

INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

June 2023

Nova Scotia Wildfires

Over the weekend of May 27 and 28, two wildfires erupted in Nova Scotia – one in Barrington and the other Tantallon. To support families and communities impacted in Central Zone, Nova Scotia Health established mobile primary care clinic adjacent the Canada Games Centre in Clayton Park for residents using the comfort centre while evacuated from their homes. Mobile primary care clinics and urgent care clinics were expanded throughout the week to support evacuees in Western Zone as well, with mental health supports in place in both zones for evacuees.

Nova Scotia Health's Mental Health and Addictions program, in collaboration with the QEII Foundation and the Global Psychological eHealth Foundation, launched a supportive text message tool today for any Nova Scotian affected by the wildfires called Text4HopeNS. Text HopeNS to 393939 to subscribe for six months of supportive text messages, free of charge. Text4HopeNS is an evidence-based tool that helps people identify and adjust the negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviours stressful times might provoke.

In addition, Nova Scotia Health, and the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia shared information on how to best access prescription medication left behind during the emergency evacuation order and which pharmacies are closed because of the evacuation.

Many Nova Scotia Health employees and physicians are directly impacted by the wildfires, either through emergency evacuation, hosting displaced family and friends, or grief. All-staff messages were shared by P.B Rodier, our Provincial Director for Emergency Preparedness on appropriate mental wellness resources EFAP and additional Trauma Support. In addition, leadership in both Western and Central zones have provided information on how to use emergency leave.

In Western Zone, the following sites cancelled routine blood collection appointments on May 29 due to fire-related internet outages:

- Fishermen's Memorial Hospital, South Shore Regional Hospital, Roseway Hospital, Queens General Hospital, and Our Health Centre

In Central Zone blood collection in St. Margaret's Bay was paused on May 29 to limit traffic to the evacuation area.

On Thursday, June 1, Roseway Hospital in Shelburne was evacuated as the wildfire in Barrington grew. South Shore Regional and Fishermen's Memorial and other facilities.

Over the weekend of June 3 and 4, rain fell. As a result, the wildfire in Central Zone became 100 per cent contained and many evacuees were able to return home. Presently, the wildfire in Western Zone is still considered out-of-control, but not growing.

Action for Health Plan

Patient Flow

Beginning in May, Nova Scotia Health’s IM/IT team began expanding the use of self-registration kiosks to fourteen additional health care facilities across the province. This work is happening in phases and is scheduled to be complete by the end of June. Self-registration kiosks are already available in the organization’s Central Zone and will now be available in Eastern, Western and Northern Zones. The kiosks provide patients and clients a convenient, zero-contact registration option for appointments and will reduce wait times at registration, enhancing the visitor experience. Patients and clients still have the option to register in person and some clinics will continue to require face-to-face registration.

Health Human Resources

Recruitment

Nova Scotia Health recruitment teams remain very active participating in international, national and community job fairs frequently. In addition, recruitment is active on social media through LinkedIn which amplifies the reach of the recruitment efforts.

In late May, government shared that 140 nurses signed on to return to work as a direct result of the \$10,000 recruitment bonus. The returning nurses have signed contracts to work in the publicly funded system for at least two years. These numbers supplement the over 1,200 nurses Nova Scotia Health recruited over the last fiscal year.

Health Workforce Nova Scotia Strategic Action Plan

Work continues to gather feedback to inform the provincial workforce strategy with meetings being held in person and virtually. Soon, a workforce survey will launch on Engage4Health to support this work.

Access to Primary Care

In May, Province invested in, or strengthened 60 primary care clinics. The expansion includes collaborative family practice teams, primary care clinics, after-hours clinics, urgent care centres, and urgent treatment centres.

Details include:

- Eight new collaborative family practice teams, strengthening 26 teams, and adding a locum support team.
 - Four new or expanded collaborative family practice teams will adopt a new rapid onboarding process for healthcare professionals developed in partnership with Dalhousie family medicine. Other groups will start using this process over time.
- Increased funding for one (of the current three) after-hours clinics, and funding to open two additional clinics
- Six new primary care clinics will be added, and 10 will be enhanced.
- One new urgent treatment centre to bring the total number to eight clinics. (Note: These facilities provide urgent, non-emergency care to all Nova Scotians and are different than urgent care centres).



- Five new urgent care centres. These centres improve access for existing patients to participating private practices. Several healthcare providers work together from one clinic location to offer evening and weekend appointments to one another's patients. (Woodlawn Medical Clinic is an example of an urgent care centre).

Mobile Primary Care Clinics

From September through end of May, there have been over 8,500 patients visits to mobile primary care clinics and close to 100 clinics held provincewide.

Surgical Strategy

Single-entry Surgical Intake Model

On March 31, Nova Scotia launched a new single entry intake model for better managing and coordinating surgical consult requests. Supported by the Ocean eReferral tool, a central intake office and a centralized waitlist, the model aims to help improve access to surgical care, help to reduce wait times and improve the overall experience for providers and patients.

More than 1,900 referrals have been received from 337 unique referrers to date and referral volumes are increasing each week. Approximately 50 per cent of primary care providers and 78 per cent of Nova Scotia Health Surgeons are fully set-up to use the tool. Efforts are continuing to onboard all primary care providers and surgeons to Ocean and to optimize the use of the tool to help realize the expected benefits for patients, providers, and the health system.

Ocean eReferrals will also be used to support MRI eReferrals (target July 2023), followed by other Diagnostic Imaging modalities in the fall and winter. Users already set-up to use Ocean for surgical referrals will be able to send Diagnostic Imaging referrals as well.

Shared Decision-Making Module

A Shared Decision-Making learning module: *Shared Decision Making in Cardiac Interventions* has been developed by Nova Scotia Health in collaboration with the Queens University Online Learning Group. The module is now available for use by providers in Nova Scotia. The module and others in development, are part of Nova Scotia Health's multi-year Surgical Access and Quality Improvement Strategy. The strategy has quality improvement initiatives among its key areas of focus, including efforts to assure the appropriateness of surgical care.

Access & Flow

Access and Flow refers to how patients move through the health care system - whether that's hospital, home, or community. Recent updates include the implementation of SAFER-f in inpatient units across the province. This is a set of simple rules for adult inpatient units to improve patient flow. Also, the Home First provincial strategy is in development. The goal of Home First is to empower patients to safely age in their preferred place with supports and programs.

Digital Health Strategy

A Nova Scotia Digital Health Strategy has been developed in collaboration with clinical leaders across Nova Scotia Health and IWK, and partners from the Department of Health and Wellness. The strategy presents pillars for effective digital transformation, guiding principles, and a framework for categorizing critical capabilities and investments. The strategy has been informed by a national and international jurisdictional scan, as well as the 'Digital Discovery



Interviews' conducted in Fall 2022. Work is currently underway to map out the delivery of key capabilities, with the delivery of the complete strategy to follow in July.

Healthcare Infrastructure

QEII New Generation Project

On May 12, the province shared that it reached an agreement with Plenary PCL Health to start advanced work on the Halifax Infirmary site of the QEII Health Sciences Centre. Construction activity is expected to begin soon.

CBRM Redevelopment Project

Two tower cranes are now on site to begin work on Cape Breton Regional Hospital's new Clinical Services Building. The cranes are expected to be on site for two years. At Northside General Hospital construction continues as structural steel is put in place.

Annual General Meeting

Planning is well underway for Nova Scotia Health annual general meeting, with the theme: *Healthier Together: Ready, Responsive and Reliable*. The tentative is date July 6 for launching our recorded AGM and Annual Report on social media. This past year has seen Nova Scotia Health make huge strides in patient care and health care services. The AGM and Annual Report will highlight our successes.

Continuing Care

Continuing Care recently published its fiscal year in review, which shows increased service use.

- Fiscal year 2022-23 highlights include:
 - 43,619 individuals and their families were supported
 - A 5 per cent increase over the previous year and a 17 per cent increase since 2016
 - 140,016 intake phone calls were received, and 23,131 intakes made
 - 3,388 people admitted into long-term care
 - NSH home care nurses completed 51,971 visits and travelled 782,453 kilometres

Cancer Care

Oncology Transformation Project (OTP)

This first-of-its-kind project is collaboration with NS Health (Cancer Care Program, Research, Innovation and Discovery), the Province of Nova Scotia and Varian Medical Systems, a Siemens Healthineers company to implement a single provincial oncology-specific information system, Varian's ARIA® Oncology Information System. The first major milestone is the scheduling component of ARIA® OIS, due to go-live on June 19.

Lung Screening Program

The Lung Screening Program has the overarching goal of reducing deaths from lung cancer (the leading cause of cancer deaths in Nova Scotia) with phase one launching in Central Zone in early fall. The program is intended for Nova Scotians who are determined to be at very high risk for lung cancer, aged 50-74 years old, who currently or formerly smoked daily for 20 years or more. Nova Scotians who meet the initial criteria may self-refer by calling 1-833-505-LUNG (5864) or be referred by primary care providers. Those referred will have a risk assessment (by telephone) with a nurse navigator to determine their personal level of risk for lung cancer and whether they would benefit from a low-dose CT



scan. The program was developed in consultation by a steering committee of physicians, allied health workers, health advocates, patients, and community representatives, including First Nations.

Providing Care Closer to Home (stabilizing community oncology clinics)

Recent investment in local resources at the eight community oncology clinics across the province means reduced travel for many patients and improved access to cancer care by recruiting more general practice oncologists (GPOs), nurse practitioners (NPs) and pharmacy staff. April data shows the Cancer Care Program's ability to meet or exceed its target of providing 80 per cent of systemic therapy (chemotherapy and immunotherapy visits closer to home).

Patients Relations

Encouraging, receiving, and responding to feedback from patients and families is an important part of Nova Scotia Health's mandate. The Patient Relations team helps to facilitate the feedback process by working with patients, families, and teams to identify what lies at the heart of feedback. In May 2023, Patient Relations received 193 new feedback files, and closed 411.

Patient Relations held a family meeting in Millbrook in May, accompanied by Northern Zone Medical Executive Director Dr. Aaron Smith. Patient Relations had held a previous family meeting in Eskasoni, with the support of Eastern Zone executive director Michelle DePodesta. These meetings are a significant step forward for Patient Relations and for Nova Scotia Health in acknowledging the historic and current systemic anti-Indigenous racism that exists in the health system and being open to listening and learning in a setting that is safe and comfortable for the family. It is a first step, and we remain committed to the longer-term journey of truth and reconciliation in action.

Research and Innovation Hub

The Innovation team has spent June preparing for their upcoming move to the Nova Centre, which will be a provincially space and headquarters for health innovation in Nova Scotia. The launch of the new space is June 15.

YourHealthNS

YourHealthNS, the first Government of Nova Scotia/Nova Scotia Health app, is expected to launch on June 8. This app will put some health care services directly in the hands of Nova Scotians. Through the app, you can book blood tests, X-rays, EKGs, or COVID-19/flu shots, and provides COVID-19 test results and some vaccination records. Launching with the app is Virtual Urgent Care NS, a service is for immediate, but non-life-threatening conditions, like sinus infection, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, rashes, or non-crisis mental health care.

3M Health Care Quality Team Award

The Canadian College of Health Leaders has awarded Nova Scotia Health with the 3M Health Care Quality Team Award (Across a Health System) for the success of VirtualCareNS. The award category honours quality improvement initiatives focused on health system redesign resulting in transitions and/or integration across the continuum of care, between two or more organizations, service networks or partners.



Our People

Summer Students

On May 29, a group of summer students began their work terms with Nova Scotia Health and an e-mail message from Nova Scotia Health President and CEO Karen Oldfield was delivered to each personally to welcome them to the organization.

Rural Career Fair

Nova Scotia Health hosted its first rural career fair in Port Hawkesbury on May 11, focusing on promoting clinical and non-clinical vacancies in Eastern zone's eight rural facilities. It was also an opportunity to educate attendees on the necessary training and educational requirements for jobs within health care. The 25 attendees included international nurses, a social worker, microbiologist, pharmacy tech and others interested in various other opportunities.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation and Accessibility (EDIRA)

As part of Nova Scotia Health's ongoing work support the Health Equity Framework, a senior director position was posted June 1 to hire for the first senior leadership position dedicated to this important work. In addition, discussions are underway with Nova Scotia Health, Government and Tajiikimik to host community conversations in First Nation communities across the province. Vice presidents in each zone have been asked to reach out to their Mi'kmaq Health Services Directors to identify appropriate communities for consideration.