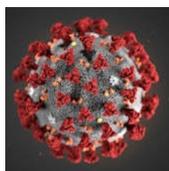


# Our Primary Purpose

Stories, news and information from our fellowship in the National Capital Region

A member shares: how AA helped her deal with Covid-19



Page 7

From the Archives: putting Canada on the AA world map



Page 9

On the road to Vancouver 2025: a look back at San Antonio



Page 10

Vancouver 2025

## Is your meeting ready to reopen, safely? Local home groups plan for face-to-face meetings

*This is the first of a three-part series: how Covid-19 has changed AA meetings. Followed by feedback about how it feels to be back in a face-to-face meeting. Then, latest trends. Are members coming back to the rooms, or staying online?*

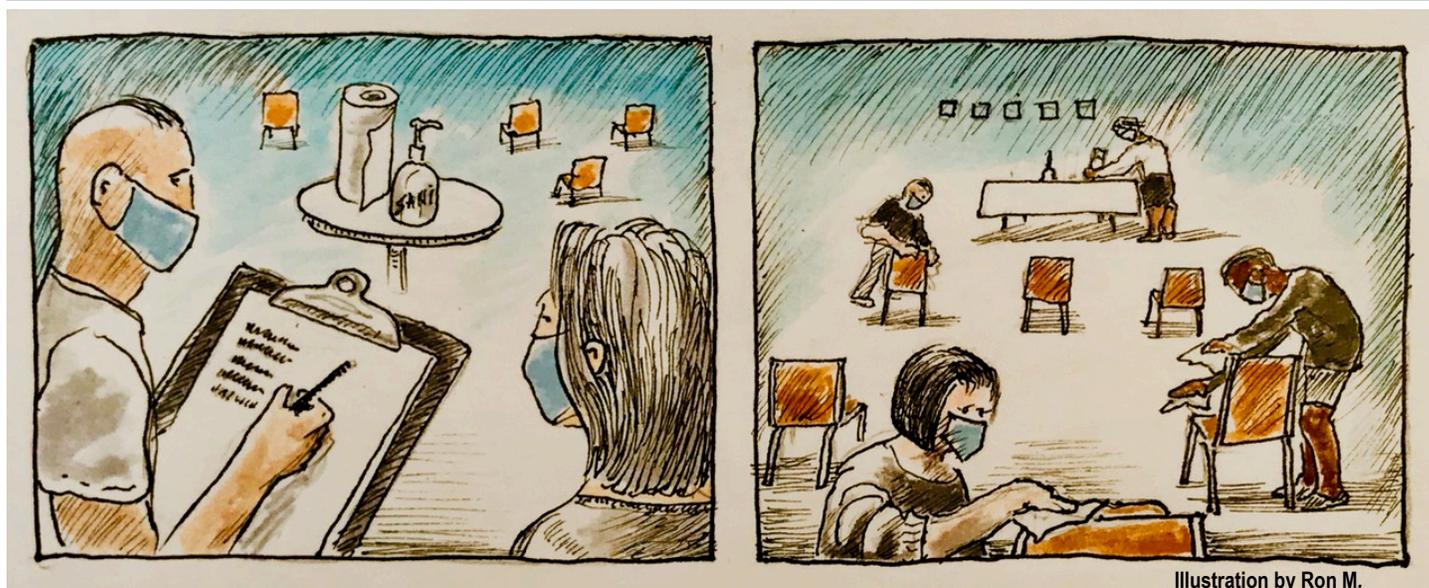


Illustration by Ron M.

***In-person meetings will require more help. Greeters will seek contact information, while others will be busy disinfecting surfaces.***

John M knows the stakes are high as his home group prepares for its first face to face meeting since mid-March, when Covid-19 quickly shuttered AA doors across the National Capital Region.

“We have a real balancing act on our hands,” said John, chair of the business meeting at Lunch With Bill (LWB), a noon hour group that used to gather Monday through Friday, pre-pandemic.

“Our mission is to help the suffering alcoholic, but we must also be diligent about public health. No one wants to see the headline: ‘AA meeting sparks outbreak.’ We have to make sure public health guidelines are followed to the letter, or we risk putting the whole fellowship in jeopardy.”

**See It can't be business as usual, Page 4**

## Ottawa Intergroup Office

211 Bronson Avenue, Suite 108  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1R 6H5  
Office Hours: 10 am – 4 pm,  
Monday-Friday and  
1 pm – 4 pm Saturday  
Telephone: (613) 237-6000  
Email: [info@ottawaaa.org](mailto:info@ottawaaa.org)

### Newsletter Editor

[newsletter@ottawaaa.org](mailto:newsletter@ottawaaa.org)

Article submission deadline is  
the 20th day of the month  
preceding publication date

## Ottawa Area Intergroup

Chair – Harry B

Vice-Chair – Frank O

Secretary – Charlene R

Treasurer – Sandy C

Website – Carolyn O

Telephone Answering – Al L

Literature – Doris M

12-Step Coordinator-Natalie L

Spring Conference – Cindy E-M

Eastern Ontario Conference-Richard C

Newsletter – Jeff F

[chair@ottawaaa.org](mailto:chair@ottawaaa.org)

[vice@ottawaaa.org](mailto:vice@ottawaaa.org)

[secretary@ottawaaa.org](mailto:secretary@ottawaaa.org)

[treasurer@ottawaaa.org](mailto:treasurer@ottawaaa.org)

[webmaster@ottawaaa.org](mailto:webmaster@ottawaaa.org)

[tas@ottawaaa.org](mailto:tas@ottawaaa.org)

[literature@ottawaaa.org](mailto:literature@ottawaaa.org)

[12step@ottawaaa.org](mailto:12step@ottawaaa.org)

[spring@ottawaaa.org](mailto:spring@ottawaaa.org)

[eoc@ottawaaa.org](mailto:eoc@ottawaaa.org)

[newsletter@ottawaaa.org](mailto:newsletter@ottawaaa.org)

## Ottawa General Service Districts and Committees

District 54 – Ottawa East – Jo Anne D

District 58 – Ottawa Centre – Kim B

District 62 – Ottawa West – Trevor F

Cooperation with Professionals

Public Information/Media Contact

Corrections Facilities & Treatment – Mike B

Archives – Sue B

[district54@ottawaaa.org](mailto:district54@ottawaaa.org)

[district58@ottawaaa.org](mailto:district58@ottawaaa.org)

[district62@ottawaaa.org](mailto:district62@ottawaaa.org)

[cpc@ottawaaa.org](mailto:cpc@ottawaaa.org)

[pi@ottawaaa.org](mailto:pi@ottawaaa.org)

[cft@ottawaaa.org](mailto:cft@ottawaaa.org)

[archives@ottawaaa.org](mailto:archives@ottawaaa.org)

## Editorial – thinking about “AA as a whole”

Rarely, in the 85-year history of AA, has Tradition Four had greater meaning or consequence, as countless groups here in Ottawa, and the world over, contemplate reopening.

But first, a little reality check...

What keeps many of us coming back, week after week, month after month, year after year, is AA's governance structure...with the inverted pyramid, the many are telling the few how we think the fellowship should operate. We revel in the notion that no one is in charge or can tell us what to do or how to behave. We are not a rules-based organization.

We are free to interpret the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions in any way we see fit. The fact is most of us gravitate to meetings where we find those who look at recovery the same way we do. Birds of a feather flock together. This conveniently makes arriving at a group conscience much easier.

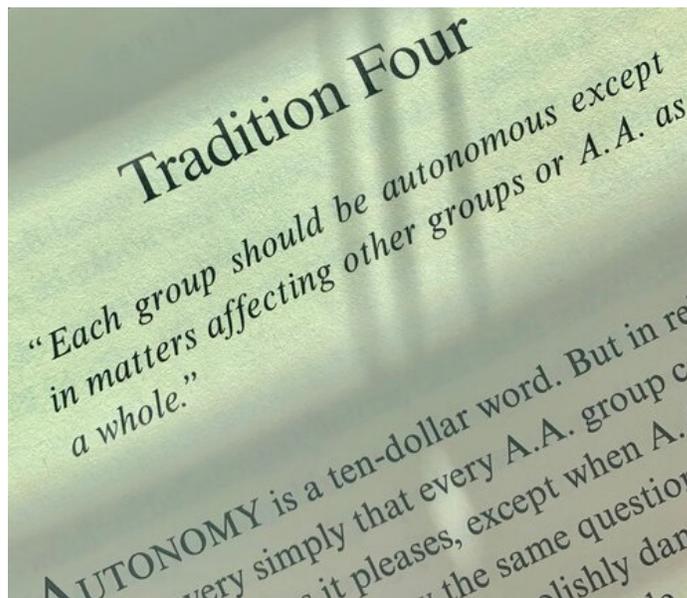
This might be good for our personal well-being; it likely helps keep many of us sober. But what about “matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.”

By now, we've all read or heard stories about how just one person infected with Covid-19 can quickly and easily transmit the disease to those in close proximity. These people, in turn, can pass it along to many others.

Before long you could have a headline like: “New Covid-19 infections traced back to AA meeting.”

There will be those who will balk at giving their contact information when entering an AA meeting. There may in fact be meetings held in the near future where no attempt is made to get a current phone number or email address from every last person in attendance.

In 99 out of 100 cases nothing may happen. But what about that one case where a group discovers that one of its members has tested positive for the virus? If that group does not have a good record of



attendance, or no record at all, then there may be members who are at risk of being infected or who may already be infecting others without even knowing it.

If, as individuals or groups, we fail to follow public health guidelines we could be putting not only fellow AAs at risk, but also their family members, some of whom could be elderly and more vulnerable.

We should, and we must, do everything to help the suffering alcoholic, BUT we cannot do so with wanton disrespect for those outside the fellowship.

“... except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.”

Think about these words when you are getting together with your business meeting, or your reopening committee. We can't be there for the suffering alcoholic if we are making ourselves and others sick in the process.

It's simply not fair to other AAs, or the fellowship as a whole. And it's certainly not fair to all our close friends and loved ones who want to be there to support us in our sobriety.

# It can't be business as usual from Page 1

Anyone who has been a part of the reopening planning process will tell you that post pandemic, in-person, meetings are going to be a radical departure from the cozy gatherings we once flocked to.

“For those yearning for a return to the way things were, they may be disappointed,” said John.

“It's going to be much more regimented than ever before. There will be no hugs, no handshakes, and the smiles will be hidden behind masks. Some members will no doubt find it to be quite impersonal.”

What there will be is a much stronger presence at the door. LWB, for example, will have two greeters: one will screen people before entering the building to make sure they have a mask, and are not showing any obvious symptoms. Inside the door, members will be expected to disinfect their hands, and be willing to share contact tracing information.

“We will have to have a zero-tolerance policy. No mask, or contact info, no entry. No exceptions can be made, or we risk violating public trust.”

## Limited space

Another reality is that in most AA meeting venues space will be limited, and therefore members will have to realize they won't always get in.

“We have been given permission by the church to allow 20 people to gather. With at least 6 people helping to set up and run the meeting, we will not be able to accommodate large numbers,” said John.

“We are going to need patience and cooperation at the door. It's not going to be easy for any greeter to turn people away.”

LWB may consider employing some kind of online reservation system if they end up with too many members at the door.

## Testing group conscience

Groups such LWB have three masters to please when



it comes to reopening their meetings: public health authorities, landlords, and their own group conscience.

“There can be no room for compromise with either public health guidelines, or stipulations placed upon us by our landlord. Where we do have some latitude is our own group conscience, and how we choose to execute our individual plans for reopening,” said John.

“At LWB, we are calling this a pilot project. We don't know if too many will show up, or too few. We also need to find out if members of our group are

ready to step up and do the extra work that is required to run a meeting.”

Anecdotally, we know that some of our fellow members have fallen through the cracks and relapsed because they could not find their way online, and weren't able to seek out other ways of getting the help needed. Reopening will potentially bring some back to the fold, but it remains an experiment for most groups.

## Having a hand in the new normal

We do know that AA is never going to be the same. Now that many have had a taste of online meetings, some will never again venture into a church basement or community centre.

Many factors will dictate the success or failure of reopening efforts like the ones being proposed at LWB. The return to school could fuel a second wave of Covid-19, and force governments to once more deny all public gatherings.

“Beyond guarding the greater good, there's a limit to what we have some measure of control over. It really comes down to the attitude and behaviour of our members. If ever there was time to put ego aside, and do what's right for both the suffering alcoholic, and the public at large, this is it.”

Looking for a service opportunity? Now is the time to raise your hand. Rest assured it will help you stay sober.

# Room “set-up” and “greeting” become critical service roles in the new normal

*John M, chair of the Lunch With Bill business meeting, recently held a “reopening” strategy discussion with his fellow home group members. Here are some excerpts from his presentation.*



## Room set-up - “Roomies”

- Chair rows set up 2 metres apart on all sides – side; front – back
- Sanitation table set up in entry/library
- Sanitize chairs, tables and contact surfaces before and after meeting
- No bulletin board, literature table, or coffee
- Kitchen and hallway bathroom taped off
- Set up signage at the building entry door, hallway, and main room
  - Re physical separation and masks
  - Aisles are one-way in/out as indicated by floor markings
  - Move to the end of the aisle to be seated
- No break-out rooms



## Entry management - “Greeters”

- Greeting, screening and sanitation station outside in good weather or just inside in entrance hallway
- Participants queued 2 meters apart in entrance hallway and outdoors along the exterior church wall as indicated by floor/pavement markings/red cones
- Check for mask
- Ask to sanitize
- Fill out health screening and contact information form for each participant



## Health Screening and Contact Tracing

- Screening questionnaire on each entry re:
  - Symptoms, travel, contact, ordered isolation
- Contact tracing
  - First name, initial (minimum), phone and/or e-mail.
- Documents kept by meeting chairperson
- Requires sensitivity to anonymity but both are mandatory for entry to meeting

## Announcements

# National AA Technology Workshop 2020 Virtual Gathering



The National AA Technology Workshop is a group of AAs who gather and work together to share about carrying the message of AA through technology.

### **When:**

September 12, 2020

11am - 7pm Eastern | 8am - 4pm Pacific

### **Where:**

Zoom Platform

### **Registration:**

[naatw.org/reg](https://naatw.org/reg)

For more information about NAATW visit [naatw.org](https://naatw.org)

# A member shares...

## Isolated, but not alone with AA

I stopped drinking April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019. I am very grateful because facing my health challenges in 2020 without AA and a program of recovery would have felt insurmountable.

I awoke with neck pain last March. I wasn't too concerned thinking perhaps I slept in a strange position. My family and I enjoyed a beautiful hike in Gatineau Park as the ache did not appear serious. The following day, the ache in my neck spread to my back. I also developed a throbbing headache. It felt like I was coming down with a bad cold or flu.



The illness rapidly changed around the third or fourth day with an afternoon fever that persisted. By the eighth day, I had trouble catching my breath. My alcoholic mind was active in defiance. I didn't believe I actually had COVID-19. This feeling passed as I surrendered and accepted my diagnosis as well as the kind assistance of family.

We were advised by Public Health I could remain at home in isolation. My doctor prescribed me medicine to use with a nebulizer which greatly assisted my breathing. The major symptoms (fevers, muscle aches, fatigue shortness of breath) continued for 19 days. I did have to go to the hospital eventually as I also have a neurological disease. We have since discovered COVID-19 can complicate some pre-existing conditions. After a short stay in Acute Care at The Ottawa Hospital I am back at home and healthy again.

This is a good news story because I now have the gift of recovery. I didn't know how critical AA tools were until I was rendered powerless once again. Prior to AA I was terrified of being admitted to a hospital. Being a hospital patient during COVID normally triggers every

fear I have. I am by myself. Who will advocate for me? Who can I trust? The gift of believing and trusting in a Higher Power was the critical difference. This allowed me to trust the medical process and believe I would be cared for. Even in isolation I now know I am never truly alone. This belief keeps me away from that first drink, as well as saves me from the dreaded loneliness that creeps into my mind and threatens to fill it with self-pity. AA provides me the spiritual tools I desperately need. I now know with our fellowship I never need to feel lonely again.

When my mind races with hectic thoughts I try to remind myself to keep things simple with these AA strategies:

1. I try to pray or meditate (or both)
2. I try to call a fellow member of AA
3. I try help someone else.

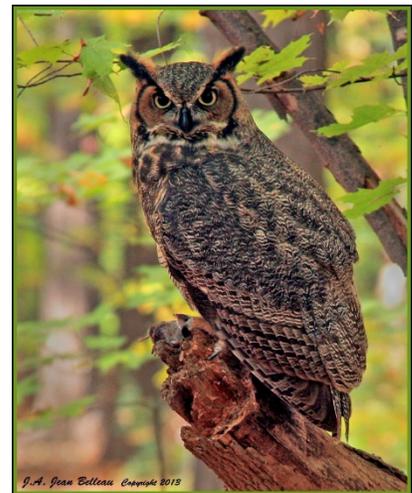
Accomplishing even one of these tasks always helps. If I manage all three, I renew my belief in a Higher Power and feel content and peaceful. Sometimes reaching out to my AA friends is like the most difficult chore on earth. It does not come easily to me. My spiritual and personal rewards are immeasurable when I do pick up the phone.

The alcoholic in me tries to live in the past or the future. AA helps me to live in the present. Covid-19 served as a reminder of the important tools I desperately need to stay sober One Day at A Time. These days I wake up to a fresh start, renewed gratitude, and countless opportunities to do the next right thing.

Lori T

## The OPP Creative Corner

Covid-19 is giving us gifts. We have more time to reflect and to create. Our new “Creative Corner” is a place where we can share what AA members are doing with extra time on their hands during the pandemic. **Send us your poetry, or your paintings, or your photographs.** You can reach us at: [newsletter@ottawaaa.org](mailto:newsletter@ottawaaa.org)



Photographs taken by long-time AA member Jean B

# From the AA archives...

## The Story Behind the Poster

During Jean F's term, 2005-2006, as District Committee Member (DCM) for District 62, the Public Information Committee produced a poster for teenagers based on the 'Pamphlet for Teenagers'. Pamphlet images were reproduced onto a 11 x 17 poster. Copies of this poster had been made for local use. A poster was sent to the Area Committee as a suggestion for a poster for teenagers.

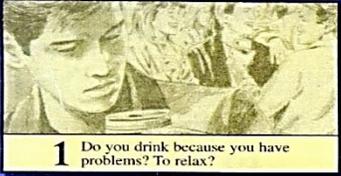
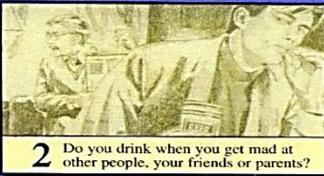
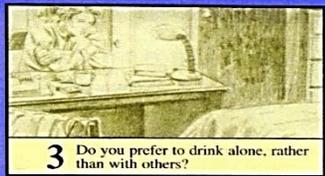
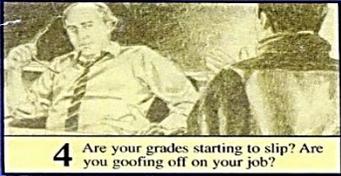
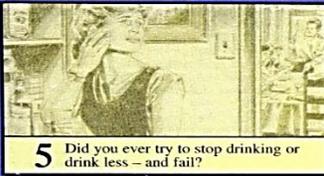
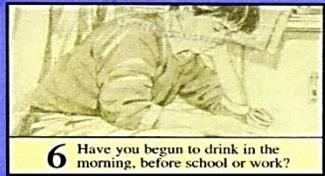
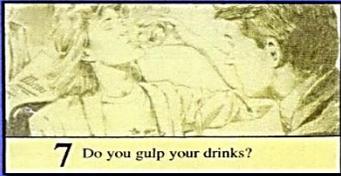
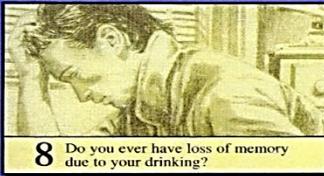
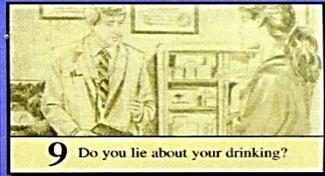
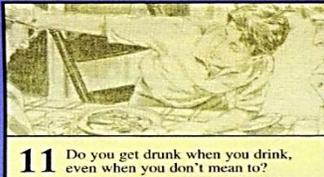
When the Area 83 Delegate (Barb K) sent this suggestion to the General Service Office (GSO) as a suggestion for a poster, the General Service Board advised that we could not use the pictures from the Pamphlet for Teenagers because this was a copyrighted pamphlet and as such could not be reproduced.

The GSO Literature committee debated the issue but stated they had not received any other requests for such a poster.

This subject remained a dead issue until the 2009 General Service Conference (GSC) received another request from Area 14, in Florida, which addressed the need for a poster for teenagers. As this was the second request that the GSO had received, it was finally decided that there was a need for such a poster, and GSO decided to have it created and distributed.

This was the second occasion that a suggestion from a Canadian Area/District resulted in a major change to AA worldwide. The first was when a Winnipeg GSR suggested that the Third Tradition be changed to remove the word "honest".

**"A MESSAGE TO TEENAGERS"**

 <b>1</b> Do you drink because you have problems? To relax?	 <b>2</b> Do you drink when you get mad at other people, your friends or parents?	 <b>3</b> Do you prefer to drink alone, rather than with others?
 <b>4</b> Are your grades starting to slip? Are you goofing off on your job?	 <b>5</b> Did you ever try to stop drinking or drink less – and fail?	 <b>6</b> Have you begun to drink in the morning, before school or work?
 <b>7</b> Do you gulp your drinks?	 <b>8</b> Do you ever have loss of memory due to your drinking?	 <b>9</b> Do you lie about your drinking?
 <b>10</b> Do you ever get into trouble when you're drinking?	 <b>11</b> Do you get drunk when you drink, even when you don't mean to?	 <b>12</b> Do you think it's cool to be able to hold your liquor?


**CALL (613)-237-6000**  
[www.offawaaa.org](http://www.offawaaa.org)  
**"ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS"**

## On the road to Vancouver 2025: San Antonio 2010

The 13th AA International Convention was held in San Antonio, Texas, from July 1 to 4, 2010. The theme was, 'A Vision For You', as AA celebrated its 75th anniversary. An estimated 53,000 were present, once again breaking all previous attendance records and rivaling many other conventions hosted in San Antonio, a city known for its large events.



Shop owners, cab drivers, hotel personnel and average citizens were quick to comment on the joyful, orderly, well-behaved group of sober drunks who had taken over their city.

Over 212 meetings and workshops took place at the convention center and several hotels. Meetings were available in French, Spanish, Italian, German, Japanese, Russian, Portuguese, Polish and Swedish.

Hurricane Alex, a rare June, Atlantic-coast hurricane threatened San Antonio that weekend. The hurricane did not hit. But heavy rains fell on Thursday, dropping the temperature by 10 degrees which very quickly brought relief to many convention goers.

Friday evening was the Opening Flag Ceremony, featuring flag bearers representing the more than 90 countries attending the convention. This was followed by a three-speaker meeting, chaired by Conley B, Southwest regional trustee. Saturday

evening everyone was back at the Alamodome for the Oldtimers Meeting, chaired by Phyllis H, G.S.O. general manager. Over 575 AAs, with more than 40 years of sobriety, put their names in the hat and twelve were drawn to share.



Southeast regional trustee El N chaired the Sunday morning three-speaker Big Meeting. The 30 millionth copy of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, was presented to the American Medical Association, which in 1956 formally declared alcoholism an illness.

All AA conventions have stories and fond memories, here are just a couple of these stories:

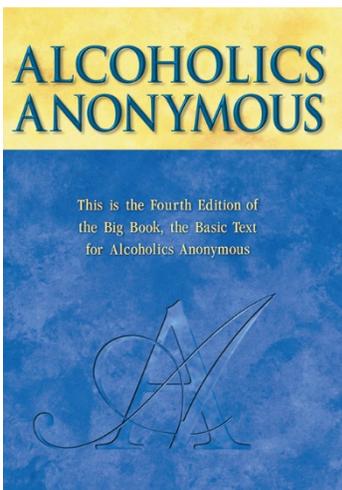
One man came up to the G.S.O. booth asking to see Gayle. He was promptly taken to Gayle SR, G.S.O. staff member. It seems that when Gayle was on the Corrections desk she had sent this young man a Big Book when he was in prison—and here he was, sober and filled with gratitude.

And a story of perseverance from a lady who just had to attend the convention no matter what: After the Toronto convention, five years ago, one woman knew she had to be in San Antonio, so she started a change jar. Then she found out she had cancer, lost her job and lost her home. "But I still had my change jar," she said, "and here I am in San Antonio."

That's it for now, Until next month and the 2015 Atlanta convention.

**Mike B**

# From the Literature Coordinator



The current Big Book is the fourth edition (2001) and is the basic text of A.A. Chapters describing the A.A. recovery program remains unchanged. New stories have been added to the personal histories.

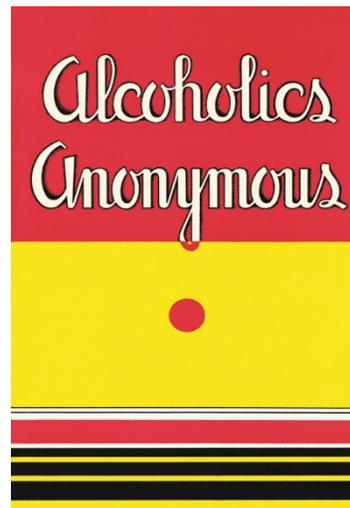
## The Big Book has many formats Which suits you best?

Since the first edition of the Big Book appeared, in 1939, it has helped millions of men and women recover from alcoholism.

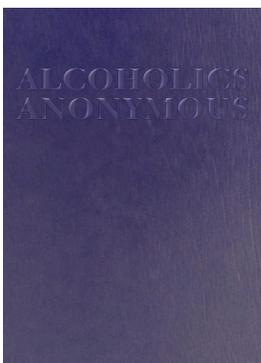
Written by William G. "Bill W." Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and many of the first 100 members of the group, the composition process was collaborative, with drafts of the book sent back and forth between Bill W's group in New York and Dr. Bob, the other co-founder, in Akron, OH.

It is one of the best-selling books of all time. In 2012, the Library of Congress in the United States designated it as one of 88 "Books that Shaped America".

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AA's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. It is a replica of the first edition with red hardcover binding, the famous "circus cover" dust jacket and bulky paper (which was why it was initially called the Big Book).

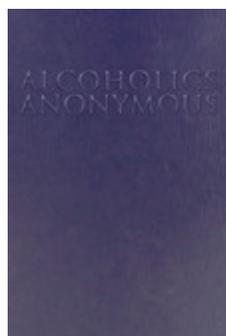
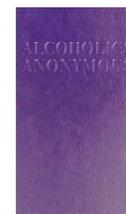


Large-print, softcover, 7" x 10 1/4", in type size recommended as suitable for the visually handicapped.



Abridged, large-print softcover, 7" x 10 1/4", in type size recommended as suitable for the visually handicapped..

Abridged, softcover, pocket version; 3 1/2" x 5 1/2". Contains all front matter, Prefaces, Forewords and Dr.'s Opinion; text of pages 1-164; "Dr. Bob's Nightmare;" and Appendices.



Portable, softcover, unabridged Fourth Edition, 4 1/2" x 7".

Each of these formats is available through our online store at <https://ottawaaa.org/e-store/>

# SERVICE CALENDAR

*Individual committees may organize their own online meetings.*

No matter how much sobriety you have, you can help and be part of the greater whole. All AA members are welcome to attend any of the following committees:

OTTAWA INTERGROUP MONTHLY MEETING..... Second Wednesday (7:00 pm)  
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue – Nepean Room)

DISTRICT 54 MEETING..... First Thursday (7:30 pm)  
(Overbrook Community Centre, 33 Quill Street)

DISTRICT 58 MEETING..... First Monday (7:00 pm)  
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 213)

DISTRICT 62 MEETING..... Second Monday (7:30 pm)  
(All Saints Church, 347 Richmond Road - rear entrance)

CORRECTIONS FACILITIES AND TREATMENT..... Fourth Tuesday (6:30 pm)  
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

PUBLIC INFORMATION/ COOPERATION WITH PROFESSIONALS...Third Monday (6:30 pm)  
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

OTTAWA ARCHIVES..... Third Wednesday (7:00 pm)  
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

**Is your AA Group's meeting information correct on ottawaaa.org?** Please send all updates as well as temporary closures to Ottawa Intergroup at [info@ottawaaa.org](mailto:info@ottawaaa.org).

**Do you have a question for the Intergroup board?** Please email us with your question and you can also request an invitation to meet with us at our monthly board meeting. Send your email to [chair@ottawaaa.org](mailto:chair@ottawaaa.org).

**If your group needs insurance,** please contact Ottawa Intergroup at [info@ottawaaa.org](mailto:info@ottawaaa.org) to discuss.

“Our Primary Purpose” publishes articles reflecting the full diversity of experience and opinion found within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. In determining content, the editor relies on the principles of the Twelve Traditions. “Our Primary Purpose” values the shared experience of individual AA members working the AA program and applying the principles of the Twelve Steps. Seeking neither to gloss over difficult issues, nor to present such issues in a harmful or contentious manner, “Our Primary Purpose” tries to embody the widest possible view of the AA Fellowship.

*The editor of “Our Primary Purpose” reserves the right to accept or reject material for publication, based on the AA traditions. Note: this policy is consistent with that of the AA Grapevine.*

*Articles are not intended to be statements of AA policy, nor does publication of any article constitute endorsement by either Alcoholics Anonymous or Ottawa Area Intergroup. Submissions are always welcome.*