

Budget

2019–20

Building on a Strong Foundation

Government Business Plan





Message from Premier Stephen McNeil

I am pleased to present Government's Business Plan for 2019–20.

Over the last several years, Nova Scotians have focused on our collective plan to increase our population and strengthen our economy. We are starting to see the benefits of planning for success.

Our population is the highest it has ever been. More young people are moving to Nova Scotia than leaving. Employment numbers for 2018 grew at the most vigorous annual rate since 2004, and 2019 is off to an even better start. Through careful fiscal management—and four years of balanced budgets—provincial spending is within our means.

When our province does well, government can make investments that are important to Nova Scotians.

Over the last several years, government reinvested millions in education and created over a thousand new teaching and support positions as we undertake the most significant education reform in more than 25 years. Nova Scotia's first pre-primary program is preparing our children for a lifetime of success, and curriculum in P–12 is re-designed to ensure students are ready for the future.

We are redeveloping Nova Scotia's essential healthcare facilities and adding primary health care teams across the province to improve access to, and quality of, healthcare. Youth mental health programs recently expanded, and we are improving the quality of long-term care for seniors. In Cape Breton, government planning is underway to add more long-term care facilities. The Cancer Care Centre's capacity will also double.

Twinning of major 100-series highways is making our roads safer, and an almost \$200 million investment will improve high speed internet in underserved areas to enable Nova Scotians to participate in economic and social opportunities. Vital work is underway to create an environment that supports existing firms and encourages new high-growth, innovative, local companies to take root and create jobs.

It is encouraging to see many areas advance. There is still more to do to fully realise our province's potential and engage everyone in the benefits.

In 2019–20 government will maintain course and focus on four priority areas — health, education, communities, and economic growth. We will continue to reposition critical public institutions, infrastructure, programs, policies, and services to prepare for our rapidly changing world, amplify our momentum, modernise and deliver better services, and set Nova Scotia on the path for a vibrant future.

Strategic investments in the 2019–20 Budget support the Business Plan and will deliver benefits to Nova Scotians in the coming year, and to future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen McNeil". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen McNeil
Premier of Nova Scotia

Introduction

Nova Scotia has undergone considerable change and is gaining momentum through the collective and planned efforts of individuals, communities, the private sector, non-profit and post-secondary organisations, and governments:

- Our population is at an historic high. For the first time in a generation, population growth is nearing the national average.
- Employment grew, on average in 2018, at the most substantial annual rate since 2004. As of February 2019 (which had the lowest unemployment rate on record since 1976 when the current Labour Force Survey was first published), Nova Scotia had eight straight months of employment gains.
- For the first time in three decades, more youth are moving to Nova Scotia than are moving out.
- Disclosed raised venture capital increased by 347 per cent from 2013 to 2018, a higher growth rate than the national average.
- Record numbers of new immigrants have made Nova Scotia home, and more international students are choosing to stay than at any time in our history.
- Nova Scotia's seafood exports have more than doubled since 2012. Tourism revenues and visitor numbers are substantial. Craft breweries and the wine industry are growing.
- Exports have diversified to new destinations and products. Non-energy exports have risen 40.4 per cent (2010–2017), enough to offset the decline in oil and gas, while exports to the growing Chinese market have increased by 118 per cent (since 2014).
- Government has balanced the budget since 2016. The net debt to GDP ratio continues to decline. As a result of strong fiscal management, Nova Scotia has among the top four credit ratings in Canada.
- Nova Scotia is making progress on more than half of the 19 One Nova Scotia goals.

Our momentum is the result of collective work to produce meaningful, lasting change that will positively impact the day-to-day lives of Nova Scotians and the future of our province. Progress makes it possible to invest in healthcare, education, infrastructure, communities, and more opportunities for all Nova Scotians. Progress allows for measures that help the most vulnerable, improve the prospects of young people, and build an environment conducive to business and more jobs.

Quality of place equally matters to Nova Scotians. Our collective work contributes to healthy, welcoming, vibrant communities and a higher quality of life.

Government Priorities in 2019–20

In 2019–20, there is more work to do to realise Nova Scotia’s full potential.

This budget continues to deliver on government’s plan to strengthen our fiscal health by balancing the budget, which allows for investments in new and existing programs and services and for conditions that foster economic vitality.

Government will also maintain a steadfast focus on four vital areas:

- Improving Access to Healthcare
- Investing in Education and Preparing Youth for the Workforce
- Creating the Conditions for Economic Growth
- Supporting Our People and Our Communities

Improving Access to Healthcare

Navigating our healthcare system through a time of change is government’s top priority. In 2019–20, we will build on earlier adjustments to the foundations of our healthcare system to improve the care Nova Scotians receive and their access to it. Over the next year, government will advance toward a more accessible, modern, collaborative, and data-informed future. One where professionals with complementary expertise work together with the right tools to deliver the best possible outcomes to patients.

Modernisation: Some of the most significant upgrades to Nova Scotia’s healthcare infrastructure in the history of our province will continue in 2019–20 to ensure that the changing healthcare needs of Nova Scotians are met for decades to come.

The CBRM Health Care Redevelopment project is addressing ageing infrastructure, emergency closures, and changing health needs. The Cape Breton Regional Hospital renovations will double Cancer Care Centre capacity. Planning will also continue for new community health centres and long-term care facilities in Cape Breton. The QEII New Generation project will progress as government continues to work toward a new, specialised outpatient centre for clinical, primary, and ambulatory care.

Nova Scotia’s comprehensive Digital Health plan is intended to create a high-performing system that delivers enhanced care, improves health outcomes, and results in greater efficiency through data and analytics. In 2018, government invested \$4 million to help family doctors communicate with patients through MyHealthNS and by telephone. In 2019, government will focus on completing the procurement process to replace three hospital information systems with a single clinical information system foundational to the One Person One Record (OPOR) strategy. OPOR will provide essential information when and where care is needed. Nova Scotia’s expertise in life sciences and research, and our growing strength in data analytics, have tremendous potential to create opportunities for research and innovation.

Access: Primary healthcare offered through a family doctor is often a patient's first point of contact with the healthcare system. Compared to 85 per cent of Canadians, 87 per cent of Nova Scotians have a dedicated family physician. Recent provincial data shows there are 51,119 registrants not yet placed with a family practice; this accounts for 5.6 per cent of Nova Scotians. Improving access is the focus.

Increasing access to collaborative teams of primary healthcare providers — including doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, mental health professionals and others — is another way patients can get the right care at the right time. When doctors have better work-life balance, and other professionals work to their full scope, Nova Scotia is a more attractive place to call home.

Since 2015, 60 new Primary Health Care Teams have been added, for a current total of 78. In 2019–20 government will invest another \$10 million to further develop these teams and their capacity. The addition of nurse practitioner seats that began in 2018–19 will continue this year to help ensure Nova Scotia has the experienced professionals it needs.

Efforts continue to train more doctors in Nova Scotia. This year, government will open 25 residency spaces at Dalhousie University Medical School, including 10 in family practice and 15 in speciality medicine. International doctor recruitment will also continue through the Physician Immigration Stream — the first targeted stream for doctors. A new Practice Ready Assessment Program will evaluate internationally trained family doctors to work in Nova Scotia. The first candidates will be assessed in 2019.

Mental Health and Addictions: Mental health is equal in importance to physical fitness. Government is working closely with service delivery and community partners to align health promotion and prevention, early intervention, and emergency care with the needs of Nova Scotians.

In 2019–20, government will enhance options for accessing care. SchoolsPlus, which connects youth and their parents to an array of services unique to their individual needs, will expand. Government will continue to pilot youth health centres to make it easier for young people with mental health and issues like addiction to access services. In 2019–20, we will also support improved access to community-based care by increasing mental health clinicians in the community.

Orthopaedics: Over three years government has invested more than \$39 million to hire surgeons and support staff and change service delivery to shorten wait times for hip and knee replacements. In 2019–20, a central intake system and recently introduced wellness model of care will improve access and ensure the best possible post-surgery results. Government will invest more than \$17 million in this multi-pronged approach to move closer to the six-month national benchmark for orthopaedics.

Long-Term Care: In 2018, a Long-Term Care Expert Advisory Panel presented ideas to improve quality of care. In 2019–20, government will continue to work with its partners to implement changes and plan for the construction of new long-term care facilities.

Investing in Education and Preparing Youth for the Workforce

Preparing young people for the future is essential both for their success and the welfare of our province. From the earliest years, children must be ready to learn essential skills for a fundamentally changed definition of “work.”

Early Years: Early learning has a lifelong impact on children and their outcomes. Pre-primary will expand and achieve provincial coverage in 2020. Government will expand child care services and subsidies and increase the number of early childhood educators. We will offer a Childhood Education Program incorporating Mi'kmaw language, culture, and perspective, and a new bursary for African Nova Scotian, Acadian-Francophone, and immigrant early childhood educators. These investments build on 2018 initiatives to convert hundreds of spaces to support families with infants and toddlers with after-school care and the new Infant Incentive grant to keep it affordable.

Primary–12: Technological proficiency and entrepreneurial skills are essential in the modern economy. Thoughtful inclusion is critical to ensure young people are not left behind by technological driven inequality.

In anticipation of the need for our children to be future-oriented critical thinkers, government has made significant changes to the school system with a focus on achievement, inclusion, and skills. Creativity, coding, entrepreneurial skills, and opportunities to gain hands-on experience are now part of curriculums. Students who graduate from a new Technology Advantage Program (TAP) pilot will be ready to continue their studies or step into competitive IT jobs. Skilled trades programs will continue to expand in the areas of construction, culinary, manufacturing, and transportation trades.

In 2018–19, government invested \$15 million in inclusive education, starting with hiring education assistants, autism and behavioural support specialists, school psychologists, nurses, and speech-language pathologists. Government will build on this progress with an additional \$15 million to continue implementing recommendations made by the Commission on Inclusive Education.

School design should support changing student needs. Fourteen schools will be built or undergo significant renovations over the next several years.

Creating the Conditions for Economic Growth

To realise Nova Scotia's untapped potential, our economy must grow in ways that create opportunities for all Nova Scotians to participate and benefit. Together, growth and equity reduce poverty, attach people to jobs, boost economic progress and social connections, and make possible a range of benefits in healthcare, education, and support for our most vulnerable.

Government's continued focus in 2019–20 is fostering an environment that:

- enables businesses to start and grow
- encourages high-growth, innovative, local companies
- helps all regions capitalise on their unique advantages
- encourages businesses to innovate and export

Workforce: In 2019–20, government will continue to market Nova Scotia to the world and ensure we can welcome more immigrants. Potential immigrants with skills to meet specific labour force needs is the focus. Support for organisations and immigrants in rural and French communities will help newcomers stay for the long run.

We will maintain focus on attaching our youth and under-represented groups to the workforce and jobs. Programs including Graduate to Opportunity and Innovate to Opportunity will continue to support our young people, as well as First Nations, African Nova Scotians, and racially visible individuals through the diversity bonus.

This year, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency will increase its START program grant to employers who hire apprentices from under-represented groups, bringing the total amount available from \$25,000 to \$30,000 over the term of their apprenticeship.

Business-Ready Environment: Efforts are ongoing to build an environment where local, innovation-driven, high-growth businesses – responsible for most job creation – can form and grow. Government will make strategic investments in sectors through the Small Farm Acceleration Program, the Vineyards and Wineries Investment Program, Mineral Resources Development Fund, the Building Tomorrow Fund, and in the tourism sector. Investments through Invest Nova Scotia will increase to fund projects that foster economic competitiveness and productivity in sectors and communities.

New ways for corporations and individuals to invest in Nova Scotia will become available. Budget 2019–20 expands opportunities for Nova Scotia companies and individuals to invest through the Innovation Equity Corporate and Personal tax credits and the Venture Capital Tax Credit.

Of fundamental interest is ensuring that all parts of Nova Scotia participate in economic growth. Modern best-practices build on existing regional comparative advantages. Regional Enterprise Networks will continue to engage local businesses, municipalities, and community organisations to develop economic strategies built on regional strengths and assets.

Strategic Infrastructure: Strategic infrastructure is essential for communities to capitalise on their unique assets. In a time when knowledge drives growth, Nova Scotia is positioned to be internationally competitive if people have the tools they need, regardless of where they live.

High speed internet is necessary to take part in social and economic opportunity. Nova Scotia is making one of the most substantial investments of any province, so people in more areas have access to those opportunities. A \$193 million Internet Fund Trust is in place to construct the rural network and complement a \$1.4 million investment in smaller scale projects to improve access for homes and businesses in the last two years.

Major highways also connect communities to opportunities. In 2019–20 a multi-year push to twin 100-series highways and improve access and safety moves forward. The \$20 million annual Gravel Road Program, work toward implementation of the Traffic Safety Act, and improvements such as rumble strips, guard rails, and passing lanes will also continue.

Export: Over half of Nova Scotia's trade is interprovincial. Government will continue to work on the national stage to reduce barriers and enhance the flow of our goods across Canada.

Exporting to diverse markets is also vital. In 2019–20, government will build on recently formed trading agreements. International trade negotiations and federal discussions will continue as the province participates in missions and other work to connect with strategic markets. Export development programming that supports Nova Scotia businesses, including the Export Growth Program, will be enhanced and expanded. We will continue to promote Nova Scotia seafood exports under the new brand and through the \$38 million Atlantic Fisheries Fund.

Supporting Our People and Our Communities

Connected communities combine strong, collaborative relationships with place-based strengths to promote well-being, involvement, and inclusive economic growth. In 2019–20 government will make investments in community infrastructure, take steps to reduce inequalities, and contribute to welcoming, prosperous communities across our province.

Sustainable Communities: Government will support social inclusion and create opportunities for communities to come together in 2019–20.

Accessibility is a human right, and government is committed to an accessible province by 2030. Government released Access by Design: 2030 in fall 2018. Development of the first accessibility standards for education and the built environment will advance this year. In 2019–20, \$1 million will continue to be available through the Business ACCESS-Ability program to help businesses improve their accessibility. Another \$1 million will help make community facilities more accessible through the Community ACCESS-Ability program.

Poverty is a complex and critical issue. Government is committed to reducing its negative impact on lives, communities, and healthy economies. This year, we will introduce a Standard Household Rate to move all clients to the maximum amount for which they are eligible, as well as provide rate increases for all clients. Through the \$20 million, multi-year Poverty Reduction Blueprint, we will continue collaborating with other governments, communities, and non-profits to improve access to the necessities of life and support youth at risk.

Housing is central to the economic and social vitality of communities. Government's three-year commitment to deliver up to 1,500 new affordable rent supplements (300 to address homelessness), as well as investments in shelters and public housing, continues in 2019–20. Support for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities through home repair and adaptation programs, and the homeless, will continue to be the focus.

Planning to transition Nova Scotians with disabilities into community-based homes continues in 2019–20. Government committed to develop eight new small-option homes. Two are now open, two more will open this year, and the remainder are in the design and site selection phase. Persons with disabilities will continue to be able to live at home through programs such as Flex individualized funding, Independent Living Support, and Alternative Family Support.

A demographic shift is happening in Nova Scotia. We must reframe how we think about ageing and foster environments that help older adults thrive. More than 50 actions outlined in the three-year Shift: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population (2017) celebrate the social and economic contributions of older adults, promote healthy lifestyles, and help people stay connected to their communities as they age at home. The Age-Friendly Community Grant program will continue to support projects that encourage community planning, while the first social innovation lab creates policies, programs, and services to meet the needs of this vibrant population.

Work with community groups to build an action plan to prevent domestic violence, called Standing Together, aims to help everyone feel and be safe. Government will work to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence by enhancing support while continuing to encourage long-term change through collaborative community prevention initiatives.

The Creating Communities of Care project will support the unique needs of Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian survivors of gender-based violence. In 2018, Nova Scotia's first Aboriginal Wellness and Gladue Court opened in Wagmatcook First Nation. In 2019–20, government will build on restorative justice, a government-community collaboration that responds to the impact of crime on individuals and communities by bringing together those harmed with those responsible. A new International Centre of Excellence and Innovation on Restorative Justice will develop innovative strategies.

Over the last several years, government has supported Nova Scotia's diverse cultural heritage through improvements to community halls and other public spaces, the creation of the Link Arts Centre, and the \$1.5 million Culture Innovation Fund. These efforts harness the arts, creativity, culture, and sport to improve social well-being. Government will also contribute to welcoming communities through the Beautification and Streetscaping and Recreational Facility Development grants.

In 2019–20, new biodiversity and coastal protection legislation will safeguard our natural assets. Working with the federal government through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan's Green Infrastructure stream, government will undertake transformative community-based projects in the areas of buildings, electricity, transportation, and housing to support lower-carbon infrastructure. Government will also continue to move toward ecological forestry by implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of Forest Practices for a more sustainable forestry sector. These efforts contribute to the success of our communities and ensure future generations benefit from and enjoy our natural assets.

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