

Annual Report

2024-25



1658 Bedford Hwy Unit 290, Bedford

Brain
Injury
Association of Nova Scotia

Included in the Report

- Our Vision & Mission
- Messages from our E.D. and Chair
- Community Reach & Support
- Programs, Education & Training Sessions
- A thank you to our Board of Directors & our supporters

ATTACHED TO THIS REPORT

- 2024-25 AGM Agenda
- Minutes from 2023-24 AGM
- Full Financial Statements

A Brief Story About Who We Are

Founded in 1987 as the Head Injury Support Group, the Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia (BIANS) was established by Kevin Hall and Jacqueline Warlow. It remained volunteer-led until hiring its first Executive Director in 1993. Responding to community needs, Brain Injury NS launched its Chapter program in 1994, beginning in the Valley, followed by Bridgewater, Halifax, and Truro over the next three years.

Today, BIANS is the only organized voice for Nova Scotians affected by brain injury. As a registered Canadian charity since 1989, we continue to provide vital programs, education, advocacy, and support for survivors and their families across the province.

Vision

Nova Scotians living with acquired brain injury and their families and caregivers realize their potential through a continuum of programs, services, and community supports throughout the province.

Mission

Fostering resilience, recovery, and community for brain injury survivors and their families across Nova Scotia.

Strategic Priorities

01

Increase awareness & visibility through promoting education, supports, & programs

02

Enhance & improve access to education, peer support, & support groups for survivors and families

03

Work with government and the public sector for supports and services to be available for survivors

04

Develop & maintain long-term partnerships with health and business organizations



Message from Executive Director

It's been just over three months since I stepped into the role of Executive Director at the Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia (BIANS), and in that short time, I've been continually inspired by the people who make this community so special. From our incredible staff and board to the survivors, families, and partners we serve, it's clear that BIANS is powered by deep compassion, resilience, and a strong sense of connection.

Looking back on this past year, I feel incredibly proud of how far we've come. We faced both challenges and milestones, and through it all, the unwavering support of our Board of Directors, and in particular our Board Chair, Patrick O'Connell, helped carry us through a period of meaningful change. Thanks to their leadership, we've emerged stronger and more focused than ever on our mission.

This year has been one of rebuilding and reimagining. The restructuring process brought important changes that have positioned us for growth, stability, and greater impact across the province. To our staff, volunteers, and community partners: your dedication has been instrumental. Every step forward has been made possible because of your energy, compassion, and belief in what we do.

We've seen the power of connection in action through our peer support programs, including Concussion Café, Virtual Checkpoint, Walk & Talk, Coffee Chat, and Brain Matters. These spaces have become lifelines for many, offering not just support, but true friendship. Our music therapy and yoga sessions have seen a surge in interest, bringing healing, joy, and a sense of calm to those navigating recovery. And events like the Ice Cream Social reminded us just how important it is to laugh and enjoy each other's company.

Our Pathway to Peers program also marked another successful year, continuing to empower those with lived experience to support others and build a strong, resilient network.

As we look ahead, I'm excited by what's on the horizon. We're laying the groundwork to grow our programs, deepen our advocacy, and reach more people than ever before. Hi New partnerships are forming, and more voices are joining the conversation. Together, we're building a future where no one in Nova Scotia has to navigate brain injury alone.

Thank you for being part of this journey. I'm grateful every day to walk alongside such a passionate, committed community. Here's to a year of continued impact and connection.

With appreciation,
Emma Folkins

Chairs Report

On behalf of the Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia Board of Directors, I present this report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

The past fiscal year can best be described as embracing change. Early in the summer, the board was informed by our Executive Director that they would be moving on to a new opportunity.

Following their departure, one of our staff members also informed the board that they would be moving on to a new role. I'd like to thank both Emily Roeding and Sam Clarke for their commitment to our mission over their time with the organization. Following these changes, the Board of Directors took time to reflect on our organizational structure, governance model, and staffing needs. After a successful recruitment led by a board committee, we were thrilled to welcome our new Executive Director, Emma Folkins, in March.

Through the changes to staffing and operations over the year, I am proud to say that with the support of the board and the remaining BIANs staff member, Marlee Smith, we were able to continue all programming and events throughout the year. We continued to offer in-person events from Yarmouth to Sydney while maintaining our regularly scheduled online program offerings. Our annual "Pathway to Peers" conference in November was a great success, with the largest attendance in our four-year history. We also hosted our first Atlantic Canada version of our popular Concussion Café, which brought in over 65 attendees from three different provinces.

Our Board of Directors had a productive year, exceeding quorum at all but one of our meetings

and averaging just over 80% attendance rate throughout the year. I would also like to highlight our Governance committee from this year, as they worked with external consultant Patricia Bradshaw on updating our policy manual to help support our goals while making processes more efficient between the Board and the Executive Director.

As we kick off another fiscal year, I am proud to say that we have a balanced budget and have funding confirmation through our agreement with the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care through to the Fiscal Year ending in March 2027. This year, we will continue to evaluate our performance in accordance with our Strategic Plan that was drafted for the years 2021-2026, and begin the draft of our Strategic Plan for future years with our new Board of Directors.

Finally, I would like to thank our departing Board Members for their time, dedication, and deliberate involvement with meetings over the past years. Departing this year are the following: Marcy Weston, Chris Toms, and Mackenzie Hancock. I have also made the decision to pursue my Masters degree starting in the fall and will be stepping down from my position as Chair, as well as resigning from the Board. The past four years have been incredibly rewarding. Thank you to all of our members, community partners, and staff whom I have had the pleasure of working with over the years.

As always, I encourage our membership to connect directly with the board with any comments, concerns, and recommendations for ways to improve our programs and services.

Regards,
Patrick O'Connell

Community Reach & Support

In 2024–2025, BIANs expanded its reach across Nova Scotia through inclusive, peer-informed programming designed to reduce isolation and build stronger connections for survivors and caregivers.

From weekly drop-in sessions and support groups to creative therapies and hybrid events, we prioritized accessibility, community partnerships, and lived experience. These initiatives offered consistent spaces for healing, empowerment, and engagement, serving hundreds of individuals across the province.



Social media presence reached
40,000
 significantly expanding our community engagement and enhancing awareness

580
Total Participants Engaged
 unique participants across all outreach and support programs

Program Highlights

- Weekly Peer Drop-Ins & Coffee Chats – Informal, accessible programs such as Brain Matters, Checkpoint, and Coffee Chats provided connection for **70+ regular participants**
- Therapeutic Wellness Programs – Yoga for ABI and Music Therapy served **over 130 participants** combined, reporting improved sleep, mood, and social connection
- Concussion Support & Outreach – Concussion Café and Tri-County expansion welcomed **48 new participants**
- Walk & Talk Series – **23 sessions across Nova Scotia** engaged over **265 individuals** in supportive outdoor gatherings





Programs, Education & Training

This year, our education efforts focused on equipping survivors, caregivers, and community members with the tools and knowledge to navigate their brain injury journey. Through interactive workshops, resource distribution, and financial literacy training, we worked to close information gaps and support informed decision-making. Our programs empowered participants to better understand brain injury, access critical resources, and plan for their futures with greater confidence.

Highlights Include:

- Pathways to Peers Summit (135 attendees): Province-wide hybrid event featuring expert speakers and lived experience panel; **100% would attend again**
- Canada Disability Savings Program & RDSP Workshop: **Attendees gained practical knowledge on long-term financial planning**
- Concussion Info Card Distribution: **1,020 cards distributed across 28 hospitals** in all four NS health zones and helped bridge the gap between acute care and community support

"BIANS programs offer a social as well as therapeutic experience. We are all at different places on our brain injury journey and it is nice to meet others and enjoy their company." - Survivor

1,700
Total Participants
Reached

through direct training
and resource distribution

120
Total Sessions
Held

community-based and
virtual program sessions

Volunteers & Board of Directors

We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all of our dedicated volunteers over the past year. Your time, energy, and commitment have made a meaningful impact on the brain injury community in Nova Scotia. Our work simply wouldn't be possible without your support.

To our 2024–2025 Board of Directors — thank you for the leadership, insight, and expertise you brought to the organization. We are grateful for your contributions and are pleased that many of you will continue to be involved with the 2025–2026 board and in other roles moving forward.

First-voice representation is important to us, and 1/3 of our Directors are brain injury survivors.

- Patrick O'Connell – Chair
- Jomir Tibayan – Treasurer
- Mackenzie Hancock – Secretary
- Dani Squires – Provincial Survivor Rep
- Chris Toms – Past Chair
- Erica Bergstrom
- Barry Bowser
- Dr. Halina Bruce
- Shaun Dares
- Brent Decoste
- Allison Harris
- Joan Lareza
- Elizabeth Outhit
- Josh Sampson
- Marcy Weston

Our Supporters

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all our partners, supporters, and donors. Your generosity and commitment make it possible for us to deliver vital programs and services to an underserved community.

We could not do this important work without your support.



Thank You

As we close this year's report, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who has been a part of our journey. Whether you are a donor, volunteer, supporter, or someone who has benefited from our programs, your contribution has been invaluable in helping us create meaningful change for individuals affected by brain injury.

Together, we continue to make strides in improving lives, advocating for greater awareness, and providing the support needed for recovery and resilience. We are excited to move forward with you by our side as we work toward a future where everyone impacted by brain injury has the resources, understanding, and community they need.

Thank you for your unwavering support, compassion, and commitment. We look forward to another year of progress and shared success.



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