degrees of illness and wellness – as experienced by many people living with HIV and other unpredictable illnesses. **Realize** is a leader in research and advocacy addressing the range of complex barriers to inclusion people living with episodic disabilities experience. **Realize** is the convening organization for the Episodic Disabilities Forum — a pan-Canadian forum comprising people with living experience, national disability organizations, federal policymakers, employers and researchers.

How you can help!

- Become a **Realize** advocate and share our work with the people you know.
- Become a **Realize** member – see our website at www.Realizecanada.org.

Our Reach

Realize has individual and organizational members and partners across Canada, and strong partnerships internationally. Our Board is comprised of professionals from the health, legal, research, and not-for-profit sectors, as well as activists from the HIV and disability communities. We convene or play a vital role in many coalitions that focus on issues of critical concern to people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities.

Realize has a growing national constituency of over 7500 people we reach annually, through our courses/trainings, forums and think tanks, and other program activities who in turn share their increased knowledge within a wide range of community-based organizations, professional associations, workplaces, care centres, clinics, and research groups.

Our Thanks

The impact of **Realize's** work transcends the size of our organization. Our success is due to the expertise, energy, dedication and support of our Board of Directors, staff, members, volunteers, partners, and funders. Thank you.

We particularly thank the Accessibility Standards Canada, Canadian Institutes for Health Research, Employment and Social Development Canada, Ontario HIV Trials Network, Ontario SPOR Support Unit, Public Health Agency of Canada, Service Canada and ViiV Healthcare for their generous funding support.

Realize

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YouTube: [@RealizeHIVepisodic.disability](https://www.youtube.com/@RealizeHIVepisodic.disability)

Instagram: [@hivandrehab](https://www.instagram.com/hivandrehab)

Linkedin: [Realize / Réalise](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Realize/Réalise)

Established 1998, Incorporated 2002, Charitable
Registration number 85699 5535 RR0001.



Members of the **Realize** team, Liz Racz, Melissa Egan, Roger Musselman and Sunny Wang lead the Disability Networking Zone at AIDS 2024 in Munich, Germany

Board of Directors



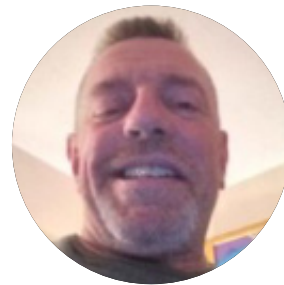
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Co-chair



David Salter
Co-chair



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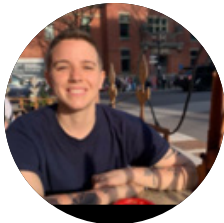
Realize extends a heartfelt thank you to Nicole Salmon whose term on the Board of Directors comes to an end in September 2025. Nicole is a fundraising and not for profit management professional based in Brampton, Ontario with over 25 years experience as a consultant and as a leader within major organizations in Canada. She is also a published poet and author. Nicole first became involved with **Realize** in her professional capacity to help us strategize about fundraising. In 2017 she joined the Board of Directors and from 2022 to 2024 she served as Co-Chair. Nicole's insight, leadership and personal touch have been great assets to the Board and to the direction of the organization. She will be greatly missed. Thank you for your valuable contributions, Nicole! We hope you continue to make **Realize** part of your mission for positive change.

Staff



Puja Ahluwalia

Co-Director
National Programs



Addison Brash

Training Lead



George Da Silva

Marketing and
Program Officer



Alexandria Ditner

Program Assistant (Comms)



Melissa Egan

Co-Director, National
Programs



Lara Herrera

Program Assistant



Aarti Hurry

Digital Engagement
Coordinator



Cathy Kozuch

Bookkeeper



Tess Kern

Youth Initiatives Officer



Christina Lessels

Community-Based
Research Coordinator



Janet London

Director, Program Support



Kate Murzin

Director, National Programs
(on maternity leave)



Roger Musselman

Interim Executive Director



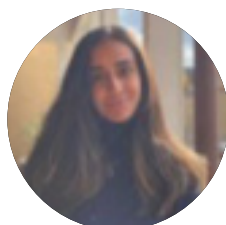
Chidi Ononiwu

Admin. Officer



Ingrid Palmer

Principal IDEAL Advocate



Alexandra Pennell

Program Assistant (Outreach)



Melissa Popiel

Manager, Cross-Functional
Team and Curriculum



Shaun Proulx

Podcast + Comms Officer



Elizabeth Racz

Manager, National Research



Jocelle Refol

HIV and Aging Initiatives Lead



Rosie Smith

Program Assistant
(Executive Office)



Sophie Vira

Program Assistant



Sunny Wang

Knowledge to Action Officer



Annette Wilkins

Membership and Stakeholder
Relations Support



**Tammy C.
Yates-Rajaduray**

Executive Director
(on maternity leave)



Realize Co-chairs Daniel Sands (left) and David Salter (right)

Message from the Co-Chairs

2024-2025 was a year of great highs and challenging uncertainties in our work at **Realize** and for the communities we serve.

In March 2025, a record number of participants – particularly from the employer side (business leaders, managers and human resource professionals) – took part in our annual National Summit on Episodic Disabilities and Employment. The Summit continues to grow each year reflecting the increasing number of workers and people seeking work across Canada who live with episodic disability and the needs of employers trying to understand these dynamics and how best to manage them effectively. We've been excited to see the uptake of our resources for employees and employers and the momentum that is building for disability inclusion in Canadian workplaces. This work is all part of our *EPIC project*.

Realize continues to explore people's experiences of the intersections of disability, race, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation and other factors of identity as they impact employment and social participation. Our work with a diverse group of *community organizations*

and consultations with their members has opened new conversations that for many participants have been their first-ever opportunities to openly examine and express how their episodic disabilities and identities affect their working lives and even how they are perceived and treated in their own communities. For many participants, the process has been empowering and affirming – they feel seen and less alone.

The success of this work is exciting, but we understand that changing systems that exclude people takes time and progress isn't linear. For example, during the height of COVID-19, the move to working remotely improved working conditions and the ability to manage work for many people living with episodic disabilities. At home, they were better able to manage their health needs and how to get their work done. Now, some large employers are implementing blanket 'return to office' policies that threaten to re-exclude workers with disabilities. We also need to recognize the growing chill on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that is creeping into the corporate sector (particularly with large multinational businesses) and threatens the livelihoods of many of the people we work with across our programs.

In our work on healthy aging with HIV and other episodic disabilities, it's been a year of significant research and preparation for the first ever national survey in Canada of the 'Preferences And Needs for Aging Care among HIV-positive Elderly people' (PANACHE). The *national PANACHE survey* was launched and opened to participants just as the year of this Annual Report was

ending, but our staff and external research partners have put in incredible effort to put the systems in place to ensure that we get the best (most accurate) results possible. This research has the potential to shape community action and public policy on HIV and aging for years to come.

Informed by earlier, Ontario-based work on PANACHE, in 2024 **Realize** conducted The Financial Empowerment for Healthy Aging with HIV (FE) research study to explore the financial difficulties and needs of older people living with HIV, and the information, resources, services, and supports available that can facilitate greater financial empowerment. The FE Study focussed on Ontario, but the *guides for people aging with HIV and for front line service workers* are of use more broadly across the country.

Realize continues to partner with organizations around the world on issues of HIV and aging. Following an online global environmental scan to assess the accessibility of resources addressing the sexual health and sexuality of older adults (aged 50+), we found significant gaps with few resources available. Working with a Global Steering Committee, in 2024-2025 we developed and piloted workshops with partners in South Africa, the Philippines, the UK and Canada. The resulting sexual health toolkits for older adults and people who work with them in front line health agencies are now available in six languages on the *Realize website*.

In Canada, we continue to champion policy and practice change addressing ageism and ableism in the national HIV and STBBI (Sexually Transmitted Blood-Borne Infections) response. In February 2025, the Public Health Agency of Canada helped facilitate a meeting for our team with senior leadership across federal ministries with responsibilities for health, disability, aging, gender equality (and more) to discuss our *analyses of these policy gaps* and suggested recommendations. For many in the virtual meeting, it was the first time they had ever met across-ministries to discuss these issues.

As part of this work, **Realize** is also working with front line service agencies in the HIV, aging and disability sectors to create better sexual health and support systems for older adults and people living with

disabilities. The work is challenging, complicated by preconceived notions of these populations and complex stigma. For instance, despite growing evidence that people with disabilities face heightened vulnerability to HIV and STBBI infection, most organizations in the disability sector are not open to discussions of sexual health among the communities they serve. "It's not what we do" is something we've heard often.

In addressing any issues of HIV in Canada, we must mention ongoing uncertainty about funding support for front line HIV service organizations, community-lead organizations and national research and advocacy groups now and in the future. Perceptions that HIV is now a manageable condition and can be downgraded as a public policy priority don't reflect increasing complications of aging and long-term treatment and growing rates of infection among key populations. There are still many unknowns.

Weighing the successes of **Realize** programs and the uncertainty that affects that work, this year the Board of Directors undertook a "Strategic Pulse Check", to review and revise the organization's strategic plan through to the end of 2026. We also worked with senior management to ensure organizational integrity through several key staff transitions. Both Tammy Yates-Rajaduray, Executive Director, and Kate Murzin, Director, National Programs, began maternity leaves this year. We have been working to support Roger Musselman as Interim Executive Director and Melissa Egan and Elizabeth Racz as Co-Directors of National Programs.

In closing, we thank **Realize** members and partners for the tremendous support you continue to offer, the growing audience of participants in our programs who inform our work and translate the learnings from **Realize** resources and events into concrete actions in their workplaces, networks and communities and a special thanks to our funders who make what we do possible.

Thank you!

Daniel Sands and David Salter

Co-Chairs of the **Realize** Board of Directors

Realize Programs

IDEAL: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility – Leading To Belonging

At **Realize**, our efforts to create meaningful change for people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities have always been grounded in the lived realities of the communities we serve. As our mandate has broadened, so too has our awareness that these communities are far from homogenous. The experiences of stigma and barriers to inclusion, care, and support can vary widely depending on intersecting identities such as race, gender,

sexual orientation, age, religion, and more. To meet these diverse needs effectively, **Realize** integrates what we call IDEAL principles into every aspect of our work — from governance to operations to program design.



Healthy aging across the life-course

Our Impact: People aging with HIV, and/or other episodic disabilities can rely on age-friendly policies and programs that reflect their diverse needs.

Despite major advances in treatment, the global and Canadian HIV responses have struggled to keep pace with the shifting demographics and realities of those aging with HIV.

Realize's research – including the PANACHE (Preferences And Needs for Aging Care among HIV-positive Elderly people) Ontario study and our 2024 situational analyses on Canada's policy frameworks for HIV, disability, and aging – reveals serious gaps in policy and health and social services for older adults living with HIV. Frontline providers in both the HIV and aging sectors often lack knowledge and training specific to this population, and sexual health information tailored to older adults – particularly those living with or at risk of HIV – has been scarce.

HIV and aging has long been a core focus for **Realize**. We are now in the third year of a multi-year initiative aimed at addressing systemic ageism and ableism within Canada's HIV response, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. We also secured support from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to expand our landmark PANACHE ON study from a provincial study into a national research survey, which launched at the end of March 2025. The goal of this community-based research study is to gather information from people aging with HIV in Canada (age 60+) about their current and anticipated healthcare and social needs and preferences. The survey is in English and French and can be completed online independently, or with a Community Researcher virtually or by phone. The survey will be shared broadly with community partners and organizations across Canada.

Additionally, **Realize** leads the Secretariat of the National Coordinating Committee on HIV and Aging (NCC), which works to improve the lives of older adults living

with or vulnerable to HIV through information-sharing, collaborative action, and national advocacy.

Through ongoing engagement with communities affected by HIV, aging, and disability across Canada, **Realize** and our partners have consistently identified ageism and ableism as major obstacles to accessing relevant sexual health information, services, and supports. While awareness of these issues is growing among policymakers, healthcare professionals, program developers, and community organizations, many still lack the tools and expertise needed to respond effectively.

Highlights of **Realize** work in Healthy Aging Across the Life Course in 2024–2025:

Realize's multi-year SHINE initiative—STBBI, HIV and Hep C Innovations for a New Era—launched in 2023, was designed to help close these gaps by equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and strategies to create more inclusive, equitable care.

Realize published *a Situational Analyses of the ableism and ageism embedded in Canada's STBBI response*.

We also offered free workshops in the HIV, disability, and aging sectors to integrate an intersectional approach into service provision and enhance their ability to engage in conversation about the intersection of sexuality, HIV/STBBI, and disability with clients.

"I will be sharing this knowledge with my team as we plan our future STBBI public health initiatives. I'd like to advocate for people living with disabilities as a key population that should be targeted."

"Clinicians don't want to talk about aging and HIV. I just turned 65 and I've yet to have an HIV specialist talk to me about sex, at all. We need to do something about that."

Realize's Think Tank 2025 was held February 25th, hosted by **Realize's** Jocelle Refol and Shaun Proulx. Tackling the subject of "Ageism and Ableism in the HIV/HEP C/STBBI Response," the two-hour online event brought together a range of stakeholders, from research to policy, practice and community from the HIV/STBBI, ageing and disability sectors. It was a rich discussion that included breakout

rooms focusing on the questions: “What is already being done in terms of strategies currently used in practice to support older people and those living with disabilities?” and “What strategies have been observed in supporting older people and those living with disabilities?”

Financial Empowerment for Healthy Aging with HIV is a research study **Realize** began in 2023. The study was made up of two components: a survey of individuals aging with HIV and focus groups for service providers. The study’s intention was to gather information from people with HIV aged 50+ in Ontario on their current and anticipated needs for financial information, services and support.

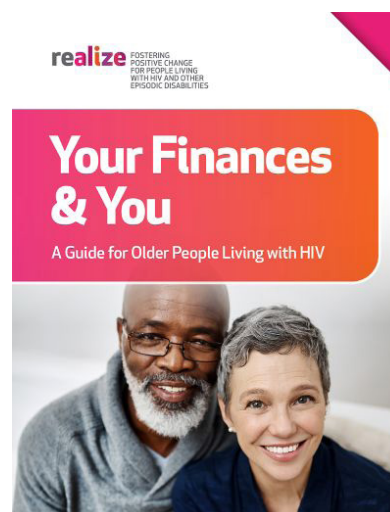
“When you have got policies that are so restrictive, they force people living with HIV to remain in a very unacceptable socio-economic state for a very long time.”
-CBHO Service Provider

“As people are aging, we’re trying to talk to them and making a plan, but it’s almost impossible when you don’t have the financial means to do that.” -CBHO Service Provider

The study was carried out in 2024-25. An Advisory Committee made up of community members, representatives of stakeholder organizations and other knowledge holders, allowed the project to work towards meeting its key objectives. The study learned from service providers’ knowledge and experiences in supporting older PLWH with income and benefit programs, as well as their access to financial education and empowerment services.

The findings aim to inform the development of policy and programs tailored to this population’s financial needs. As a result of our learnings from this study, **Realize** developed two resource guides for use by community members and service providers at community-based HIV organizations. These guides offer listings and links to financial resources and information relevant to Ontario residents.

We have also created a list of *Local Financial Resources for Older Adults Living with HIV in Ontario*.



The resource guides and the study’s Executive Summary are available at *Financial Empowerment for Healthy Aging with HIV*.

This project was carried out with funding from the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) Endgame Community-Based Research Grant.

On April 29th, 2025, (just after the year-end for this Annual Report) **Realize** launched SHOP (Sexuality and Sexual Health for Older People) with a virtual webinar. The SHOP Project aims to increase access to evidence-based, relevant educational resources on healthy sexuality and HIV/STBBI prevention for older adults, service providers, and community-based organizations globally. We completed final stages of development, and three rounds of piloting by community-based organizations from around the world – including South Africa (pictured above) the Philippines and Canada have taken place.

In South Africa, approximately thirty older adults attended the SHOP pilot workshop and were very engaged and excited to learn more about sexual health and sexuality for older people. Facilitator Jane Simmonds says participants used words like ‘joy’ and ‘safe’ to express how they felt about the session and a second session requested by South African health workers is planned.

Both SHOP toolkits are now available on our website in six different languages.



Optimal health and wellbeing

Our Impact: People living with HIV, and/or other episodic disabilities, and people working within the communities will co-create systems-level strategies to improve quality of life.

Realize plays a key leadership role in driving positive change in policies and practices that ensure timely, appropriate access to rehabilitation for people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities. We work to advance education among clinical, research, community, and policy

stakeholders, sharing evidence-informed rehabilitation strategies and service delivery models that help prevent or reduce disability.

A central pillar of our work is promoting optimal health and wellbeing for people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities. Until recently, global HIV response goals have focused almost entirely on testing, anti-viral treatment, and achieving viral suppression. While these remain important, they fall short of addressing the full reality faced by people living long-term with HIV – challenges such as comorbidities, stigma, frailty, pain, income insecurity, and many other intersecting health and social issues.

Meaningful social participation

Our impact: People living with HIV, and/or other episodic disabilities co-create systems-level changes and can rely on inclusive policies that reflect their diverse needs while meaningfully engaging in education and employment.

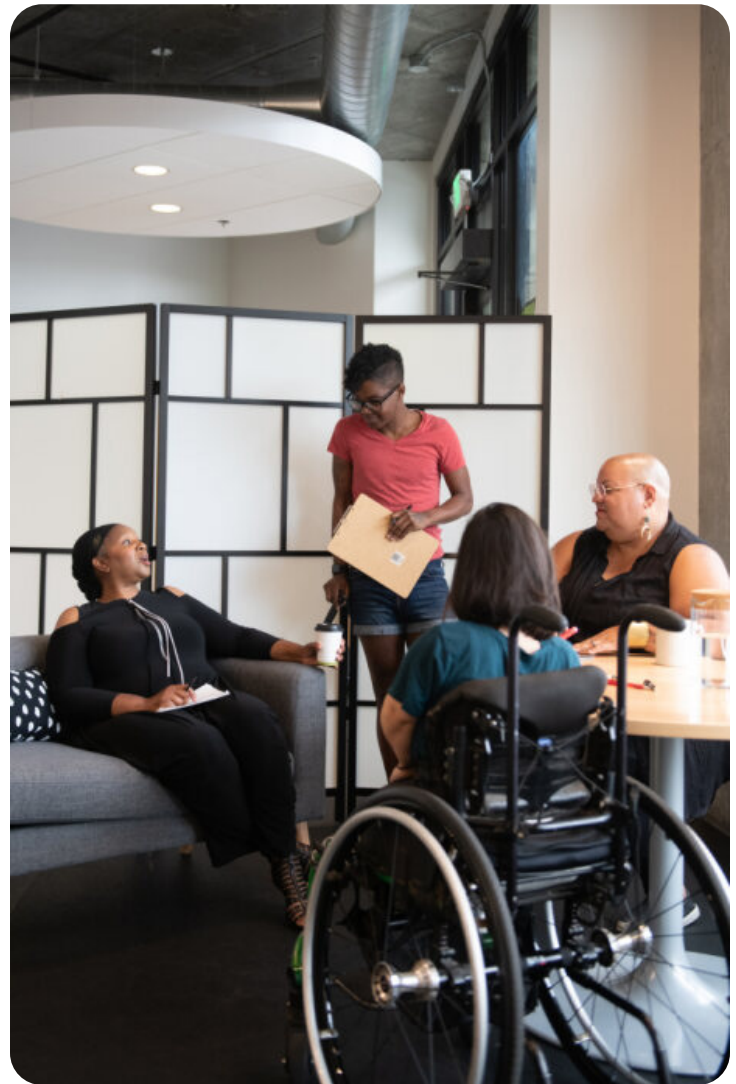
Realize serves as a national leader in championing the social inclusion of people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities. We bring together a network of employers, insurers, rehabilitation providers, community organizations, and government representatives to advance social inclusion and financial security for people aging with chronic illness.

Originally founded to address the rehabilitation needs of people living with HIV, **Realize** understands the unique challenges posed by the episodic nature of certain conditions—periods of illness and wellness that can fluctuate unpredictably in duration, symptom type, and frequency. These fluctuations, known as episodic disabilities, can make it harder to participate fully in community life, pursue education, maintain employment, secure income, experience social inclusion, and access needed care.

While our roots are in the HIV community, we recognize these issues affect people living with many episodic conditions, including multiple sclerosis, depression, Long COVID, lupus, and more ([a full list is available on our website](#)). That's why our work extends to promoting meaningful social participation for all people with episodic disabilities, as well as contributing to the broader disability community.

Realize is also the convening organization for the Episodic Disabilities Forum – a pan-Canadian gathering of people with lived experience, national disability organizations, federal policymakers, and researchers.

We address barriers to social inclusion head-on, with a particular focus on employment. **Realize** plays a leading



role in Canada in connecting the episodic disability community with business leaders, HR professionals, rehabilitation specialists, and the insurance sector. Together, we work to build understanding and create flexible, mutually beneficial employment opportunities that support both employees living with disabilities and their employers.

Highlights of **Realize** work in Meaningful Social Participation in 2024-2025:

Realize's 5th Annual National Summit for Episodic Disabilities and Employment took place March 19th (employer day) and March 20th (employee day) in 2025. A record 450+ people attended each day – a huge success featuring speakers from Indigenous Disability Canada,

small business owners, a panel discussing featuring community members with lived experiences, partners from the Institute for Work and Health's ACED Project, and more.

"I love that this training is free. Last year was my first time attending and I plan to continue every year. This is the best training in my work: I am a Rehab consultant."

"I love the presentations with people describing their lived experiences. Last year was life-changing for me. This year I have gathered many new resources. Thank you."

This was soon followed up by our inaugural Youth Day Annual National Summit for Episodic Disabilities and Employment, which took place at the Chelsea Hotel in Toronto March 27th. Experts in episodic disability, leaders in research, and youth community members with lived experience all shared at the Summit, which featured as keynote speaker Nicole Ineese-Nash, an Oji-Cree educator, researcher and community helper who teaches at the University of Toronto.

Realize also continued to grow our podcast, The **Realize** Podcast: Nurturing Potential, Inclusion + Belonging. A space dedicated to exploring the strength adaptability and determination of individuals facing the ever-changing landscape of episodic disabilities.

Written, produced and hosted by former **Realize** Board member, broadcaster Shaun Proulx, episodes are now available on all major podcast platforms (Apple, Spotify, iHeart). Topics explored include suicidal ideation, the loneliness epidemic, HIV and ageing, Indigenous disabilities and wellness, youth activism for HIV and AIDS, and two speakers from our Youth Summit recently shared their stories for a special episode about what it is like for them to live with multiple disabilities. Video versions of each episode are currently being posted to our YouTube channel.

Following last year's **IDEAL Community Consultations**, **Realize** began its IDEAL Ready program, in which organizations or businesses can become certified as equipped and ready to work with people living at the

intersections of disability and gender, racial identity, faith, community, health conditions, sexual identity, and age.

Our three-year project - Canada's Museums: Putting the 'A' (Accessibility) in IDEAL - seeks to improve the representation of persons with long term and episodic disabilities among senior, middle and other managers and supervisors as well as administrative and senior clerical personnel positions in Canada's museums. The program is carried out in partnership with Ingenium Canada (the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum, Canada Aviation and Space Museum and the Canada Science and Technology Museum).



Our pilot workshop - created as a result from a **needs assessment survey**, looking at where the gaps were, what was needed, and what was wanted - was facilitated in December 2024 in Ottawa, for over 35 senior staff.

Focusing on an introduction to disability and episodic disability, three models of disability were shared, allowing participants to recognize how they show up at work. An introduction to episodic disabilities looked at examples and delved into how employees living with them are impacted in both their personal and work lives, the difficulties in accommodating them, and solutions, tools and resources that support that.

Response was highly positive and receptive, with strong engagement. This led to lively discussion about how people grew up thinking about disability, how it's presented in general society, and challenges. There was also an active discussion around intersectionality, centred on how people can carry more than one stigmatized

identity, and how employees with disabilities can be facing more than ableism. They can encounter other significant forms of discrimination and exclusion, due to other identities that they carry, making it key for senior management to consider this, and to look at their work and interactions through an intersectional lens.

The INDEED (INvestigating the DEvelopment of Accessibility Standards in Canada and the Inclusion/Exclusion of Episodic Disabilities) research study was carried out to better understand how episodic disabilities are currently incorporated into employment accessibility standards and how they can be better accommodated in the future.

Co-led by Dr. Monique Gignac, Institute for Work & Health, the research team was guided by a Project Advisory Committee comprised of individual and organizational experts in episodic disabilities.

Over the fall and winter 2024/2025, the study engaged people with lived experience of episodic disabilities in focus groups and stakeholders from disability organizations in key informant interviews. We also conducted a scan of provincial accessibility standards for employment across Canada.

“...a lot of employers still don’t really have awareness of many conditions that are episodic or that are more invisible.” -Focus Group Participant

“Accessibility is good for everyone...just removing that stigma and understanding of not having to prove your disability is a huge thing.” -Focus Group Participant

The findings of the INDEED project highlight critical insights into the lived experiences of individuals with episodic disabilities and key stakeholders in the sector,

revealing systemic gaps in policy, workplace culture, and public awareness experienced by participants. The key recommendations and next steps for policy and programming that developed from these findings are intended to inform the development of more inclusive and effective accessibility standards in Canada.

This research study was carried out with funding from Accessibility Standards Canada.



Realize and Long COVID

As the national leader in the field of episodic disability, **Realize** recognizes the ongoing impact of COVID-19 infections and related illnesses on individuals and communities in Canada and around the world.

A Government of Canada study, Experiences of Canadians with long-term symptoms following COVID-19 (released December 8, 2023), reported that by June 2023:

- About 1 in 9 adults (11.7% of the total adult population) had experienced long-term symptoms — defined as those lasting three or more months after a COVID-19 infection, with no other explanation.
- This represents approximately 3.5 million Canadians, and nearly 1 in 5 adults (19.0%) who had been infected at least once.

For people living with Long COVID, symptoms can be disabling and interfere with daily life, work, and leisure. These ongoing, often episodic symptoms may include fatigue, headaches, sleep disturbances, shortness of breath, anxiety, and more. Many also experience reduced physical and cognitive function, which can significantly affect their quality of life. Navigating healthcare, disability supports, and workplace issues adds further stress and uncertainty.

In response to these realities, **Realize** has developed a suite of tools to help individuals — along with employers, insurers, human resource professionals, and rehabilitation specialists — manage the complexities of Long COVID, disability, and return-to-work planning.

These resources are available on the **Realize** website.

Elisse Zack Award for Excellence in HIV and Rehabilitation

The recipient of the 2024 Elisse Zack Award for Excellence in HIV and Rehabilitation, Carolann Murray, was announced at a special luncheon before the **Realize** Annual Meeting on October 18, 2024 in Toronto. Congratulations Carolann!

Carolann Murray

Nominated by: Kelly O'Brien, Francisco Ibanez-Carrasco and Soo Chan Carusone

Carolann is a leader in her field, with over 30 years of experience, and she is the single known physiotherapist in Canada working specifically in HIV, practicing at Casey House since 2018. She is making huge strides in the advancement of rehabilitation care for people living with HIV. In her time at Casey House, Carolann has thus far seen over 250 clients living with HIV – and her caseload is expanding. In addition to providing one-on-one care, Carolann has developed an on-site, twice weekly supervised group-based aerobic and resistive exercise program. Carolann also mentors students and new graduates, and her role has also included establishing new partnerships with local community organizations to facilitate safe and independent transition of clients of Casey House to independent exercise and physical exercise and activity in the community. She also innovatively adapted one-on-one consultations, and eventually moved the exercise program into a virtual format when the Covid-19 pandemic kept us all sheltered in place. Carolann is frequently described as “positive,” “kind,” and “inspirational.” She possesses endless dedication and enthusiasm for her work, a passion that resembles that of Elisse Zack, and **Realize**.



Carolann Murray (right) receives the Elisse Zack Award from **Realize** Board Member, Nicole Salmon

Janet London Award

Post-Secondary Education Award

The **Janet London Post-Secondary Education Award** was created in recognition of the exceptional dedication of Janet London, Director of Program Support at **Realize**, where she is the longest serving staff member. The award acknowledges Janet's stellar commitment, and her keen interest in building the capacity of a younger generation pursuing careers that dovetail with the various sectors in which **Realize** operates. In October 2024 the inaugural award was given to **Jesse Symington-Leblanc**.

Jesse (who was 19 years old at the time of the Award presentation), identifies as queer, is on the honour roll, and knows of **Realize** from his mother's work with the HIV Legal Network (**Realize** and the Legal Network share office space), back when **Realize** was known as CWGHR. He is following in her footsteps in his own advocacy for accessibility and for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights.

In his application, Jesse wrote: "This award will positively affect my educational outcomes and allow me to make a real difference in my community."

At the beginning of his educational journey to becoming a primary care paramedic, Jesse is in a one-year pre-health sciences program, after which he will enter a two-year paramedic program. This multi-year education is costly. This award, Jesse says, will help alleviate financial stress and allow Jesse to concentrate on his studies. After completing schooling, Jesse plans to work with marginalized and stigmatized groups, which dovetails with work **Realize** does.

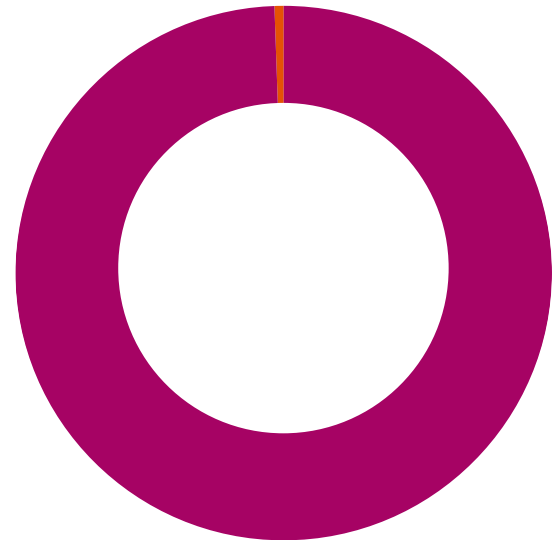


2024 Janet London Award recipient, Jesse Symington-Leblanc

Revenues and Expenses

Revenue

■ Grants:	99.6%
■ Professional fees, donations, memberships and course registrations:	0.4%



Expenses

■ Program and Contract Staff:	70%
■ Occupancy Costs:	3%
■ Financial Administration, printing and materials:	17%
■ Evaluation:	2%
■ Travel:	8%

