Quality and Sustainability Plan
2025 - 2026

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Nova Scotia Health's Quality and Sustainability Plan: Fiscal Year 2025-26

Nova Scotia Health continues to move forward in strengthening and modernizing the healthcare system so Nova Scotians receive the care they need and deserve. Our 2025-2026 Quality and Sustainability Plan is guided by Action for Health, our organizational strategy, and our commitment to Operational Excellence. Together, these frameworks shape how we set priorities, focus our efforts, and improve performance across the organization.

Over the past four years, sustained investment has helped us expand capacity and improve stability across the system. The need for healthcare services has increased by 20 per cent, and hospital occupancy remains above 100 per cent. In response to these pressures, our teams have increased overall capacity by 14 per cent since 2019. This growth has resulted in more beds, more surgeries, and more complex and lifesaving care delivered across the province. In 2025-2026, we will continue to focus on improving access and patient flow, stabilizing and supporting our workforce, advancing digital tools and infrastructure, embedding health equity in our work, and maintaining long term sustainability. We are also continuing to shift appropriate care into community, home, and virtual settings, allowing hospitals to concentrate on specialized and high acuity services. This balanced approach supports a more patient-centred and sustainable health system.

This plan outlines the key priorities and coordinated initiatives that will advance system performance and improve outcomes for Nova Scotians, including:

- Access and Flow
- Integrated Digital Health Strategy
- Primary Health Care
- Specialized Care, Surgical Access and Health Services
- Infrastructure and System Workforce
- Health Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Research, Innovation and Discovery

Nova Scotia Health remains deeply committed, evident through the compassion, and innovation demonstrated every day by more than 40,000 employees, physicians, volunteers, researchers, and learners. Together, we are building a stronger, more accessible and more sustainable healthcare system for Nova Scotia.

Action for Health

Action for Health is strengthening and modernizing Nova Scotia's healthcare system. Nova Scotia Health aligns its priorities with this provincial plan to ensure co-ordinated action, shared accountability, and measurable improvement across the health system. Since launching in 2022, Action for Health has driven meaningful, measurable results across the province. Transformation is reflected in:

- 78,000 fewer inpatient hospital days
- 20,000 more people admitted for care in 2025
- 29,000 fewer hours spent waiting in emergency departments
- 21,000 ambulance hours returned to community response
- Surgical wait times at a 10-year low
- 97 per cent of cancer systemic therapy delivered closer to home
- Need a Family Practice Registry reduced to 6.2 per cent of the population, with more than 200,000 people attached to primary care or resolved since 2024
- Workforce vacancies reduced by more than half
- Nearly 200 net new physicians added in 2025

These results demonstrate sustained progress toward a more accessible, responsive, and high-performing healthcare system for Nova Scotians. Additional progress updates and performance data are publicly available through Action for Health progress reports and the interactive data dashboard.

Our Commitment to Operational Excellence

Operational Excellence is Nova Scotia Health's approach to improving how work gets done. It brings structure and consistency to how decisions are made, how teams solve problems, and how priorities are delivered across the organization.

This work is guided by **True North**—what we prioritize, strive for excellence in, and measure ourselves against over the long term. True North defines what success looks like and ensures efforts across the system are aligned around shared goals and outcomes. It includes 12 key metrics across five areas: **Healthy Communities, Access to Care, Quality and Safety, Workplace and Team, and Sustainability**. Together, these measures guide decision-making and provide a clear focus for teams across the organization.

Operational Excellence is the framework that turns this direction into daily action. Through simple routines and practical tools, teams are supported to identify issues, make improvements, and sustain results over time.

The approach is built on five core building blocks:

- **Organizational Focus & Alignment:** Clear priorities that connect strategy to frontline work.
- **Management System:** Standard practices and routines that support accountability and continuous improvement.
- **People Development:** Ongoing training and skill-building to strengthen improvement capability.
- **Improvement Methods:** Structured approaches used to solve problems and improve performance.
- **Leadership Behaviours:** Consistent leadership practices that support engagement, clarity, and teamwork.

Through Operational Excellence, Nova Scotia Health is building a health system that is more reliable, responsive and sustainable for Nova Scotians. We are advancing this work now because healthcare is becoming more complex, not less. Operational Excellence helps us stay focused on what matters most, make better and more consistent decisions, and actively involve our teams in meaningful improvement, especially during times of high pressure and demand.

Our Mandate

Healthcare in Nova Scotia is a shared responsibility among the Department of Health and Wellness (DHW), Nova Scotia Health, IWK Health, and Tajikeimɨk (Mi'kmaw Health and Wellness). Working in partnership with government and community organizations, they focus on preventing disease and injury, promoting health and wellness, and delivering care across the full continuum of services, including:

- Emergency and primary care
- Mental health and addictions services
- Acute, continuing, and end-of-life care

The Health Authorities Act defines the roles of DHW and Nova Scotia Health, ensuring clear leadership and accountability within the system.

DHW provides system-wide oversight by:

- Setting strategic direction, priorities, and standards
- Establishing public funding for high-value services
- Monitoring performance and accountability

Nova Scotia Health is responsible for governing and delivering health services across the province, implementing provincial policy and engaging with communities.

As the largest health organization in Atlantic Canada and the largest employer in Nova Scotia, in fiscal year 2025-26 (April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026), Nova Scotia Health serves more than one million residents with:

- $4.05B+ operating budget and $1B+ capital budget
- 43 hospitals and 220 clinics or health homes
- 1.2M+ inpatient days annually
- 560,000+ emergency visits
- 73,000+ surgeries
- 3.2M+ outpatient visits

The organization is supported by:

- 32,000+ employees (27,000+ unionized)
- 3,500+ physicians
- 9,000+ learners
- 1,800+ volunteers

Together, this system is designed to support the health and well-being of all Nova Scotians.

Our 2025–26 Quality and Sustainability Plan Priorities

With significant investment in the health system over the past four years, Nova Scotia Health continues to stabilize and transform services. This work is guided by Action for Health, our strategic plan, and the principles of Operational Excellence. We are collaborating closely with health system partners and industry to enable innovation, test new models of care, and scale strategies that have proven effective.

To ensure resources are used efficiently and effectively, Nova Scotia Health is executing a co-ordinated set of sustainability initiatives designed to reduce controllable costs, strengthen our workforce, and improve system flow.

Demand for healthcare services continues to grow. Health service use has increased by 20 per cent, and acute occupancy remains above 100 per cent. In response, Nova Scotia Health teams have expanded capacity by 14 per cent since 2019, delivering more care across the system.
This increase in capacity means:
- 400 additional beds per year
- 2,600 more surgeries annually
- 500 more complex-care admissions per month

Our workforce has also strengthened significantly. In fiscal year 2025, the organization added nearly 2,400 team members compared to the previous year, including 989 new nurses. We recruited 253 physicians, representing a net gain of 187, including 89 family physicians and 164 specialists. At the same time, the overall vacancy rate declined from 20 percent in April 2023 to nine percent by December 2025, improving stability and supporting more timely access to care for Nova Scotians.
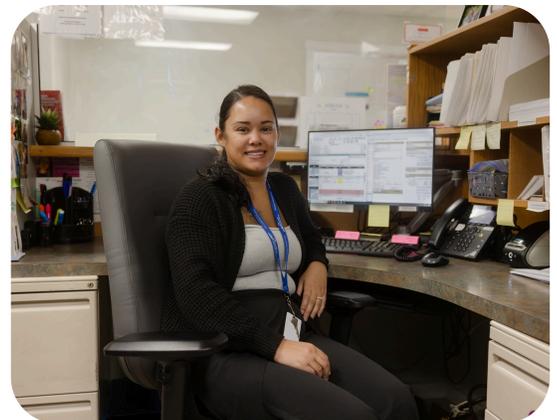
A Sustainable Wellness System

Nova Scotia Health is advancing toward a sustainable wellness system where care is delivered in the most appropriate setting. A growing proportion of services are shifting to community, home, and virtual environments while hospitals focus on complex and lifesaving care. This approach improves the patient experience, reduces avoidable inpatient demand, stabilizes the workforce, and lowers the cost of delivering care without compromising outcomes.

A sustainable wellness system does more than treat illness. It strengthens communities, supports families, and contributes to economic resilience at the local level. By delivering care in the right place, optimizing hospital capacity, modernizing digital infrastructure, and supporting the workforce, we are building a system that is more accessible, more affordable, and better aligned with how people live. Nova Scotians save both time and money when routine appointments shift from centralized settings to local or virtual care.

Investment Balanced with Standardization and Efficiencies

As we continue to make progress and manage a high pace of change, we are focused on investing in what works best. Our goal is to work smarter by putting resources into priority areas that strengthen our core services, improve access, reduce wait times, and deliver better care for Nova Scotians.

Technology plays an important role in helping us do this. It is not a separate initiative, but a tool that supports improvements across workforce planning, patient flow, procurement, and revenue. We are prioritizing digital tools that reduce administrative work, support better decision-making and bring more consistency to how we operate.

This includes carefully expanding the use of artificial intelligence where it clearly improves patient and provider experience and lowers costs. We are also strengthening YourHealthNS as a single platform for common services and more consistent processes across the system. Artificial intelligence can help us plan for demand, better manage staffing and scheduling, automate routine tasks, and improve patient flow, allowing our teams to spend more time focusing on care.

Priority Transformation Initiatives: Building a Sustainable, High-Performing Health System

Nova Scotia Health is advancing a co-ordinated set of investments designed to improve access, strengthen sustainability, and enhance quality across the health system. These priorities focus on delivering timely care, stabilizing and growing the workforce, modernizing digital infrastructure, and improving health outcomes for Nova Scotians.

Primary Health Care

- **What are we doing?** We are continuing targeted investments to strengthen primary healthcare as the foundation of the system, including expanding and sustaining health homes and team-based care models. Evidence shows that jurisdictions investing more of their health budget in primary care achieve better overall health outcomes.[1,2]
- **Why does it matter?** Strengthening primary care improves timely access close to home, supports continued reductions in the Need a Family Practice Registry, enhances longitudinal care and chronic disease management, improves recruitment and retention, and strengthens integration across the health system.

System Accountability and Flow (Access, Emergency Departments, Community Care)
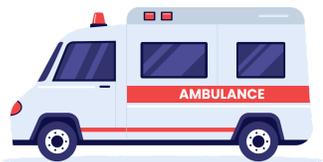
- **What are we doing?** We are investing in co-ordinated improvements to reduce congestion and delays across the patient journey by strengthening care pathways, improving inpatient throughput, increasing critical care capacity, enhancing discharge and transitional options, and preventing unnecessary admissions.
- **Why does it matter?** Improved system flow reduces hospital length of stay, eliminates avoidable days, strengthens transitional and continuing care capacity, decreases emergency department congestion, improves ambulance flow with Emergency Health Services, expands virtual care, and enables faster, safer access through stronger interdisciplinary teams.

1. Stange, K. C., Miller, W. L., & Etz, R. S. The Role of Primary Care in Improving Population Health. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 2023.
2. Hutchison, B. Reforming Canadian Primary Care – Don't Stop Half-Way. *Healthcare Policy,* 2013.

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Surgical and Diagnostic Imaging Access

- **What are we doing?** We are continuing to invest in timely, equitable, and high-quality access to surgical, endoscopy and diagnostic imaging services. Nova Scotia Health has reduced long waiters across surgical specialties and decreased the overall waitlist by nearly 10,000 people. Improvements in cataract, hip, and knee procedures have restored vision and mobility for many Nova Scotians.
- **Why does it matter?** By completing more surgeries and imaging procedures, improving referral co-ordination, standardizing booking processes, expanding local capacity, and strengthening workforce strategies, we ensure more timely access and sustained system improvement.

Workforce

- **What are we doing?** We are stabilizing and growing health human resources by accelerating recruitment, including internationally educated professionals, strengthening onboarding and mentorship programs, expanding simulation supports, modernizing people-services processes, improving workforce data visibility and reducing reliance on travel nurses.
- **Why does it matter?** Stronger recruitment and retention, improved workforce wellness, reduced administrative burden, and lower dependence on travel nurses support a more stable, resilient and sustainable workforce.

Health Equity

- **What are we doing?** We are working with partners to advance health equity through implementation of the Health Equity Framework, creating a system that is safe, inclusive and accessible for all communities.
- **Why does it matter?** System-level guiding principles and targeted supports improve access and health outcomes for underserved populations and strengthen equity across the health system.

Digital Health

- **What are we doing?** Expanding access to personal health information through digital tools that support more informed participation in care.
- **Why does this matter?** YourHealthNS makes it easier for Nova Scotians to access their personal health information and services in one convenient, connected place.

Cancer Care

- **What are we doing?** We are investing in the recruitment and support of cancer providers across community and specialty sites to enable timely, high-quality care closer to home, supported by advanced equipment such as Ethos and innovative treatments like CAR T-cell therapy.
- **Why does it matter?** Expanded staffing, new care delivery models, progress toward delivering chemotherapy outside traditional clinical environments, and expanded screening programs improve access, patient experience, and outcomes.

Mental Health and Addictions

- **What are we doing?** We are continuing to improve access to the right mental health and addictions services, ensuring care is accessible, integrated, proactive, compassionate and measurable.
- **Why does it matter?** Expanded day hospital programs, stronger outpatient teams, enhanced addiction medicine services, increased crisis team availability, expanded forensic psychiatry capacity, and improved access for patients requiring mental health and addictions services strengthens the full continuum of care.

Public Health
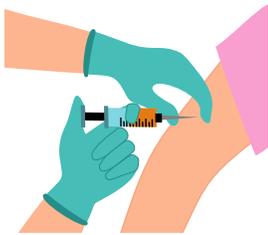
- **What are we doing?** We are investing to improve health and wellbeing equitably by addressing the social determinants of health, with a particular focus on early years development and oral health.
- **Why does it matter?** A modernized public health system, expanded early years and oral health supports, and an equity-focused approach contribute to stronger long-term population health outcomes.

Innovation

- **What are we doing?** We are partnering with clinicians, industry, foundations, government and academic institutions to drive innovation that increases access, improves outcomes and generates value for the health system.
- **Why does it matter?** Practical innovation enables adoption of optimal solutions and commercialization opportunities that strengthen sustainability, performance, and long-term system resilience.

Our Financial Strategy 2025-26

Our 2025-26 financial plan is an extension of our strategic and priority plans and includes multi-year goals, milestones and financial responsibility. A summary can be seen below:

	2025-26
REVENUE	$
Regular Operating Revenue	3,322,213,000
Funding for Utilization, Contractual and Statutory Increases	257,812,000
Funding for Strategic Priorities:	
OPOR	99,836,000
Redevelopment	57,909,000
Funding for Action for Health Priorities:	
Primary Care	79,676,000
Surgical Access	41,192,000
Workforce Strategy	40,850,000
Access & Flow	39,935,000
Digital & Innovation	30,700,000
Emergency Care	20,865,000
Cancer Care	20,230,000
Mental Health and Addictions	16,107,000
Public Health	10,653,000
Other	6,039,000
Research & Innovation	3,500,000
Health Equity	1,245,000
Total Revenue	**4,048,762,000**
EXPENSES	$
Wages and Benefits	2,687,176,000
Drugs	228,831,000
Facility and Infrastructure	239,565,000
Support Services	176,726,000
Administrative and Office	138,125,000
Professional and Contracted Services	258,444,000
Clinical and Medical Supplies	319,895,000
Total Expenses	**4,048,762,000**
Surplus/(Deficit)	$ -

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Nova Scotia Health's 2025-26 Operating Budget Allocation:

	2024-25 Actual Expenses $	2025-26 Budget $
Inpatient Care	873,781,000	866,844,000
Ambulatory Care & Emergency Services	618,515,000	636,617,000
Facilities & Operations	522,456,000	631,176,000
Diagnostic & Therapeutic Services	381,629,000	411,890,000
Surgical Services	337,771,000	347,176,000
Mental Health & Addictions	254,680,000	277,878,000
Other Acute Care Expenditures	174,335,000	195,080,000
Primary Health Care	170,745,000	183,347,000
Administrative and Support Services	199,256,000	177,446,000
Physician Remuneration*	187,550,000	120,135,000
Public Health	79,881,000	84,531,000
Continuing Care	61,739,000	64,655,000
Research Funds	49,290,000	51,988,000
TOTAL	**3,911,627,000**	**4,048,762,000**

*Excludes direct physician compensation which is not included in Nova Scotia Health's budget allocation and is funded through a direct relationship between DHW and the province's physicians.

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2025-26 Planned Spending by Program Area:

- Inpatient Care 21.4%
- Ambulatory Care & Emergency Services 15.7%
- Facilities & Operations 15.6%
- Diagnostic & Therapeutic Services 10.2%
- Surgical Services 8.6%
- Mental Health & Addictions 6.9%
- Other Acute Care Expenditures 4.8%
- Primary Health Care 4.5%
- Administrative and Support Services 4.4%
- Physician Remuneration* 3%
- Public Health 2.1%
- Continuing Care 1.6%
- Research Funds 1.3%

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