



Budget

2020–21

Better Together

Government Business Plan


NOVA SCOTIA



Message from Premier Stephen McNeil

I am pleased to introduce the 2020–21 Nova Scotia Government Business Plan. This document provides an overview of government's strategic direction. It highlights many priorities and approaches that contribute to advancing our province's agenda in the year ahead.

Nova Scotia began an unprecedented journey a few years ago. The One Nova Scotia Commission collectively awoke Nova Scotians to the possibilities we can achieve if we band together behind a shared agenda. As we found new ways of working, we realized essential milestones and successes.

It is exciting to see our population achieve new heights. To enjoy an economy that is resilient and growing. To reach higher employment and lower unemployment levels. To benefit from rising personal incomes. To export to new places and to welcome visitors to our shores.

It is also gratifying to see fundamental changes that result in enriched lives and businesses. A renewed education system is putting students first. Some of the most substantial investments in our history are transforming healthcare. Restorative approaches are altering our perspectives and relationships. We are on the brink of completing a modern internet network that will connect underserved communities and people. Less red tape is allowing entrepreneurs and companies to focus on the things that matter most. More people are working, more people are staying, the books are balanced, and business is good.

Together, we worked hard to deliberately lay the groundwork and arrive here. More profound changes are yet needed.

Our successes have, in some cases, brought inequalities into sharp relief. What most matters is people and how Nova Scotians experience the benefits of our province's growth in their homes, communities, and daily lives. Heading into 2020–21, government sees gaps. Our economy is improving in many ways—but not for everyone everywhere. The environment that sustains us requires our protection. Some Nova Scotians are living in poverty, while others do not have the same opportunities most take for granted.

There are many ways to define growth. For Nova Scotia, economic and social progress and sustainability must all go together. In 2020–21 and beyond, we will work to close the gaps to build a thriving Nova Scotia that includes us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen McNeil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Stephen McNeil

Premier of Nova Scotia

Introduction

In 2020–21, government will take an inclusive approach to our future rooted in social and economic well-being, sustainability, and equity. Our perspective is deeply embedded in how Nova Scotians and their communities are faring. We are concerned for this generation and those to come and will work to level the playing field for more people.

Over the last number of years, discipline and new, more collaborative ways have paid off:

- Our population continues to reach all-time highs; 976,768¹ at the most recent count—the fastest growth rate since 1973.
- The number of new immigrants reached an historic high of 7,580 in 2019. The last three years are the strongest in the post-war era.
- In addition to immigrants, we have seen four consecutive years of positive net in-migration—the first time this has happened since the early 1970s. It resulted in surpassing the One Nova Scotia goal.
- We had the highest annual growth in employment in Atlantic Canada in 2019, and the strongest for our province since 2004. While faster employment growth pushed unemployment rates to the lowest level in decades, our use of employment insurance is the lowest since 2014. Average weekly earnings are growing faster than any other province.
- In 2019, we experienced a net gain of 390 new businesses, the largest increase since 2004. Business sector productivity improvements sustained positive real GDP growth from 2014 to 2017 while rising employment kept growth positive in 2018. Investment in intellectual property products is up by 56 per cent. The three-year venture capital average continued to increase.
- International goods exports are up 5 per cent since 2016. Manufacturing shipments are healthy. We surpassed another One Nova Scotia goal for Fisheries and Agriculture exports. Canada now has much of the lobster trade with China, and Nova Scotia exports make up a significant portion.
- The majority of working-age Nova Scotians hold a post-secondary education. We also surpassed the One Nova Scotia Retention of International Students target.
- And this year marks the fifth consecutive balanced budget, putting the province on stable financial footing and contributing to a secure and predictable environment in which to live and conduct business.

¹ As at Oct. 1, 2019

However, economic progress is not enough—it must directly contribute to social well-being. In 2020–21, government will intensify emphasis on sustainable growth that creates opportunities and benefits for everyone, everywhere. It will focus on poverty, protect children, support our most vulnerable, and recognize and take steps to reduce disparity, inequality, and discrimination. Areas that affect our well-being and quality of life will be addressed. Economic growth is inextricably tied to social progress, and this work will advance our province.

Priorities for 2020–21 include:

Building on Our Economic Success — Our Sustainable, Inclusive Economy

In today's world, the imperative to think and do things differently is crucial. Economic and social prosperity are one and the same; and Nova Scotia will only continue to grow with this understanding as a principle. Building an inclusive, sustainable economy will be done with a clear view of interconnectivities and with care for the concerns of young people and the rights of future generations. Policies that enable businesses to grow and all workers to benefit, that rely on our unique local advantages, and that explore the vitality of the green and bioeconomy will be pursued.

Improving the Lives of Nova Scotians — Our Quality of Life

Economic opportunities are essential to a thriving Nova Scotia. However, a myriad of economic and social conditions that surround us each day combine to affect our well-being and quality of life. Communities are more than geographic spaces. They are living, breathing places with unique assets and characteristics that should enhance the quality of our lives. When we embrace their full diversity and raise others up, we are resilient.

Government will focus on several key areas in 2020–21 that have a significant impact on our well-being. A better future will require rethinking the system and our basic conceptions about health. Principles including people-centred care, contemporary and innovative delivery models, and high-quality service will guide our ongoing transformation. As will an understanding that many factors and conditions have a greater impact on health than lifestyle or choice—including inequalities. The education system and the pivotal Inclusive Growth Policy will prepare children academically, mentally, attitudinally, and physically for a new future. Lessons learned from the restorative inquiry will illuminate our path. Material work to reduce poverty and the despair it brings will be enhanced. Children will be protected, and the family structures that impact so much of their lives reinforced. New policies will move us closer to an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030, while investments in rural transportation, libraries, and events connect us.

Investing in Modern Infrastructure – Our Social & Economic Foundation

Exceptional infrastructure investments in healthcare, schools, roads, and the rural internet, as well as placemaking in communities, will contribute to greater economic and social opportunities for this generation and those to come.

Our Commitment to a Brighter Future

Government and public servants across the province are committed to this course. We will work collaboratively with Nova Scotians to move it forward in 2020–21.

Together we will grow in all the ways that matter most in our lives.

Building on Our Economic Success

Our sustainable, inclusive economy

Nova Scotians have made substantive strides that are fundamentally changing our economy, our province, and our future. Collaboration across sectors, communities, and regions on an unprecedented level has led to this change. Equality of opportunity and participation by everyone is essential for continued economic and social growth.

Progress is about more than expanding our economy. The future is about sustainability—protecting our home and our precious resources and ensuring that Nova Scotians are part of the growth and the opportunities progress brings. Sustainable development in Nova Scotia includes a growing, diverse labour force, jobs and incomes that are increasingly equitable, and conditions that sustain and enrich our health, environment, and future.

Conditions for Sustainable Development

Government is concerned with implementing policies at the right level and creating conditions that allow businesses to emerge and people to find meaningful opportunities across the province.

“Place” is rich in meaning for Nova Scotians. It is culture and identity, family and community. Place is having meaningful connections and shared experiences, as much as it is the geography in which we live and work. Regions across Nova Scotia have distinctive strengths, characteristics, and assets. Through approaches anchored in our uniqueness and focused on people and their definition of progress, together we can become all we want to be. Ongoing efforts to grow our provincial and regional economies, create places in which people want to live, and increase success through collaboration will continue in 2020.

Since 2017, Nova Scotia has reduced regulatory burden by \$34.3 million—exceeding the initial target by over \$14 million. In 2020 a new service will help businesses and start-ups prepare for and schedule required inspections with speed and ease. To help Nova Scotia businesses continue to grow, innovate, and invest, the Corporate Tax Rate will be lowered by 2 per cent to 14 per cent. The Small Business Tax will also fall to 2.5 per cent.

As Nova Scotia’s economy expands, government is committed to creating conditions in which not only businesses but also their workers can get ahead. Minimum wages have barely kept pace with inflation since the mid-1970s. In contrast, productivity has increased rapidly, but its gains have not trickled down. Beginning in April 2020, the lowest-paid Nova Scotians will benefit from the most substantial annual increase to the minimum wage in a decade. This correction will help close the inequity gap and improve standards of living.

Nova Scotia’s strengths in sustainable forestry and agriculture, resource management, and our skilled workforce are the foundations for a healthy bioeconomy. Transitioning forestry workers and the forestry sector through a difficult time is a priority. A \$50 million transition fund and support including career counselling, training and apprenticeships, accelerated certifications, and job search assistance are in place to support workers. A new Forestry Innovation Rebate Program will invest five million dollars in each of the next two years to incentivize companies to innovate in the sector and increase global competitiveness.

Sustainably building sectors in which Nova Scotia and its regions have natural strengths and global competitiveness remain a focus. In 2020, work continues to:

- implement recommendations from *An Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* (2018) that balance environmental, social, and economic goals
- identify and establish aquaculture development areas and increase available information for operators who may not have the resources to do important initial scoping research
- improve the tourism experience, extend the season, and market our province to the world
- build on the comparative advantage of our oceans and the international success of our fishing industry through programs like the Seafood Accelerator
- share our expertise in digital and other life sciences with the world
- build our emerging social economy and its enterprises
- conduct basic and applied research and commercialize its use
- grow the value of our exports and diversify our economy
- increase early-stage and venture capital and build our innovation ecosystem to encourage the formation of businesses with the capacity to quickly expand and trade

Confidence in a Brighter Future

Today's youth, future generations, and Nova Scotians in all their diversity have the right to a healthy environment and good economic and social opportunities. As our province grows, we must ensure progress is sustainable. Key aspects of our approach are reducing disparity, sustaining our environment, and protecting the well-being of generations to come. A future built on these principles is bright.

A Greener Path

Government has taken numerous actions and introduced a suite of legislation to create a robust framework that supports this understanding. Climate action and environmental protection are central elements of sustainable growth. We added a Nova Scotia Cap and Trade system in 2019. Emitters are reporting, and trading will commence in 2020. As Cap and Trade moves ahead, government will develop the next phase of its climate change strategy, along with actions that build the green economy and safeguard our environment and resources.

The ban on single-use plastic bags comes into effect in fall 2020. Development of regulations for the Coastal Protection Act is underway. More no-charge energy assessments and free home upgrades will be offered this year with an increase to the Home Warming Program.

The Sustainable Development Goals Act, and the development of regulations to support it, is a focus. The act sets ambitious new goals to fight climate change and continue advancing Nova Scotia's economic, social, and environmental well-being. Through the act, Nova Scotia will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 53 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and move to a net zero carbon footprint by 2050.

Growing, Diverse Labour Force

Over the last several years the province has consistently exceeded its annual immigration allocation. Last year broke records with 7,580 newcomers arriving in 2019—a 27 per cent increase over 2018. Our population has reached historic highs and is becoming younger. We have also seen some of the lowest historical unemployment rates.

Nova Scotia will continue to attract immigrants through innovative and responsive programming that addresses our labour and economic needs. In 2019, the Occupations in Demand pilot launched to target specific professions beginning with continuing care assistants and truck drivers. To recruit more healthcare professionals, an additional physician stream will allow foreign-trained physicians to achieve permanent residency faster. Since 2018, 54 doctors were nominated, and 184 continuing care assistants have come to Nova Scotia.

The Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program is entering its fourth year with a federal commitment to make the program permanent; immigrants arriving through it in 2019 increased by more than 300 per cent² since 2018.

Education to Employment

To continue to grow, Nova Scotia must enlarge its labour force. Immigration is helping tremendously. However, skilled and well-educated people who are underemployed, or unable to attach to the labour market despite the right qualifications, already reside here as well. We must carve out a rightful place in the economy for youth and Nova Scotians and all their diversity.

Government supports its young leaders and is dedicated to their bright future. Since its launch in 2015, the Graduate to Opportunity Program has helped more than 1,200 post-secondary graduates secure permanent, full-time work in their chosen fields. About 600 different employers hired graduates through the program. Under the Diversity Bonus, employers hired close to 300 graduates from underrepresented groups. Government will continue to work collaboratively to remove youth employment barriers through a variety of means, while initiatives including The EDGE pilot program, the first of its kind in Nova Scotia, will help young people find a path into the job market. In 2020–21 the Student Loan Forgiveness Program will expand to help more lower-income earners get a better start. Programs such as One Journey Work and Learn, Fast Forward, and START will help people enter the labour force, find employment, and improve their productivity.

For those who face systemic barriers, including youth, diverse groups, and those with different abilities, government will invest in numerous initiatives. A cutting-edge digital platform will improve web-based and in-person employment and labour market services and include a diversity plan. A partnership with the federal government will assist Nova Scotians with disabilities in the labour force. Improvements to the Apprenticeship Program will increase participation by women, Indigenous Peoples, African-Nova Scotians, and other underrepresented groups. Work to attract more women to the trades enters year two, while changes to the Skills Development Program will provide quicker access to training for those who are underrepresented and unemployed. We will enhance support for the Indigenous Blacks & Mi'kmaq (IB&M) initiative, in place to increase representation at the Dalhousie Schulich School of Law.

² As of November 2019

Improving the Lives of Nova Scotians

Our quality of life

All Nova Scotians want and deserve meaningful and fulfilling lives. Many factors interact in complex ways to affect our well-being, ability to function, and quality of life. These social and economic conditions surround us everyday. They formulate our context and wield tremendous influence over our experiences. The quality of our lives is, in part, determined by economic opportunity and by the support available in our homes and communities; the quality of our education; whether we have access to good healthcare; and if we are safe and enjoy positive relationships. Some have better conditions, which leads to greater opportunities. Through attitudes and initiatives that reduce inequalities we can address the disparities that have significant negative impacts on our people and our province.

Our definition of progress must be our own, built on our distinctive strengths, and consistent with what we value. These principles are central to our lives and vital for a sustainable future. What is growth, after all, unless it improves the quality of our lives and that of our children according to our own measure?

Health, education, housing, social inclusion, and accessibility are five key areas that impact our personal and collective well-being and over which government has some influence.

Health & Healthcare

Healthcare is one of the most important issues for Nova Scotians. In 2018–19, 2.4 million of us visited outpatient facilities. Almost 70 thousand needed hospitalization, and about 2,500 doctors in all settings provided care. In the 2017–18 Nova Scotia Health Authority Patient Experience Survey, patients ranked their experiences positively at 87.5 per cent. On many national health system performance measures, Nova Scotia is ahead of or on par with national averages. However, we aim for better. We have built a foundation for change, and healthcare investments have reached an annual budget of almost \$5 billion. For these investments to have the impact we want, we need to reconsider how the healthcare system functions, and how we fundamentally think about health.

At its core, health is not about systems or diseases; it is about people. Nova Scotia struggles to improve in areas such as chronic disease, activity levels, smoking, and alcohol use. Lots of things impact our physical and psychological well-being. Factors such as the distribution of wealth and opportunity have a more considerable influence over health than lifestyle or individual choices.

Everyone in the healthcare system is working on designing and implementing contemporary service delivery despite the challenges. Actions to improve our health also require more

significant changes in areas such as education, social welfare, rural transportation, and the labour force. Only together can we continue to make progress toward better health supported by inclusive, high-quality care and a modern, people-focused system.

Access & Equity

Since November 2016, more than 134 thousand Nova Scotians connected with a new family doctor. Under a new contract with physicians, government will invest \$135 million over four years to raise compensation. This investment will mean family, emergency, and anesthesia doctors will be the highest paid in Atlantic Canada and other specialties like psychiatry, obstetrics, and gynecology will be among the highest paid in this region. The Physician Immigration Stream introduced in 2018 continues to recruit family physicians and specialists (over 50 to date) from around the world. As Comprehensive Primary Healthcare Teams expand, we will continue to focus on hard to recruit areas of the province.

In addition to four new seats added at Dalhousie Medical School in 2019, 12 more will come online in the 2020–21 school year, for a total of 16. The new seats are for students from rural areas and African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq and Indigenous communities. Increases to family residency spaces over the last few years mean that Nova Scotia now has 46 seats in total, and the total number of annual specialist seats has reached 65. The recently launched Rural Clerkship Program will introduce future doctors to rural communities in Cape Breton and the South Shore. New seats and programs to increase the number of nurse practitioners will also continue.

Efforts to balance workloads and deliver high-quality integrated team care are ongoing in 2020. The province will fund pharmacists to prescribe birth control, medication for urinary tract infections, and shingles and, starting April 1, 2020, free prescription renewals for 180 days. Currently, there are fees for these services. Government is investing more than \$9.1 million over the new five-year agreement. Work is also underway on community paramedicine, nurse prescribing, and other collaborative approaches to primary care by nurse practitioners to improve access.

Access to mental health and addictions services, particularly for youth, is improving. Over the last four years, innovative practices have led to a 75 per cent increase in access to community mental health and addictions care. Recently, the mental health crisis and urgent care teams across the province and at the IWK added 10 positions. Mental Health Crisis Line systems are upgraded, and more healthcare professionals are connecting callers with care faster. A youth mental health pilot to develop a new model enters year two. It includes a unique space called The Hub at Digby Regional High School and is in high schools in Amherst, Halifax, and Glace Bay.

Nova Scotians are taking advantage of improved support to stay in their homes and communities longer. In the coming year, government will continue to explore ways to deliver home care with greater flexibility. Construction of new facilities will begin in 2020, including a 48-bed long-term care home in Eskasoni. Kiknu, meaning our home, is the first to support the Mi'kmaq tradition of caring for elders within their community.

Nursing homes now have the flexibility to hire retired or internationally educated nurses to work as continuing care assistants. A temporary long-term care assistant role that helps residents with day-to-day activities will extend into 2020. Of the 22 recommendations of the Expert Advisory Panel on Long Term Care, five are in place, and the remaining 17 are underway. In 2020, we will increase workforce recruitment and retention activities, improve transitions of care, and enhance system performance.

Activity is essential for physical, mental, and emotional health. An increased investment in Let's Get Moving, a program making physical activity more accessible by changing the way we think about movement, will remove barriers and help more Nova Scotians find ways to have a more active lifestyle.

To create more equitable access to needed medications and better health, Family Pharmacare will increase investments in prescription drugs for low-income families and cover new cancer drugs. Newly introduced funding for the rotavirus vaccine means it is free for all infants. In 2020–21 Nova Scotia will be the first jurisdiction in North America to implement opt-out legislation under the Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act. The ban on flavoured vaping products will play a role in addressing one of Nova Scotia's major drivers of health disparity.

Reducing Poverty: Near and Long Term

No one should have to live a life of poverty and bear the struggles it brings. In 2017, government introduced the Blueprint to Reduce Poverty, a \$20 million, multi-year investment. The blueprint is forging partnerships among departments, levels of government, non-profits, and communities to alleviate poverty in the province.

Actions include:

- increasing access to early education and high-quality childcare
- raising the minimum wage by the greatest amount since 2010
- creating conditions necessary for inclusive economic growth
- including more drugs under Pharmacare
- investing in accessibility, as persons with a disability are more likely to live in low-income situations
- supporting safety and opportunity through offender access to education and job training
- making transportation and housing more available
- increasing benefits and earnings kept for clients on income assistance

Supporting healthy children, youth, and families is key to building a stronger province. Government's investment of \$18 million in the Nova Scotia Child Benefit will put more money directly in the hands of families who need it. This funding will support families in better meeting their basic needs. This is the largest financial increase through the Nova Scotia Child Benefit since its creation.

All Nova Scotians deserve a chance to build a better life for themselves and their families. That is why Nova Scotians living on low incomes will get more financial support in 2020. In January 2020, the Standard Household Rate was implemented, increasing the amounts people on income assistance receive and making the process simpler. Under the new standard rate, all clients' assistance is raised to the maximum allowable.³ The new rate is an increase of 2 per cent or 5 per cent for all clients.⁴

Government is also increasing the eligibility threshold for the Poverty Reduction Credit for the 2020 tax year. The new income threshold will be \$16,000, up from \$12,000. Eligible clients will start receiving the credit in July 2021 after they file their 2020 income tax return. The increase will ensure anyone who receives the credit now will continue to get it after assistance rates go up with the introduction of the Standard Household Rate. The change also means that hundreds of new clients will be eligible. This builds on previous increases to the basic personal amount an individual can earn before they must pay income tax, along with increases to spousal, dependant, and age amounts.

The Building Vibrant Communities Grant program is entering its third year. The \$1.4 million fund is available to community groups that deliver, enhance, or expand programs that use innovative and collaborative approaches to tackle poverty. This includes projects that address workforce attachment, housing, mental health and addictions, food security, youth transition, and transportation. In 2019–20, 50 per cent of grants are dedicated to projects that support Nova Scotian families with children living with lower employment income.

Improving access to community transportation is a cornerstone of government's Poverty Reduction Blueprint and a priority in SHIFT—Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population. Access to public and community transportation is essential for connecting people to employment, medical appointments, and their communities. The Community Transportation Assistance Program provides more than \$1.7 million in operating funding to 18 door-to-door community transit services. The Accessible Transportation Assistance Program helps organizations purchase accessible vehicles and supports Nova Scotia's accessibility goals.

Safe and healthy children, youth, and families are key to building a stronger province. The emotional, social, and physical development of children has a direct impact on their

³ The amounts under the new standard rate will still differ between clients, based on living situation and family size.

⁴ Single clients who own or rent and are disabled, fleeing an abusive situation, have a chronic mental, cognitive, or physical condition that limits participation in employment services, are 55 years of age or over, or are youth aged 16–18 will see a 5 per cent increase. All others will get a 2 per cent increase.

psychological and physical health and on the adults they will become. Evidence clearly shows that prevention and early intervention are key to helping families at risk. Working with parents at the community level to help them manage challenges can dramatically impact the outcomes for children and young people. An increased investment of \$1.9 million in prevention and early intervention programming for children will provide early assistance, before family breakdowns occur. This investment will increase over the next three years and help build stronger families and, in some cases, eliminate the need for child welfare involvement.

Over the past several years, the province has improved the way we support foster families. The Department of Community Services completed a review of the foster care program to determine how this program can better meet the needs of children and young people in care. The review also examined how foster parents can be better supported through training, streamlined processes, and stronger financial supports. Changes implemented as a result will help build an even stronger system of foster care in Nova Scotia.

The harms of human trafficking and sexual exploitation are devastating on people, families, and entire communities. That is why government is investing more in programs, services, and support to raise awareness, increase prevention, and directly help victims and survivors. The province will provide \$1.4 million annually over the next five years to support new and current initiatives aimed at stopping these horrific crimes and helping victims and survivors begin to heal and move forward.

The province will also emphasize efforts to protect children and support the well-being of their guardians. The Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP) carries out maintenance orders for child and spousal support. This service is vital to the economic stability of approximately 14,000 families and 12,000 children served. Payments in arrears are the lowest in over 15 years. Moving forward, government will harness digital technology to ensure MEP clients receive the right information at the right time.

Over the past three years, government has invested close to \$212 million in housing. Under a new 10-year federal-provincial agreement, the province and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation will inject an additional combined total of almost \$400 million in new and continuing affordable housing programs. In 2019, we released the three-year Action Plan for Nova Scotia. As part of the plan, \$88 million will be used in the first three years to ensure nearly 3,000 people in need have access to more affordable housing and rental options. In addition, the province will invest another \$70 million over the next three years to help another 2,500 households. The agreement will also preserve and improve urban Indigenous housing.

A new Integrated Action Plan to Address Homelessness—the first of its kind in the province—and an Affordable Renters Program will also be introduced. The Down Payment Assistance Plan helps Nova Scotians with modest incomes who pre-qualify for an insured mortgage to purchase their first home.

Social Inclusion & Accessibility

The Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children Restorative Inquiry showed us many things. The report points out that progress “requires a change in how we do things, not just in the things we do.” This vital work provided all Nova Scotians with an alternative path. One based on people, integration, collaboration, and holistic approaches in all facets of life. This year, we will action the recommendations of the inquiry and accelerate the use of Restorative Justice and Restorative Approaches. More than that, government will incorporate these new principles in the way it works.

To date, the occupants of almost 300 parcels of land in five African Nova Scotian communities are in the process of receiving clear titles, which will allow owners to build home equity and income. The province released Count Us In in 2019 in response to the International Decade for People of African Descent. To date, Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada to develop, endorse, and proclaim such a plan. In 2020–21, we will work with the African Nova Scotian community to establish a Justice plan and further approaches to address systemic barriers.

Collaborative advancement of Mi'kmaq Aboriginal and Treaty rights will continue to move forward. We will work with the Mi'kmaq to respond to the recommendations flowing from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Government will also continue to work closely with the Mi'kmaq to advance restorative approaches to social and justice issues.

Nova Scotia is making substantial progress on SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population. Critical investments in transportation, mobile food markets, volunteering, entrepreneurship, affordable housing, and senior safety are helping seniors enjoy rich experiences in their communities. In 2020–21 government will advance SHIFT to help older Nova Scotians remain active, healthy, contributing members of their communities.

Libraries provide an essential service and play a broad role in bringing communities together, creating a touchpoint for new residents, and expanding minds. Government is making a substantial new investment in their future through the Nova Scotia Library Funding Model and Library Development Fund.

The Nova Scotia Event Strategy, part of the Culture Action Plan, enters its second year of a collaborative approach to event attraction and development. This year, Nova Scotia will host the North American Indigenous Games. Nearly 1,000 Indigenous nations from across North America and 5,000 athletes will attend. Other investments in culture and sport will strengthen communities through improved cultural facilities and more rural public transit. In summer 2020, for example, Nova Scotia will select a design for the new Nova Scotia Art Gallery. Over the next several years, up to \$80 million will be invested to construct the new iconic building.

Implementation of Access by Design is moving us toward an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Beginning April 1, 2020, municipalities, villages, universities, the Nova Scotia Community College, and provincial libraries must prepare to meet accessibility standards. In the upcoming year, we will also collaboratively develop accessibility standards for the built environment and education. New day programming that supports employment for adults with disabilities will be introduced. This addition complements the one-on-one job coaching for those with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities introduced earlier. Resources for the Disability Support Program (DSP) will increase to better help those with complex needs. This new support will allow the province to better serve children, youth, and adults with intellectual disabilities, long-term mental illness, and physical disabilities through a range of community-based, residential, and vocational/day programs.

Early Years & Education

Learning and belonging matter. From the earliest, most formative years, our children's experiences have a profound and lasting impact on their well-being, happiness, and life outcomes. A strong start gives children an advantage, but gains made must be sustained. The speed, scope, and impact of the fourth industrial revolution—characterized by profound, disruptive digital integration—is changing everything. Education must prepare youth to take advantage of the opportunities technology will bring. Lifelong learning, sciences, mathematics, and the creative arts, the development of innate human potential, and global mindsets are only some of the areas on which we must focus.

With this coming wave in mind, government made essential changes to the foundation of Nova Scotia's education system. These adjustments put the well-being of children first and prepare them to cope with accelerating rates of change. With many of those efforts in place, we are prioritizing creating a more culturally and linguistically responsive and inclusive education system. Government is building a high-quality, forward-thinking, accessible education system that puts preparing every student for a life of opportunity and happiness at the very centre.

Rebuilding the Basics

Work over the last several years accomplished numerous improvements that put students first:

- A governance and administration review of the education system led to a new Education Act and sweeping changes
- Establishment of the African Canadian Services Branch and the Mi'kmaq Services Branch brought vital focus to matters concerning these communities
- The number of school psychologists and speech and language pathologists increased, providing better access to support and reducing wait times

- 25 skilled trade centres are in place to train the next generation of tradespeople; more are in the planning stage
- The Council to Improve Classroom Conditions invested in:
 - Ensuring no junior high or high school classes exceed class caps
 - Improving attendance
 - Supporting schools with complex needs
 - Streamlining planning for student success
 - Reducing teacher workload
 - Creating a new Student Assessment policy

High-Quality Education for Everyone

Government is committed to inclusive education for all students. The province's first-ever Inclusive Education Policy comes into full effect in September 2020. It establishes guiding principles and directives to ensure that high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive, and equitable education is available to every student.

Numerous initiatives are already underway to support inclusive education and meaningful change. Examples include:

- The addition of 364 educators and specialists
- A network for schools to share and learn from one another
- Enhancements to the learning environment and educational outcomes for all students
- Partnership with the Youth Project for safe and welcoming school climates for LGBTQ2S+ students
- An African Nova Scotian Education Framework to support the well-being and academic success of African Nova Scotian learners
- Treaty Education to increase understanding of Mi'kmaw culture
- A Physical Activity Framework to promote daily movement and mental wellness
- A focus on culturally responsive practices

Early Start

In 2016, only one in four of our preschool-aged children could access critical childcare and early learning opportunities. Today, free pre-primary is available in 205 school communities. The roll-out concludes in the 2020–21 school year. Bus service will also be available provincewide in September 2020.

Making childcare more affordable for families is a main concern. The 2019 increase to the eligible income limit to receive subsidy, and expanded subsidy access for children attending before and after school programs, made this a reality for more parents. The Nova Scotia Before and After Program, for children from pre-primary to grade 6, creates a seamless day and access to outdoor play, movement, and physical literacy. It will continue at 34 existing locations.

To meet the need for early childhood educators (ECE), government undertook local, national, and international recruitment, while post-secondary institutions increased training capacity and recruited more students. The minimum wage for trained ECEs in licensed childcare centres that receive government funding also increased to between \$15 to \$19 per hour, depending on the level of training.

In January 2018, Nova Scotia signed a three-year, \$35 million funding agreement with the federal government to make childcare more accessible and affordable, improve the quality of care through workforce development, and embed inclusion in early learning. Ongoing work in this area will result in better, more accessible, and affordable childcare.

Over the last few years, government's total investment in early learning and childcare doubled to \$78 million. Government is also continually working to improve the quality of care and the many other socio-economic and environmental factors that affect children and learning.

Academic Achievement

Nova Scotia's surging population means enrollments are increasing. Government will expand its investment in regional centres and Nova Scotia Virtual Schools to ensure all students are ready for a future of opportunity.

Curriculum changes are improving academic results for many grades in math, reading, and writing. While there is more to do, this is a positive step in the right direction. We are working with partners like the Discovery Centre as we update grades 7 and 8 curricula and embed STEAM—an educational approach that incorporates science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics. Through a project and inquiry approach, STEAM education helps create critical thinker and problem solvers able to successfully navigate the 21st century.

Access to Reading Recovery, a vital program, is reinstated in all schools with grade 1. In 2020, it will continue to help children in grade 1 struggling with reading and writing. The Literacy Strategy for grades primary to 12 also continues in 2020–21. Programs such as the Technology Advantage Program Pilot (TAP), inspired by IBM and launched in the 2019–20 school year, will prepare students for the workforce of the future.

About 93 per cent of high school students are graduating at last report⁵—a critical improvement over 86 per cent in the 2009–10 school year. More than 68 per cent of students are also now going on to complete a university degree or college certificate.

⁵ 2016–2017 data

Well-being & Happiness

All schools now have access to SchoolsPlus. SchoolsPlus helps children, youth, and families connect to a range of services. In addition to mental health support, assistance includes social work, community outreach, mentoring, after-school programs, homework support, youth groups, and parenting support.

Students in all Nova Scotia public schools also have ongoing access to free menstrual products in 2020. The successful Breakfast Program will continue to prepare young minds to learn. Program expansion in 2020 will increase the 6.3 million breakfasts served in the 2018–19 school year.

A suite of e-mental health products for post-secondary students called HealthyMindNS is available. Support for Post-Secondary Accessibility Services will also increase. Students have access to assistive technology and other services that enable them to take part and excel.

Investing in Modern Infrastructure

Our social and economic foundation

The purpose of physical infrastructure is to achieve better social and economic outcomes. Infrastructure connects communities with markets and opportunities, healthcare and education, clean water and power—all of which improve the quality of our lives. Investment in this area can assist in addressing inequality through promotion of economic growth and social development.

This year, government will make the largest single-year capital investment in the history of our province to modernize our roads, schools, and healthcare facilities and support economic and social growth.

Healthcare Facilities

As government makes historic investments in healthcare infrastructure over the next few years, new practices and more collaboration are putting patients at the centre.

In 2020, the QEII Next Generation Project will progress; this is a once-in-a-generation undertaking to transform healthcare over the next 50 years. Building on the opening of the new wing at Dartmouth General Hospital in late 2019, this massive, multi-year project will:

- expand the Halifax Infirmary and specialised surgeries and services
- build a new cancer care centre
- establish an Outpatient Centre at the Halifax Infirmary that consolidates services
- create a Community Outpatient Centre in Bayers Lake offering many services currently only available in downtown Halifax

This year, the expansion of the dialysis unit at the Dartmouth General Hospital and the opening of new dialysis units in Glace Bay, Digby, and Kentville will help people get treatment closer to home.

The Cape Breton Regional Municipality Healthcare Redevelopment Project realigns regional resources to better connect people to the care they need. The project involves a significant addition and renovation at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, renovations and additions at Glace Bay Hospital, a new community health centre, long term care home and laundry facility in North Sydney, and a Community Hub consisting of a new school, community health centre, and long-term care home in New Waterford. Design and construction management contracts will be in place for all projects in 2020.

Rural High-Speed Internet

Access to high-speed internet connects Nova Scotians to a world of opportunity. Today, about 70 per cent of homes and businesses have access to high speed. The Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative will expand that to 86 per cent in 2020–21. In the next phase, starting in 2020, the province will move to the goal of more than 95 per cent.

Highways & Bridges

Since 2017, Nova Scotia received significant funding from the National Trade Corridors Fund based on merit. This funding is enabling substantial investments in the airport and port (\$42M), municipalities (\$23.5M), and highways (\$110.4M).

The Five-Year Highway Plan includes more than 150 major construction and improvement projects in 2020–21. Twelve projects take place in 2020–21 to twin portions of highways 101, 103, 104, and the Sackville-Bedford-Burnside Connector. Over the next three years, government will inject at least \$300 million to improve and upgrade roads, highways, and bridges across the province. Twinning and gravel road maintenance is ongoing, and a one-time \$10 million investment will improve “J class” roads.

Under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan, investments will be made in a green economy, public transit, and initiatives that help create inclusive communities. The province and the federal government will together invest in infrastructure projects that promote economic growth, job creation, and productivity through the New Building Canada Funds.

Schools & Community Hubs

Schools are more than schools; they are the hubs of our communities. With more immigrants and Nova Scotians returning from other provinces, some schools are seeing higher enrolment. In 2020–21, investments will be made to build and renovate 16 schools and purchase 30 P-3 schools.

Construction of an innovative space also begins in New Waterford. This includes a new school, community health centre, and long-term care home at the former site of the Breton Education Centre. In addition to a school, this new model creates a community hub where connection and engagement are encouraged. A new *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* (CSAP) school on the Halifax peninsula, announced in the 2018 Capital Plan, will also advance through planning stages. Communities across the province will see five new skilled trade centres added to schools in addition to the 25 currently in place.

Nova Scotia Community College's (NSCC) Marconi Campus will have a new, contemporary home on Sydney's waterfront. The new campus, a dynamic learning environment with state-of-the-art technology, will attract more students and contribute to the revitalization of the Sydney waterfront.

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