

INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

October 2023

Floods and innovation

In July, as the province was still recovering from the spring wildfires, Nova Scotia was hit with 250mm of rain in a 24-hour period, causing damaging floods in many areas and resulting in four deaths.

Despite the personal stress on each of us as residents of this province, our team at Nova Scotia Health showed up, the way they always do: our facilities staff ensured our buildings were protected, our emergency preparedness team and others worked to respond to changing circumstances throughout the province, and of course our clinical teams, including those who had to stay on duty caring for patients when colleagues were unable to report to work due to road damage and other conditions.

Although some services in leased spaces had to temporarily relocate, we were fortunate to avoid serious infrastructure damage to Nova Scotia Health facilities.

However, recognizing that widespread road washouts meant it was difficult or unsafe for many Nova Scotians to travel for care, Nova Scotia Health and our Innovation Hub expedited the launch of a virtual urgent care service on a test and try basis. The service is part of Nova Scotia Health's ongoing effort in testing innovative approaches to provide Nova Scotians more ways to access care as is detailed throughout this report.

Since then, we have expanded the hours and access points and more than 1,500 people have received virtual urgent care from home or at a growing number of Nova Scotia Health sites.

On many fronts, we and our government partners are working to ensure that Nova Scotians **have** a variety of options for accessing care and that they **understand** how and when to use them.

Annual General Meeting

Nova Scotia Health held a successful Annual General Meeting on July 20, 2023. It was livestreamed from Cobequid Community Health Centre. There were 272 livestream viewers (noting some of these viewers were watching in groups and individuals at the site were invited to attend in person). The [Annual Report](#) and video, [New Pathways to Care in Nova Scotia](#), were launched at the AGM. The video was shared on social media and our audience responded positively to it. There were 688 views and it reached about 1,800 people.

Action for Health Plan

There’s a refreshed website about [Action for Health](#) that features the various ways Nova Scotians can access timely primary care, such as at pharmacy clinics, mobile clinics, urgent treatment centres, and through virtual care. The site is now mobile friendly and includes stories demonstrating the impact of the many activities underway that are transforming how we deliver care. It also has a revised reporting section, that enables people to view detailed data and see the progress being made to create a world class health care system for Nova Scotians. An accompanying marketing campaign (traditional and digital advertising) is now in market, focused on sharing the various ways to access care.

Health Human Resources

Recruitment

Nova Scotia Health recruitment teams remain very active participating in international, national and community career events. Enhanced visibility on social media through LinkedIn has amplified the reach of the recruitment efforts and provides awareness on where the recruitment teams are attending events. There has been recruitment participation at key conference events with other Nova Scotia Health team member attendees including diagnostic imaging, critical care, and cardiovascular nursing.

There has been an upward trend of external hires with more than 300 new employees in July. Commitment letters have been shared with 558 upcoming nursing graduates to join our organization. There is ongoing collaboration with the integrated workforce planning to engage and support a sustainable workforce.

We have hired 402 doctors since 2021. Factoring in retirements and other departures, that represents a net gain of 208 doctors in Nova Scotia between April 2021 and end of September.

Year	Total Docs Recruited	Net Gain
2021-2022	163	89
2022-2023	168	86
2023-Sept 30, 2023	71	33
	402	208

Access to Primary Care

The expansion of primary care clinics, including collaborative family practice teams, primary care clinics, after-hours clinics, urgent care centres, and urgent treatment centres, continues.

- In July-August, announcements were made about the following four clinics:
 - July 19 – [New Collaborative Family Practice Clinic in Amherst](#)
 - Aug. 28 – [New primary health care collaborative clinic to boost access in Antigonish](#)
 - Sept. 6 – [More room to grow for primary health care services in Bridgewater](#)
 - Sept. 8 – [New Collaborative Family Practice Clinic in Masstown](#)

- We are seeing more than 50,000 Nova Scotians each month receiving primary care at expanded primary care access points, including:
 - Virtual Care Nova Scotia
 - Mobile Primary Care Clinics
 - Primary Care Clinics
 - Urgent Treatment Centres and Urgent Care Centres
 - Pharmacy Primary Care Clinics, Pharmacy+ Clinics, and community pharmacies
- We are providing Nova Scotians unprecedented access to primary care, which is often more accessible and faster than waiting to see your family doctor.

Surgical Strategy

- We are making progress toward restoring surgical services to pre-COVID (2019-20) levels, increasing capacity, and reducing wait times.
- The percentage of patients having surgeries within targets is improving.
 - So far this year a higher percentage of patients are receiving cataract surgeries, hip replacements and knee replacements within the national benchmarks compared to last year (2022-23).
 - Some areas seeing notable gains including Northern Zone, which went from 43 per cent of patients receiving cataract surgery within target in April of this year, to 77 per cent during the month of September.
- We are seeing waitlists for surgeries and endoscopy procedures decline.
 - Surgical wait list is down nearly 18 per cent from April 1, 2022.
 - Endoscopy wait list (excluding Central Zone) is down 30 per cent from April 1, 2022.
- 1,204 outpatient joint replacements were completed last year, compared to 85 pre-COVID (2019-20) and 684 have been completed so far this year, including the first cases at Aberdeen Hospital.
- A new [surgical access premium initiative](#) launched in August provide zones increased flexibility to complete additional surgeries after hours as other resources are available including beds, nursing, and medical device reprocessing services.
- More than 7,300 referrals have been received through Nova Scotia's new electronic referral tool (eReferrals) since its launch at the end of March, with efforts continuing to onboard additional surgeons and primary care providers and support their use of the tool. This tool has recently been expanded at the end of September to allow primary care providers to submit MRI referrals as well, and eReferrals for ultrasounds and CT scans will also be introduced later this year.

Access & Flow

While our hospitals continue to struggle with high occupancy, Nova Scotia Health, with support of the government, is improving access and flow in hospitals with initiatives like the Care Coordination Centre, the first provincewide command centre in Canada that gives healthcare teams information on bed availability, ambulance offloads and patient transfers. The command centre enables staff and physicians to spend more time providing care instead of co-ordinating it, directly addressing the need for faster access to care.

And there's SAFER-f, an initiative focused on improvements like completing lab tests sooner, better co-ordinating healthcare teams and improving communication with families and patients, all of which help patients to return home sooner.

Increasing evening and weekend access to services such as physiotherapists, dietitians, pharmacists, occupational therapists, and discharge planners also helps patients reduce their length of stay.

And we are building. Many hospital beds are being used by patients who could be better served in long-term care or could be monitored effectively outside of the hospital with the right set-up. That's why we are building long-term care homes across the province and transition to care beds in key areas. This will ensure people get to the care they need in the right place.

Quality Summits

During the month of October, Nova Scotia Health will host four Quality Summits—one in each zone. The summits bring together employees, physicians and patient family advisors to celebrate, inspire and learn from each other about new and innovative quality improvement and patient safety initiatives happening within the organization. There was a high demand for tickets, with central zone needing to triple the number of seats. There was also a large number of submissions from initiatives across the entire organization.

Healthcare Infrastructure

Bayers Lake Community Outpatient Centre

This new facility achieved substantial completion on Aug. 15 and will open for care on Nov. 20. Training and recruitment are ongoing. An internal recognition event was held Oct. 15. Patients are beginning to receive appointment notices. An official public launch will be planned ahead of opening day.

QEII New Generation Project

The project team is focused on design and planning activities. Efforts centre on improving designs to achieve better alignment between functionality and cost/schedule constraints. The project team continues to research parking options for staff – to replace Robie Street parkade (will be decommissioned as part of early works).

The following work continues at the site:

- Summer Street lobby – expected completion winter 2024
- MRI/DI enhancement – 1.5T removed, 1.5T trailer near ED still operating as a contingency, impact to cafeteria
- ED ductwork – in progress until the end of October (enables demolition of Robie Street levels 3, 4 and 5 down the road)

Bedford transitional care facility

Work has been ongoing at the facility to ensure functional requirements will be met for clients and health care workers. QEII New Generation clinical planning team in collaboration with Nova Scotia Health partners developed the functional program supported by clinical planning consultants Agnew Peckham.

We expect to have a contract with the external service provider signed by late October and the site is on track to open in early 2024.

CBRM Redevelopment Project

At Cape Breton Regional Hospital, construction of the Clinical Services Building (CSB) and Cape Breton Cancer Centre is underway. The CSB will house an emergency department, critical care department, inpatient beds, surgical suites with cardiac catheterization lab and family/newborn unit.

Construction progress of the Northside Health Complex was celebrated with clinical planning teams signing a steel beam that will be erected in the new health centre, 60 bed long-term care home and laundry facility.

In New Waterford, construction of the new Breton Education Centre (BEC) school and community wellness centre is underway. The school is expected to open in Sept. 2024. Once the new school opens, the former BEC will be safely demolished so construction of the health centre and long-term care home can begin.

Cancer Care

Oncology Transformation Project (OTP)

The OTP is progressing on schedule. Phase 1 was completed on June 19, enabling oncology appointment scheduling across the province to occur electronically through the ARIA® Oncology Information System (OIS). Now under phase 2, two full-day in-person workshops have been held to discuss how the patient engagement application of Noona can be used to support clinical operations, from streamlined patient triage to inclusion of patient-reported outcomes across routine oncology practice. Nine virtual workshops occurred in September with subject matter experts from across the province sharing knowledge to inform the design of ARIA for use in systemic therapy. Design and configuration of ARIA, based on detail provided by subject matter experts, is scheduled for October. The first site to implement systemic therapy management in ARIA is community cancer clinic in Truro with a go-live date of December 4. Other sites will follow in 2024.

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). The program is on track to be ready for the phase one launch in Central Zone this fall. A soft launch of the Lung Screening Program began in mid-July in Central Zone. The soft launch is enabling the booking clerk and screening nurse navigators to work through the existing wait list from primary care referrals to identify which patients are at very high risk and could benefit from a CT chest scan. Between July 11 and Sept. 22, 203 Nova Scotians have had clinical risk assessments to determine their personal risk of lung cancer. As a result, 156 Nova Scotians were booked for a CT chest scan; 78 individuals were referred to Tobacco Free Nova Scotia, and 77 individuals indicated their interest in nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).

Providing Care Closer to Home (stabilizing community oncology clinics)

Work continues to stabilize services in community oncology sites by ensuring the right mix of cancer health professionals with the right skills are in place to meet patients' needs and support as much cancer care as is safely possible being provided closer to where patients live. Work also continues to expand psychosocial oncology resources in community oncology sites including hiring social workers and drug access navigators, whose role is to work with insurance providers on behalf of patients to minimize their out-of-pocket cancer drug costs. The investment is making a difference. The range of services is expanding to include gynecologic oncology, hematologic oncology, and pediatric oncology. During May 2023 (most recent data available) 92% (2,457) of the 2,672 systemic



therapy chemotherapy visits took place in the community oncology clinic closest to the patient's home. The target is for more than 80 per cent of patients to receive chemotherapy close to home.

Patient 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. Between July 1 and Sept. 30, 2023, Patient Relations entered 1,646 feedback files, and closed 1,647 (not necessarily the same ones entered).

Communication with providers rates as the third most common feedback theme, although most feedback files contain some element of feedback about communication. Patients and families who report a positive experience relay that they felt heard, validated, respected and that provider(s) communicated clearly what they could expect, with empathy. Patients and families who report a negative experience share that they felt dismissed, disrespected, not heard, and that they were not provided with the information they needed, or that the information was relayed in a way that lacked empathy. These themes underscore the transformative nature of communication in influencing the patient experience, both positively and negatively. This is in keeping with the principles and evidence reinforced through the Communicate with Heart program offered by Nova Scotia Health to employees and physicians.

Research and Innovation Hub

Virtual and Digital Health transformations

Digital transformation is at the forefront of Nova Scotia Health's plan for better healthcare, faster. The Health Innovation Hub has been leading quick, seamless industry collaborations to deliver virtual care, accessible patient records and unified information systems.

As part of these transformations, the 3M award winning **VirtualCareNS** is improving access to primary care with more than 73,000 Nova Scotians that have registered and more than 95,000 visits have occurred, with a 4.6/5 satisfaction rating; **VirtualEmergencyNS** has enabled 2,600+ patients visits, Of those, more than 1,900 were for prescription and renewals and 372 required a doctor's note; **Virtual Hallway** has enabled rapid collaboration between care providers, with over 4,600+ physician to physician consults since 2022 with 84 per cent of patients no longer needing specialist referrals and finally **virtual urgent care** has enabled urgent care access for more than 1,500 patients.

Through the Health Innovation Hub, Nova Scotia has deployed the world's first province-wide implementation of a Care Coordination Centre that allows for the identification of delays in the system and helps care teams rapidly deploy solutions using real-time data to get patients the right care, at the right time.

Impactful partnerships

The Health Innovation Hub continues to be a powerful catalyst in the province hosting several key partners and impactful events to advance best possible care and solutions for access to all Nova Scotians.



We are working with partners, both locally and globally, such as Denmark, Singapore, India and Philippines, Princeton University (USA). Working on partnerships to advance priorities related to digital technologies, AI, robotics and virtual solutions and enhancing access to best talent and healthcare professionals so Nova Scotia can indeed become a “Magnet for Healthcare Professionals” and experts.

Key impacts include:

- By the end of this year, Nova Scotia Health working with key partners will have enabled access to nearly 1,000 internationally educated nurses;
- Nova Scotia Health is the only site in Canada with six surgical robots which include: Intuitive da Vinci for cancer and general surgeries, Medtronic Stealth Auto- guide for brain surgery, two Stryker Mako for orthopaedic surgery, and Medtronic Mazor for spinal surgery.

Impactful events:

- Policy Lab to advance learnings from Nova Scotia to Atlantic and Canadian Partners – working with Healthcare Excellence Canada
- Wound Care Event leading up to Nova Scotia being the gateway to Wound Care Centre of Excellence strategy in Canada, Sept. 25/26
- Women in Healthcare Innovation Leadership Event, Oct. 12
- Roundtable on Single-Use Intermittent Catheter Access in NS on Nov. 1 with Denmark partners

Our People

Productivity in filling requisitions has shown a significant increase, with 1,260 more requisitions being filled during the 5-month period spanning from April to August 2023 (6,613) compared to the same period in 2021 (5,353).

Immigration and International

The immigration and international recruitment team has gained momentum with recent changes to the Nova Scotia nursing licensure which has increased uptake and hires for recruitment services. This intake is unique with immigration requirements with Nova Scotia Health providing nominee support for work permits, primary contact for immigration services for employer portal requirements, collaboration with NICHE (RID), attention to hire placements and pre-boarding requirements before hire. This team is resourced and aligned to support and provide guidance to our leaders and candidates for foreign worker hire compliance.

Student Engagement

A student engagement strategy has been developed including program ambassadors from each zone. These ambassadors have been leveraged to join recruitment services at career fairs and support recruitment initiatives. Forty-three career events have been attended since July 2023 with an additional 35 to attend before the end of the year. An information session has been provided to 100+ senior nursing students at Dalhousie.

Mock interviews and commitment letters have been provided to NSCC LPNs in WZ to support potential hires who are graduating December 2023.

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

On June 1, 2023, a senior director position was posted to hire the first senior leadership position dedicated to this important work. On September 5, 2023, Raj Makkar officially assumed the role of Senior Director of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Accessibility (EDIRA) and Talent and Organizational Development.

We are recruiting Mi'kmaq and Indigenous Patient Navigators to care teams across the province with the goal to improve culture in our facilities, enhance patient care experiences and ensure access to health care. We are also reviewing policies to set standards for anti-racist and non-discriminatory behaviors.

In response to the first legislated [Health Equity Framework](#) released in July 2023, Nova Scotia Health is also part of the health system partners implementing the framework, which engaged with Indigenous partners to develop. The core three focus areas of the framework include improving patient experiences, health human resources, and health system policies.

Engagement and Accountability

As well as supporting individual patient and public engagement projects across all zones and services ranging from pediatrics to palliative care, our public engagement team has been supporting the development of the health system online engagement platform. Work was completed to enable the transfer of the Engage4Health.ca URL to Health and Wellness when they are ready to launch their platform in late November. The new URL for Nova Scotia Health's platform is Engage4HealthNSH.ca. Over time the plan is to move NS Health online engagement activities over to the health system platform and decommission our existing platform.

We completed an evaluation of the Patient, Family, Public Advisory Council (PFPAC) on behalf of Quality. Current and former PFPAC volunteers were interviewed, and a report was presented to Quality and Patient Experience leadership and current PFPAC members.

Mass Casualty Commission (implementation of Recommendation C13) Engagement

- Summary report from June engagement sessions provided to participants, community and staff in August.
- New Engagement Advisor hired for this project is undergoing orientation, training, and building connections and relationships with other NS Health staff working on this file.
- A draft, high level engagement strategy was shared with MCC project leadership.

Community Health Board Support

CHB Review

The consultant completed a draft proposal and report for the CHB Boundary Review. There are 22 CHBs proposed (a reduction of 15). The new boundaries have been derived based on the Stats Canada dissemination areas, Community Clusters and Community Environs. This will ensure that CHBs will be able to access accurate, up-to-date population health data for their areas. The boundary proposal also addresses feedback from NS Health leadership and DHW that there were too many CHBs. Managers and staff have provided input into the draft new boundaries and the consultant is preparing the final report. With the boundary review completed, the next step will be to prepare a

redesign proposal and business case for approval by NS Health leadership and DHW. The Minister is required to approve changes to CHB boundaries under the Health Authorities Act.

Community Health Planning

CHBs are preparing to consult with their communities beginning mid- to late-October. An online province-wide survey had been developed, and CHBs in each zone have developed questions that are specific to the interests within their areas. CHBs are also planning in-person conversations and focus groups, and each zone is taking a slightly different approach. Public Health, the Public Engagement team, Strategy and Performance, and Engage Nova Scotia are supporting the CHB Health Planning work. This initial round of community consultations will wrap-up in early December, with data analysis happening in January and February, and a second-round stakeholder consultations on health plan priorities occurring throughout the late-winter and into the spring. This is the first time in the history of the CHBs that all boards have conducted their health planning process simultaneously.

CHB Wellness Grants

Community Health Boards changed the time period for their Wellness Grant process from fall to spring starting in 2023. For this fiscal year, CHBs across Nova Scotia funded 287 community groups and organizations through their annual \$700,000 Wellness Fund process. The value of individual project grants ranges from \$500 to \$3,000. The Wellness Grants are intended to support local action on health promotion, wellness and wellbeing activities for communities. Information about projects and recipients is available on the [Community Health Board website](#).

Accountability

Senior Nova Scotia Health leaders have met with standing committees of Province House to answer questions from MLAs on the following subjects:

- July 11(Health) EHS Offload Times
- Sept. 12 (Health) Implementation of Additional Mental Health and Addictions Supports
- Sept. 19 (Veterans' Affairs) Impacts of the Health Care Crisis on Camp Hill
- Oct. 4 (Public Accounts) Report of the Auditor General: Ground Ambulance Services

More data and easier navigation of health information

Nova Scotia Health launched a new information tool that will help Nova Scotians understand wait times at some of the province's largest emergency departments. Predicted wait times for 10 emergency departments across the province can be found at <https://www.nshealth.ca/edwaittimes>. More sites will be added by end of year. Nova Scotia Health will also launch a redesigned public website on October 19, 2023.