

# Budget

2021–22

*Government Business Plan*

  
**NOVA SCOTIA**

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Government Business Plan  
Finance and Treasury Board  
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## Message from Premier Iain Rankin

It is my honour as your Premier to introduce government's business plan for the Budget year 2021–2022.

None of us will soon forget the last 12 months. So often though, it is when we face our biggest challenges that we rise to our best. That is exactly what Nova Scotians did in response to the global pandemic. We worked together to keep each other safe, and in the process, we showed the world what can be accomplished when people, families, neighbours, and communities come first. We adapted and managed our public and financial health. We have fared better than most on all fronts, and we are in a strong position to not only recover, but to begin the next chapter in our province's history.

This is the starting point from which we can make the lives of Nova Scotians better and build a fair and prosperous future. As we embark upon our recovery, we have an opportunity to do things differently and learn from the past year. The nexus between the economy, equity, and the environment is the focus of my government's agenda. The priorities of Nova Scotians are the priorities of our government.

Front and centre must remain our work to win the fight against COVID-19. As we recover, we can set our sights higher than simply returning to normal. Together, we can create something better than before. We can make people, their well-being, and their quality of life our focus and our goal. We can build back not only better, but fairer.

A strong economy allows us to invest in our people – especially those who have not had the same historic opportunities as others – and the priorities of Nova Scotians, including healthcare, mental health, long-term care, infrastructure and skills for the future, and the environment.

Equity and inclusion are issues that will define our time. To keep moving forward and improving our province, we must acknowledge systemic racism harms our society and prevents us from achieving our full potential.

Nova Scotia will be a clean and vibrant province that puts the interests of people first. Acting on climate change will be good for people and good for business. As Nova Scotian businesses have already shown, there is economic value to be gained by being a leader in climate action.

My government will work, day-in and day-out, to earn your trust by making fair and transparent decisions that reflect our shared values and capitalize on the advantages that make us unique.

*Budget 2021–22* is a step in a new direction. As we embark on our economic recovery, we will balance much needed supports for Nova Scotians, investments in helping business grow and thrive, and our commitment to sound financial management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Iain Rankin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Iain" and the last name "Rankin" clearly distinguishable.

Iain Rankin  
Premier of Nova Scotia

## Introduction

Just over one year ago, Nova Scotia experienced the first wave of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. We went into the pandemic in a strong fiscal, economic, and demographic position. During it, we collectively learned what matters most — putting people first. Individual and collective well-being will be the foundation of our recovery in 2021–2022.

Our priority is ensuring Nova Scotians are healthy and safe. We will continue to follow Public Health protocols and put people first as the COVID-19 vaccine program is completed.

As we emerge from the pandemic, in front of us is a generational opportunity to act on climate change, recover and advance our economy, create more opportunity, and embark on a more inclusive and sustainable path — and we will take it.

Moving forward, government will focus its efforts in four key areas:

1. our economy
2. the health and wellness of our people
3. our environment
4. inclusion

It is not enough to grow. Our economy exists to serve the needs and aspirations of Nova Scotians. Government will make strategic investments where they are needed most to achieve inclusive economic growth and to improve the social well-being of Nova Scotians.

## Economy

Government will build on recent economic and demographic momentum and advance policies and programs to achieve inclusive economic growth that benefits all Nova Scotians.

Our starting point will be our growing population and the attraction of more people to our province. Our foundational sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, and forestry will continue to adapt to meet the needs of current and future generations. Innovation-driven entrepreneurship and regional economic progress

that builds on our many advantages and strengths in all our communities will be our path to inclusive growth.

Our path includes becoming leaders in the clean growth economy. Investments will be made in clean and active transportation infrastructure and housing to stimulate our economy, put people to work, and build a more resilient province.

## Health and Wellness

The pressures of the pandemic highlighted the essential nature of a resilient healthcare system, as well as paths we can take to improve our personal and collective wellness. As we continue to graduate more doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, we will make changes to our system.

We will focus increasingly on public health, measures to improve our quality of life through active and healthy living, and on the social determinants of health. With a better understanding of how to put people at the centre of care, we will make greater investments in long-term and home care and pay close attention to the importance of mental health.

Applying what we learned through the pandemic will help us modernize healthcare and improve access and outcomes.

## Environment

Low carbon approaches will create opportunities for economic recovery as well as clean growth. Sustainable tactics will enhance our competitive position, increase our capacity to innovate, and reduce inequalities among Nova Scotians. Investments will meet our climate action objectives.

As we tackle climate change, new opportunities will emerge across the province in renewable energy, transportation, farming, fishing, manufacturing, in making communities more resilient, in retrofitting homes and buildings, and in reducing the carbon impacts of our infrastructure.

## Inclusion

All work of government will have at its core a commitment to social equity. We recognize the value of diversity and inclusion.

Government will strive to improve the lives and livelihoods of all Nova Scotians. By addressing discrimination, systemic racism, and persistent inequality, our generation can and will achieve change. Social justice must no longer be a distant ideal; it will become a definitive goal and government will act to promote diversity, counter anti-ableism, and achieve anti-racist outcomes through the meaningful inclusion of all Nova Scotians in social and economic progress, and well-being.

## Summary of Priorities for 2021–22

1. An economy where business can grow
2. Modernizing healthcare
3. Environment and climate action
4. A connected, affordable, inclusive Nova Scotia

## Section 1 – An Economy Where Businesses Can Grow

The pandemic put economic strain on individuals and families in Nova Scotia. Employment is recovering and quickly nearing pre-pandemic levels. COVID-19 and the growth of the digital economy have accelerated pre-existing work and labour shifts. As a result, the future of work in some areas is forever changed. Youth and those in precarious, lower skilled occupations are disproportionately impacted. The paradox is that our growing sectors need more skilled workers.

Our collective economic recovery will be based on a growing population and the creation of places and environments that attract people and allow businesses to grow. Nova Scotia has become a start-up capital. Our post-secondary institutions and quality of life are clear advantages, and we can and will do more to create a place where start ups grow and create the good middle-class jobs of the future. We will explore new clean opportunities in strategic sectors, promote innovation, and capitalize on the comparative advantages of all our



regions, while assisting in the recovery of those industries hardest hit by the pandemic.

## Growing our Population

After decades of outmigration and population decline the tide has turned. Nova Scotia is experiencing a trend of strong population growth. People are choosing our province because they are making decisions about where to live based on their quality of life. They believe what Nova Scotia has to offer will enhance their well-being and that of their families.

The renamed Office of Immigration and Population Growth will build on our success in attracting newcomers to our province and making them feel welcome. The expanded mandate reinforces that the retention of newcomers, interprovincial migration, and international immigration lead to a growing population which is both a cause and consequence of economic growth, fiscal contribution, and social well-being. Government will continue to market Nova Scotia's attractiveness to the world and promote all migration pathways.

## Strategic Sector Investments

Tourism, travel, and hospitality are some of the most deeply impacted sectors in financial and personal terms by the pandemic. Government will work collaboratively across the provincial tourism sector as it adapts to a different future. We will be a partner in finding stable footing and reimagining a year-round, regenerative, lower carbon future for tourism and travel within Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada.

Restaurants, and sports and recreation, are also severely impacted by restrictions needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and consequent changes in consumer behaviours and preferences. Our government will help these sectors adapt to a better future.

Resource-based sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and forestry are foundational to our economy, and experiencing significant change. With change comes opportunity.

We will continue to build on our strengths in oceans, including fisheries and aquaculture, as well as agriculture, sustainable and innovative forestry, advanced manufacturing, innovation-driven entrepreneurship, and the emerging and growing opportunities of the digital economy, including digital health. We will foster innovation-driven entrepreneurship through places like Ignite Labs, Volta Labs, COVE, and the Verschuren Center, and through organizations like ONSIDE and our Regional Enterprise Networks.

COVID-19 resulted in an increased focus on buying local. We expanded our livestock processing capacity and showed how quickly we can seize an opportunity when farm markets expanded their distribution methods and made local food more accessible. By increasing the amount spent on locally produced food, we can strengthen our local economy, reduce imports and emissions, and create better health outcomes for children and all Nova Scotians.

Science, research, and innovation are necessary to improve productivity, adapt to climate change, and increase value-added agricultural production. We will build on work already underway by expanding into research on technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. When it is safe, we will intensify trade missions and help our producers continue to expand to international and interprovincial export markets.

Nova Scotia is committed to ecological forestry and a triad approach to practices in the sector. We will implement the recommendation of *An Independent Review of Forest Practices in Nova Scotia* (or the Lahey Report), to protect and enhance important ecosystems and biodiversity and sustain a vibrant and innovative economic sector. Government will further collaborate with the sector to transition from industrial forestry to ecological forestry. Businesses are transitioning from low-value commodities to high-value specialty and innovative products. High levels of innovation will renew and expand the value of this sector, including through carbon sequestration.

Finally, we will work with farmers, producers, and processors to increase productivity and reduce carbon impacts.

## Creating the right business environment

To effectively capitalize on our advantages, Nova Scotia must encourage competitiveness and investment. Over the last several years the province successfully reduced the regulatory load on businesses. We will continue to pursue this worthwhile objective by setting a new target for reducing regulatory burden.

Government also will undertake a recovery review in 2021 to ensure that existing programs are both affordable and improving the well-being of Nova Scotians. In addition to assessing cost and benefit, the review will ask if programs

- measurably enhance the social well-being of Nova Scotians, in areas such as health, education, and protection of the most vulnerable
- cause environmental harm or regenerate the environment

Our review will challenge old ways of thinking and lead to programing that achieves more sustainable and inclusive economic growth and higher life satisfaction.

Now is the time to capitalize on new opportunities by embracing sustainable solutions and our unique advantages. We can address the effects of climate change, set a more sustainable path, and make our communities even more attractive and welcoming.

## Investing in workforce and skills of the future

Government will also watch the horizon, anticipate the impending needs of society, encourage the lifelong learning that the future demands, and remove barriers to participation in the workforce of the future. Skills and lifelong learning initiatives will help more people take part in opportunities in the clean economy for higher quality, less precarious, more fulfilling, and better paying work.

A skills agenda will permit all Nova Scotians to benefit from the opportunities in front of us. Aligned skills, lifelong learning, and micro-credentialing will help more people obtain better paying jobs and enjoy the benefits of higher incomes. Working with Nova Scotia employers, we will create more inclusive workplace

cultures, adopt targeted education and skills training, and offer comprehensive employment services and career placement opportunities for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities.

Government will also develop long-term plans that address the changing nature of work that includes welcoming and distributed workforces, occupational pluralism, continuous learning, entrepreneurship, engagement of older workers, and alternative work arrangements.

## Infrastructure in every region

Our government will continue placemaking — the planning, development, and management of land and infrastructure with and for people — and further develop authentic, sustainable public places with the right infrastructure to attract and retain people.

The quality of our lives and the places in which we live are differentiating advantages for our province that we will build on. Government will promote, develop, preserve, and celebrate our culture, heritage, identity, and languages. Our cultural sectors, which contribute to the vitality of Nova Scotia in so many ways, will be a focus, particularly as we emerge from the pandemic.

The hospital and education infrastructure projects underway in Nova Scotia are some of the largest and most important in our province's history. Government will effectively and prudently manage these once-in-a-generation projects while maximizing the social and inclusive economic growth benefits for Nova Scotians. These and other infrastructure investments will be planned and implemented with climate-resiliency at the forefront.

Our work to connect more Nova Scotians to high-speed internet will make communities in all corners of the province even more appealing and enable new people to move here and work remotely. More than 80 per cent of Nova Scotia homes and businesses already have access to high-speed internet — we will continue to build on that to achieve 99 per cent high-speed internet access by 2023.

## Section 2 – Modernizing Healthcare

Nova Scotians want a modern, reliable, and resilient healthcare system that meets their needs and can withstand a pandemic, and other emergent challenges, in a fast-moving, digital world. We will improve the health of Nova Scotians through active and healthy living, a focus on the social determinants of health, and modernization of healthcare. To improve access, we will apply what we learned through the pandemic.

In 2021–22 government will work closely with our federal counterparts and continue protecting people from COVID-19. Nova Scotians have worked together to keep each other safe. Our immediate emphasis is vaccine rollout, monitoring, reporting on the epidemiology, and implementing public health measures to continue to protect Nova Scotians.

### More doctors and nurses

This year, investments will be made to continue graduating more doctors from Dalhousie Medical School and to continue to fund more nursing seats at Cape Breton University and Dalhousie University's Yarmouth campus.

As restrictions ease, vaccinations increase, and travel resumes, we will remain focused on the attraction and recruitment of healthcare providers from family doctors to specialists.

### Mental health support

Government established the new Office of Mental Health and Addictions recognizing that mental health issues were on the rise even prior to the pandemic. Uncertainty and mitigation measures, such as lockdowns and physical distancing necessitated by COVID-19, have put additional strain on our mental health.

The new office will draw focus to mental health issues and expand access to services and programs in communities across the province. A harm reduction and anti-stigma approach that promotes mental health, addresses the social determinants of health, and works with partners like schools to promote mental health throughout one's lifetime, will be used.

## Health system improvements

To improve our health system, government will place more focus on public health, gather data to inform equitable decisions, and improve service delivery by increasing the diversity of healthcare providers and expanding virtual services.

The value of public health became readily apparent in the pandemic. Rather than waiting for people to become sick, public health aims to keep people healthy. This branch of healthcare promotes healthy lifestyles, conducts research on disease, finds ways to prevent injury, and detects, prevents, mitigates, manages, and responds to infectious diseases like COVID-19.

Good public health is good for consumer confidence, good for business, good for people, and good for our economy.

Moving forward, the province will focus more on preventing people from getting sick. The best investments are in early interventions and preventative measures like better nutrition, encouraging exercise, and active living that help improve the social determinants of health. Housing, personal safety, and our income levels impact our health.

Intersectional data concerning race, ethnicity, culture, gender identity, income, citizenship status, sexual orientation, language, and disability is needed to inform equity work in healthcare. This data will improve our understanding of existing barriers, better enabling government to address disparities and help communities emerge from the pandemic.

To improve equity in service delivery, we will increase the number of people from under-represented groups in professional positions within the healthcare workforce at the clinical, administrative, and management levels through approaches like Dalhousie Medical School's Education Equity commitment.

Just as the pandemic has revealed challenges, better ways of doing things have also emerged. Virtual health and telehealth visits with the province's primary care physicians are broadly welcomed by Nova Scotians — a positive outcome. Virtual care will supplement, not replace, face-to-face healthcare service. Government will intensify concentration on digital health technology to improve access and delivery, particularly in rural areas and for older Nova Scotians and others who may have difficulty accessing in-person care.

## Long-term and home care

The pandemic shone a light on the issues affecting older adults living in long-term care. The findings of the Expert Panel on Long Term Care will be implemented. Government will improve the standard of care by making investments in retrofits and building more modern facilities under the multi-year Long Term Care Infrastructure Renewal Plan. As we make capital investments in our facilities, we will also examine additional ways to reduce social isolation and provide more opportunities for individuals to age-in-place.

## Section 3 – Environment and Climate Action

Climate change is the challenge of our generation. Nova Scotians will not be able to isolate from its effects. Unchecked, it will adversely affect our daily lives and our livelihoods. The work government will undertake to address climate change, however, is among our best opportunities for economic recovery and reimagination.

The renamed Department of Environment and Climate Change reflects the importance of this focus and the need for coordination across government.

Addressing climate change requires that we continue to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This work will create opportunity; we will develop a new Climate Change Strategy for Clean Growth to ensure our province captures it. Moving forward, we will phase-out coal for energy use by 2030 – 10 years earlier than planned. Nova Scotia will also be the first province in Canada to achieve carbon neutrality.

## Green Fund programs and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Government will enable investment and growth in homegrown innovations in clean technology to give Nova Scotia an economic and environmental competitive advantage. In doing so, we will drive growth now and set the foundation for the jobs of tomorrow. We will protect the planet while ensuring Nova Scotians are protected from higher fuel and electricity costs.

Investments in energy efficiency upgrades for low-income families and renters will help lift our most vulnerable populations out of energy poverty, reduce emissions, and create good paying jobs and new business opportunities.

## Green infrastructure

Construction projects will be designed to reduce the long-term carbon impact of buildings and infrastructure. As we make choices that will remain with us for many years, we will incorporate methods to increase resiliency in the face of climate change.

Significant electrification of public transit including new electric buses for transit authorities, new hybrid ferries, a new ferry route from Bedford Basin to downtown Halifax, and enhanced active transportation networks around the province will be explored. Major investments in the promotion of new and used electric vehicles, including e-bikes, and energy-efficient home upgrades have already begun.

Climate change is the biggest challenge we face; but is also our biggest opportunity. The jobs of the future and the health of our economy and our environment are inextricably linked. As we tackle climate change and work toward economic recovery, new job opportunities in rural and urban communities will be created in renewable energy, trades, digital and high tech, and innovative technology related to our ocean or blue economy.

## Conservation

Government will enhance protected areas, manage habitats, protect our wildlife and biodiversity, and develop adaptation plans.

In the forestry sector, we will accelerate the implementation of the recommendations of the report by Professor William Lahey. We will adopt ecological forestry principles and put protection of the ecosystem and biodiversity at the forefront of forestry management practices. As we innovate away from industrial to ecological forestry, we will seek higher value production with lower ecological impacts.

*Building Regional Adaptation Capacity and Expertise Program* investments will support the development of climate change adaptation plans and actions to enhance Nova Scotia's resilience.



## Section 4 – A Connected, Affordable, Inclusive Nova Scotia

Our strength is our people, in their skill and diversity. People build our communities and contribute to the quality of life that drives others to call this place home. However, for too many Nova Scotians, systemic racism, agism, and discrimination is a lived reality. We must confront our past and learn from the mistakes that continue to harm African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq people. We must include African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq people in decision-making, with honest deference to their lived experiences – and then we must act.

Government will focus on social equity, addressing the underlying and systemic differences of opportunity and access to resources. It will work to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 and ensure our economic recovery is inclusive. Policies and programs will promote diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

### Childcare and education

While we continue to keep our schools clean and our children safe from the spread of COVID-19, government will take a student-centred approach to childcare and education. We recognize that each child is unique, and the needs of the future will be different from the past.

The pandemic highlighted difficulties faced by women in the workforce, especially around issues of childcare. My government is committed to working with the federal government on a national childcare strategy because childcare is critical to a thriving economy and equity.

Increased support for universal pre-primary will ensure all children have a good start in life. We will continue to implement the recommendations from the Commission on Inclusive Education to create an education system for all students.

African Nova Scotian and Indigenous students live with the legacy of systemic racism, which too often contributes to academic struggles, higher rates of disciplinary action, and leaving school with less access to what is needed for life, livelihoods, and lifelong learning. Addressing these factors will be central to a more successful education model.

## Equity and inclusion

Equality and dignity, the ability to live free from all forms of discrimination, and to work, are basic human rights. These rights play an important role in our quality of life. Government will develop and implement policies and programs that promote diversity and the foundational fairness of inclusion and belonging.

The new Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives will provide whole-of-government focus to address these matters effectively. The Office will emphasize government's role in addressing anti-ableism, promoting diversity, and achieving anti-racism outcomes through meaningful inclusion of all Nova Scotians in social and economic progress and well-being.

The re-named Office of L'Nu Affairs will lead vital work toward reconciliation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. The change in name, from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, better reflects the unique and important relationship between the province and the Mi'kmaq. Working with partners within and beyond government, the office will focus on greater public education, awareness of issues, deepening our collective understanding of Mi'kmaq contributions, and improving our understanding of barriers to healthcare, education, and careers.

Starting more than 230 years ago, many African Nova Scotians made their homes on land passed down by their ancestors without clear land title. Through increased investment in the Land Titles Initiative, government will accelerate help for residents in historic communities to gain clear title to their land.

We will continue to close large, congregate living sites and support moving disabled Nova Scotians from these sites to community settings and make investments in programs that support children and adults with disabilities. These efforts will help make our communities and public places age-friendly and more accessible.

## Supporting people who need it most

Government will work to positively influence the social determinants of health and improve the quality of life of those most in need.

Nova Scotians living on low incomes face many stressors and struggles as they strive to make ends meet. *Budget 2021–22* increases financial support. The Standard Household Rate for Adults on Income Assistance and the Poverty Reduction Credit will increase to help put more money in peoples' pockets. Our most vulnerable citizens should not have to worry about whether they will have an affordable and safe place to live. Government will pay urgent attention to this issue and act in response to the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Commission.

Food security is about having consistent access to safe, nutritious food. It is tied to every aspect of our lives and its quality. Apart from basic nutrition, food security is linked to economic stability, long-term health, women's empowerment, and the environment. Food insecurity can result in ongoing short- and long-term health problems. Policies and programs will set us on a path to improved food security. Investments will be made to support related initiatives, including Nourishing Communities, to assist Nova Scotia's most vulnerable residents to access healthy foods.

Youth and seniors can be particularly vulnerable. Funding increases will provide more children and youth with safe places to stay when they are most needed and expand prevention and early intervention child welfare programming. Improvements to the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors will reduce the cost of municipal residential property taxes.

Addressing human trafficking, domestic violence, and supporting survivors of sexual assault in our communities is a priority. Through *Standing Together*, the province's action plan on domestic violence, policy changes will result in better responses. More therapy and residential placements will also be available to survivors of sexual assault and sexually exploited youth.

## Conclusion

The pandemic brought challenges, but it also afforded opportunities and revealed areas that need attention if our province is to build on its momentum and continue to advance and achieve economic growth and social well-being.

Nova Scotia entered the pandemic in a strong fiscal, demographic, and economic position. After decades of outmigration and population decline, the tide has turned. Young Nova Scotians are staying, international students are studying here and then making our province their permanent home, international immigrants are attracted here and staying long term. Especially in the last year, people from other parts of Canada are coming to Nova Scotia for a better lifestyle and improved well-being. The common denominator is better lives and livelihoods can be achieved here.

People, their well-being, and improving the quality of their lives are the focus of public policy as Nova Scotia enters a new era.