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**CELEBRATED CANADIAN PRODUCER JENNIFER HOLNESS  
NAMED RECIPIENT OF THE 2026 HOT DOCS DON HAIG AWARD**

AWARD PRESENTED ANNUALLY DURING HOT DOCS FESTIVAL RECOGNIZES THE REMARKABLE  
ACHIEVEMENTS OF A CANADIAN PRODUCER AS SELECTED BY THEIR PEERS

**Toronto, ON** – Hot Docs is proud to honour award-winning producer and director **Jennifer Holness** with the prestigious **Hot Docs Don Haig Award** at the 2026 Festival, on now until May 3.

The Hot Docs Don Haig Award is presented to an outstanding Canadian independent producer with a feature-length film at the Festival, with the recipient being selected by a jury of independent filmmakers. Holness receives this year's Hot Docs Don Haig Award in recognition of her work as the executive producer behind Hot Docs 2026 official selection *Black Zombie*.

The Award recognizes creative vision and entrepreneurship, as reflected in the recipient's body of work, as well as a track record of mentoring emerging Canadian filmmakers. Holness will be presented with a \$5,000 cash prize, courtesy of the Don Haig Foundation.

In addition to serving as executive producer for *Black Zombie*, Holness is also co-director of the Hot Docs 2026 official selection *#WhileBlack*.

"I am truly honoured to receive this important and impactful award, said Jennifer Holness, 2026 Hot Docs Don Haig Award Recipient. "Documentary filmmakers are scrappy and relentless. We make work in a tough business that is driven by an independent spirit, artistic vision, integrity, passion and fortitude. These are only a few of the adjectives I thought of when I reflected on Don Haig's legacy. Then when you consider the incredible list of previous award recipients you get a small inkling of how humbled I am to be added to this group. I want to thank the jury who selected me and I want to thank Hot Docs itself for its support of my career. My first professional work in the industry was writing and directing a documentary way back in the day, and then I shifted into the narrative space. But in 2019 I followed my creative passion back to directing, and Hot Docs was there, programming my first feature documentary, *Subjects of Desire* in 2021. This year, it is truly gratifying to have two films at Hot Docs, *#WhileBlack* that I co-directed and *Black Zombie* that I am an Executive Producer on. I am so proud that I was able to help a young team helmed by Maya Annik Bedward embarking on her first feature at the start of her professional career. Ironically, I met Maya at Hot Docs years ago when she asked me to be a part of her journey. These connections that Hot Docs facilitates are important and powerful and I am thrilled to receive the recognition the Don Haig award bestows."

Jennifer Holness brings a fresh, authentic perspective to telling powerful, thought-provoking stories. She writes, produces, directs and is President of Hungry Eyes Media. Jen recently produced RT Thorne's thriller *40 Acres*, which was nominated for 10 Canadian Screen Awards, including Best Motion Picture. The film also received 5 NAACP Award Nominations, including Outstanding Independent Motion Picture

and Outstanding International Picture and a Saturn nom for Best International Film. The film is currently streaming and reached the #1 spot on Hulu and the #8 spot globally on Netflix.

Other narrative feature films include *Home Again* and *Love, Sex, and Eating the Bones*, which have screened and sold globally, earning multiple festival prizes, including a Best First Feature award at the Toronto International Film Festival for *Bones*.

Currently, Jen's doc feature, *#WhileBlack*, which she co-wrote and co-directed, saw its world premiere at SXSW and receives its Canadian premiere at Hot Docs. This is alongside *Black Zombie*, a film that she executive produced. Jen is also producing and directing *Nothing Fits*, a documentary about fashion, body size and Hollywood. As a writer and producer, Jen co-created the TV drama series, *Shoot the Messenger* and *Guns*, with the latter winning her a Best Writing Canadian Screen Award along with four other CSA awards.

*BLK: An Origin Story*, a documentary series that she co-created and produced, won five Canadian Screen Awards, including Best Director for her episode. Her feature documentary, *Subjects of Desire*, premiered at SXSW, was a TIFF Top Ten film, screened in festivals around the world, and was sold to Starz. She co-produced the feature doc, *Stateless*, with director Michele Stephenson (*American Promise*) for PBS and the National Film Board. *Stateless* premiered at Tribeca and Hot Docs in 2020 where it won the festival's Special Jury Prize.

Jen has also produced numerous TV documentaries, including *Badge of Pride* (CBC & PBS), Min Sook Lee's film about gay cops that has sold internationally from Israel to Europe; *Brick By Brick* (Omni); Yin Yin Jade Love (TVO); and *Dolores: The Art of Art Modeling* (Bravo!). *Speakers For The Dead* (CBC/NFB), which she co-directed with Sudz Sutherland, was invited to Harvard University as part of a talk about the film and Canadian Black history.

Jen's extensive resume crosses genres and mediums and in 2024 The Hollywood Reporter voted her one of the Most Powerful Women in Canadian Entertainment. She is also CMPA-Indiescreen Producer of the Year and has received a Women in Film and Television Creative Excellence Award.

She is a founder of the Black Screen Office, securing its initial operational funding and was its inaugural Board Chair. Jen was also the Board Co-Chair of the Canadian Independent Screen Fund (CISF), an organization she helped to establish. She has three kids, two dogs, and is married to Sudz Sutherland, who is also her partner at Hungry Eyes Media.

Holness will receive the 2026 Hot Docs Don Haig Award at the Hot Docs Awards Presentation on Friday, May 1. The jury for this year's Hot Docs Don Haig Award consisted of last year's winner Cornelia Principe, filmmaker Tamara Mariam Dawit, and industry veteran Janice Dawe.

Past winners of the Hot Docs Don Haig Award include producers Cornelia Principe (2025), Alison Duke (2024), Bonnie Thompson (2023), Mila Aung-Thwin (2022), Lalita Krishna (2021), Bob Moore (2020), Peter Raymont (2019), Ina Fichman (2018), Daniel Cross (2017), Ed Barreveld (2016), Anne Pick (2015),

Michael McNamara (2014), Merit Jensen Carr (2013), Mia Donovan (2012), Rama Rau (2011), Philip Lyall and Nimisha Mukerji (2010), Brett Gaylor (2009), Yung Chang (2008), Hubert Davis (2007), and Guylaine Dionne (2006).

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Hot Docs ([hotdocs.ca](http://hotdocs.ca)) is North America's leading documentary festival, conference and market. A not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing and celebrating the art of documentary and to creating production opportunities for documentary filmmakers, Hot Docs will present its 33<sup>rd</sup> annual edition in Toronto from April 23 to May 3, 2026. Hot Docs will also mount a dynamic series of knowledge sessions, networking opportunities and market programs for documentary practitioners and industry delegates, including the renowned Hot Docs Forum and Hot Docs Deal Maker. Since its inception in 1993, Hot Docs has supported the Canadian and international industry with professional development programs, production fund portfolio, and valuable professional development programs. The organization fosters education through documentaries with its popular free program Docs For Schools. Hot Docs also operates the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema, a century-old landmark located in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood and the world's first and largest documentary cinema.

Tickets and ticket packages can be purchased and used [online](http://www.hotdocs.ca) at [www.hotdocs.ca](http://www.hotdocs.ca) or in person at Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema Box Office, located at 506 Bloor Street West (hours vary daily in accordance with cinema screenings). Single tickets are \$22 (\$20 member) for regular screenings, and \$27 (\$24 member) for Opening Night and Big Ideas screenings. A Festival 12-Pack is \$228 and a Festival 20-Pack is \$340 (\$216 and \$320 members). Hot Docs offers free tickets for regular screenings before 4:00 p.m. to patrons 60+ and students with valid photo I.D., available in-person at the venue on the day of the screening, subject to availability.

Hot Docs is proud to include Rogers as its Founding Partner and Telefilm Canada, the Government of Ontario, and the Canada Media Fund as its Major Supporters.

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