

# MOMENTUM FOR HEALTH

A CEO progress report



# A MESSAGE FROM KAREN OLDFIELD

President & Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Health (interim)



Dear colleagues and partners in health,

It has been one year since I came to Nova Scotia Health as interim CEO. A few weeks later, I joined Premier Tim Houston and other members of the health care leadership team on the Speak Up for Health Care tour. We travelled thousands of kilometres, visited 24 sites between Yarmouth and Neils Harbour, hosted roundtable discussions in Sydney, Truro, Bridgewater, and Halifax and heard from hundreds of health care workers.

It was a humbling experience to learn firsthand about Nova Scotia Health and the people who work, learn and volunteer here. Since then, I have continued to listen and learn from health care workers and Nova Scotians about what is important to them. I've toured facilities, hosted town halls, and welcomed suggestions and ideas for improving care and making the system better for all. Most importantly, I've worked with teams across the province to enable you to move those ideas into action.

It has not been an easy task. However, the Premier asked me to be part of a team that would get things done and would not be deterred by the complexity of the issues. Your advice and insight over the past 12 months have been invaluable and only strengthened my resolve to dig in and move the needle for Nova Scotians. That has been my sole focus.

While there are many things on my to-do list, my current priorities fall under three broad categories:

- People
- Access to care
- Innovation

This report is intended to give you an idea of the incredible amount of work that has happened over the past year to advance these priorities, as well as a sense of the exciting things to come as this work begins to unfold.

In support of our teams, internationally educated and trained healthcare professionals will have easier pathways to begin working in Nova Scotia. Health care professionals have 24/7 access to innovative online physical and mental wellness programs.

Nova Scotians will have better access to primary care with virtual care available to everyone on the Need a Family Practice Registry. Mobile primary care clinics will support priority access needs in multiple communities beginning later this fall.

We're launching a single-entry intake model for managing and coordinating surgical consult referrals, which is part of the broader plan to increase access to surgeries, reduce wait times and improve the overall care experience for patients.

These are just a few examples. My role has been to remove the barriers hindering progress and to make decisions to propel us forward. I am proud of what we have accomplished so far and will continue to concentrate on improvements - whether they be in technology, process or resources. Let's leave no stone unturned.

I have heard personally from many tired and frustrated professionals and frontline staff. My inability to press a button and make it instantly better for you has been an ongoing source of frustration. Yet, like you, I know that each day is a new day and fills me with renewed energy to keep going.

I want to thank you for your continued work for the health care of all Nova Scotians. I'm learning that there is a certain kind of person who is drawn to health care. You are dedicated, goal-focused and tenacious in your mission to provide a positive care experience for each patient. Nova Scotia Health is a collective with a range of responsibilities, backgrounds, and expertise. This is more than a job -- it's a calling. And you make a difference. You have my deepest appreciation and respect.

I know the work environment is tough right now. The added pressures of COVID-19 have exacerbated an already overstressed system. You are stretched to the limit. Even so, people are jumping in to help move things forward. That signals to me an understanding of the urgency and the opportunity. The time to transform is *now*.

It's going to be a busy fall. Let's keep the momentum going.



# PEOPLE

At Nova Scotia Health, we have great people who take pride in their work. Our province is growing, and demand for our care system has never been greater. Health care workers are formidable, but work-life balance is essential to healthy living and a healthy workplace. I'm committed to attracting and keeping health all care talent in Nova Scotia - nurses, physicians and allied health. Over the past year, a record number of 160 new physicians chose Nova Scotia. Since April, 220 nurse graduates have started with Nova Scotia Health.

**Clinical associates:** Clinical associates received their medical education in a country other than Canada which presents challenges to practice as a physician in Canada. Nova Scotia Health is working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia to allow clinical associates to work with an expanded scope of practice. Students are already enrolled.

**Expanding physician assistant access:** Physician Assistants are health care professionals educated in a medical program often affiliated with a medical school. They practice medicine under the supervision of a licensed physician. Nova Scotia Health has an implementation plan for several physician assistant pilot programs, including supporting regional emergency departments.

**Bridging for nurses:** Together with our partners at the Nova Scotia College of Nursing, we have identified several streams to facilitate employment of internationally educated nurses with Nova Scotia Health, specifically supporting bridging education and skills from LPNs to RNs efficiently.

- We are facilitating conditional licensure pathways for nurses, including ongoing supervision, mentorship, and transition to practice. There are multiple cohorts being offered through 2022 and 2023.
- We are partnering with Dalhousie and St. Francis Xavier universities, the College of Nursing and others to support the design and implementation of a bridging program for nursing graduates from India next year.

- Nurses educated in the Philippines and Ukraine now living in Nova Scotia, and who meet criteria set by the Nova Scotia College of Nursing, are transitioning to roles within Nova Scotia Health. Multiple bridging programs are being offered this fall including a new pilot program that is 16 weeks plus residency with approximately 20 participants can begin work in early 2023.
- We're working with the Nova Scotia College of Nursing and College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia to expedite transition of Ukrainian workers of all backgrounds into the Nova Scotia care system.

**Physician recruitment:**

Physician recruitment is on-track, with new positions in renal transplant, infectious disease, family medicine and obstetrics/ gynecology in Central Zone, and palliative care and ophthalmology in Western Zone.

We're also looking at ways to better support physicians once they decide to practice here. The Physician Information and Wellness Portal is one link that provides all the supports new physicians need to get started with Nova Scotia Health, including orientation and wellness resources. Visit: [physicians.nshealth.ca](http://physicians.nshealth.ca)

**Registered nurse**

**recruitment:** A geotargeted digital recruitment campaign aimed at registered nurses launched in July 2022 in the Greater Toronto Area, Saskatoon, Alberta and Manitoba.

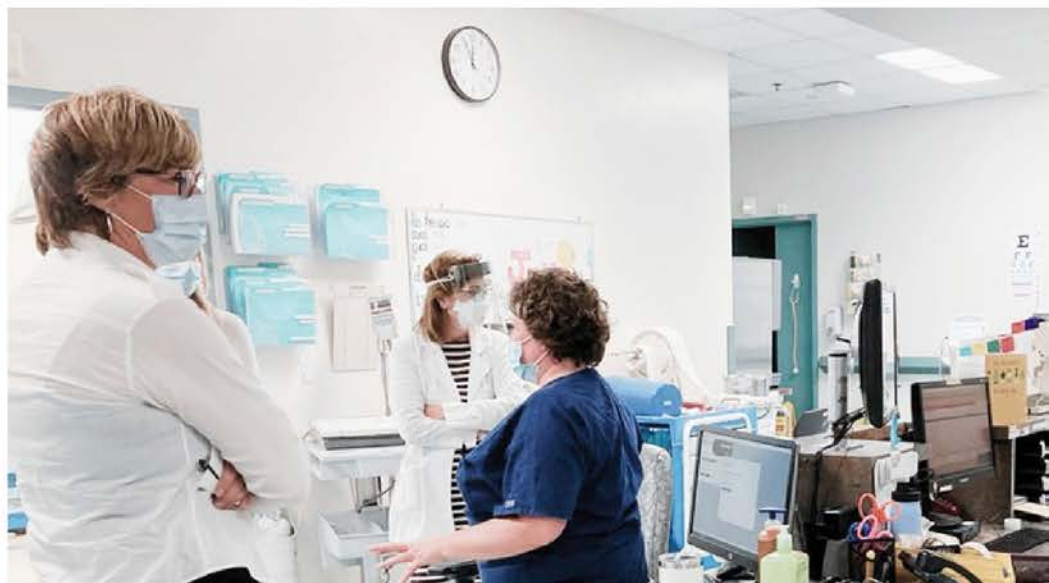
**Registered pharmacy re-**

**classification:** With support from the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists, there's now an enhanced scope of practice for pharmacy technologists working in Nova Scotia Health. New innovative care models have been launched

with key partners in pharmacies with nurse practitioners, like the Pharmacy+ clinics at Sobeys/Lawtons in Truro and New Glasgow.

- Three more locations for Pharmacy + Clinics have been identified, with one next to the Cobequid Health Centre to divert patient traffic from its busy emergency department.

**Wellness:** A comprehensive wellness strategy and series of programs for nurses and other professionals will be implemented this fall to build new skills, support professional development, work to full scope of practice, and address personalized wellness needs through coaching and other innovative approaches.



# ACCESS

Our province is growing, and our population is living longer. These positive changes continue to add pressure to an already stressed system. Over the past 12 months, we've made several concrete actions to improve access to care.

**VirtualCareNS:** Every patient waiting on the Need a Family Practice Registry now has access to virtual care. The program is available across the province and is getting solid reviews. We are looking for ways to expand.

**Improved resident matching with Dalhousie Medical School:** We're working with Dalhousie to improving Canadian Resident Matching Service so that Nova Scotia Health can design the pathways required to improve access to care.

**Access to mental health care:** We expanded access to urgent mental health and addictions care in rural communities through virtual assessments at rural emergency departments. The new mental health day hospital pilot in Central Zone is seeing amazing early results and expansion to other areas of the province is being considered.

**Emergency health care access enhancement pilots:** A project intended to expedite emergency care at four hospitals, with eight more facilities being explored. The project aims to:

- Speed triage time,
- Improve processes and quality of care,
- Expand models of care to include physician assistants and social workers at intake and discharge,
- Integrate digital solutions like VirtualCareNS, Virtual Emergency NS, and Virtual Hallway,
- Enhance care for cardiac rehabilitation patients, and;
- Open the next virtual Emergency Department pilot in Yarmouth.

**REDUCE IT Program:** This is an enhanced model of care based on the well-established cardiac rehabilitation model. Additional sites for implementation are being planned. The program has been shown to generate positive patient health outcomes and is a cost-effective model of cardiovascular care.



**Urgent treatment centres:**

These new delivery models provide appointments for unexpected, but non-life-threatening health concerns (like ear infections or abdominal pain). This year, we opened Northside General urgent treatment centre in North Sydney, and Parrsboro urgent treatment centre at South Cumberland Community Care Centre and are working to roll-out this service to more locations.

**Dialysis innovation:** In the spring, a dialysis pilot launched at Sacred Heart Community Health Centre in Cheticamp. The program offers dialysis through a new model of care that uses machines that require less plumbing and electrical requirements than traditional dialysis machines, and can be operated without physician oversight. The need for renal dialysis is growing, and we're looking at ways to expand this program that brings care closer to more patients, without major facility expansion or renovation.

**Expanding inpatient and surgical capacity:** We are working to leverage added capacity being created by the Dartmouth General Hospital and anticipate running additional OR days beginning in September.

- We are also adding inpatient beds at Aberdeen Hospital in New Glasgow and Valley Regional Hospital in Kentville to shorten surgical waitlists.

**Rapid onboarding and enhanced access to care:** This new program supports family physicians in transitioning patients off the Need a Family Practice waitlist into their practice, as well as to improve physician access for new and current patients. The program has been implemented in two large practices in Central Zone and will soon roll-out to multiple sites across the province.



# INNOVATION

If Meta's original tagline was to *move fast and break things*, my approach to technology and innovation this past year was to *move fast and fix things*. I aimed to embolden teams to dare to think creatively or apply out-of-the-box ideas to fix our thorniest care dilemmas.

## **Surgical Access and Quality Improvement Strategy:**

The strategy supports government's Action for Health by implementing innovative solutions to reduce surgical wait times, provide safe, quality care and achieve benchmarks, including:

- Reducing wait lists by completing 2,500 additional surgeries in next 12 months
- Establishing centralized booking system to manage waitlists for surgeries
- Realizing efficiencies by establishing a process for central intake and pooling of referrals
- Continuing to dedicate resources to expand operating room hours and capacity
- Continuing efforts to standardize and simplify how health providers work

- Implementing best practices to reduce variation in surgical procedures to improve patient care.

**ACTN launch:** the Atlantic Clinical Trials Network (ACTN) was launched in June. It creates a single point of entry for researchers, partners and patients. Initiated by Nova Scotia Health and co-led with IWK Health, Eastern Health, Vitalité Health Network, Horizon Health Network, and Health PEI, the network is focused on boosting research and innovation, bringing new healthcare opportunities to those living in the region, and positioning the region as a world-leader in clinical trials.

## **Care Coordination Centre (C3):**

We're improving how we coordinate the movement of patients throughout their health care journey with a real-time view of access to care, patient flow, and health system resources to support decision-making. Starting in Central Zone at the QEII Health Sciences Centre, C3 will be scaled province wide in the next year. This will translate into improved patient access and flow, efficient bed management and discharge planning, better scheduling of staff, and more collaboration across health zones.

**Health Innovation Hub:** We have established a hive of the brightest minds purposefully collaborating to transform health care through leading-edge research, clinical trials and innovation. They work with key partners to use the best available evidence to establish innovative solutions to meet the needs of Nova Scotians.



# MOVING FORWARD

## Progress and momentum

Our health system is under intense pressure and is not meeting the needs of Nova Scotians. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified long-standing challenges and disparities. At the same time, it has shown us that we can do things differently through better integration, collaboration and streamlined, data-driven decision-making models. As we focus on recovery, these lessons will help us modernize and redesign our system.

There's no quick or easy way to fix it as this situation has developed over several decades. Yet, there are ways we can make the system better today. As you've seen in this report, steps are being taken *now* that will begin to address some of the long-standing problems and lead us to a better, more responsive, accessible, reliable and equitable health system for the future.

Measuring success is a key part of this work. Now, more than ever, we're not only collecting and using data to influence care, but we're also making the data visible to everyone. Through sharing, we're holding ourselves accountable to make change, and we invite Nova Scotians along to view the demand for care in real-time and the solutions we employ to remove access barriers (View at: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/nova.scotia.health>).

Many people have contributed their ideas, expertise, time and passion to laying the groundwork for the important undertaking ahead. Most of all, people are willing to contribute to this change, and they are ready to do the work. Moving forward is a collaborative effort.



We're working more closely than ever with our government partners, including the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care and the Department of Health and Wellness, to reduce the policy, legislative and financial obstacles hindering progress. Government's commitment to add 200 more nursing seats in the province, secure a new fleet of ambulances and response and transport vehicles, hire 100 new operators, and increase the pay for continuing care assistants are good examples.

We've been leaning into the influence of health professional regulatory bodies,

community groups and partners like health foundations and community health boards, and academic institutions. Further, we work side-by-side all day with the IWK Health Centre, long-term care and home care agencies, 811 and Emergency Health Services to make care as seamless as possible for Nova Scotians. We are working to create the care Nova Scotians deserve together.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to everyone who has shared their experiences and insights. Your ideas are being incorporated into action as we move forward. Change takes time, resources, action, accountability, and courage. I am committed to working with our teams and partners to advance this important work.

We have momentum. Let's keep moving forward.



