

BUDGET

2022-23



Solutions for Healthcare
Solutions for Nova Scotians

Government Business Plan





Message from Premier Tim Houston

Successful teams share a common vision.

We are a team. A team of proud Bluenosers with a common vision.

We share your vision for this province: Access to healthcare, dignity for our seniors, growing our population so that we can have more and better-paying jobs. Fixing healthcare and rebuilding the economy is not for the faint of heart. It will require strong leadership, and a willingness to take bold action. If you want someone to tinker around the edges and check boxes, that's not this government.

Our Province has tremendous potential, and Nova Scotians have demonstrated the strength to capitalize on it over the last 24 months. Now, the rest of the world is discovering our secret and finally seeing what we've seen for so long.

Nova Scotia is growing because we are a beautiful place with an enviable lifestyle, with some of the world's best coastlines, beaches, golf, wineries, hiking and so much more. People want to live here because they share our values and see our potential. But there are areas where we can do better. We heard you when you said:

- The healthcare system must change. You want access to care when you need it.
- Mental health care is a right, not a privilege.
- Our seniors deserve to live in dignity.

It is time for solutions. Real change involves thinking differently and taking decisive action on innovative ideas. To deliver on our solutions over the next four years we need to be bold.

Budget 2022-23 reflects our belief that health and wellbeing, economy and sustainability are the issues of our time. In 2022-23, we will continue the work needed to complete all our commitments to Nova Scotians over the next four years.

To achieve our potential, Nova Scotians must first be healthy. That is why we are starting with our healthcare system.

In only a few months, we've invested in healthcare and acted in the areas that matter most to Nova Scotians. More is coming. This budget is the start of a four-year plan that will make life here the envy of all Canadians.

Let's get to work so you can access healthcare when you need it, earn higher wages and above all else, know that your government respects you and will do what it can for you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Houston".

Tim Houston
Premier of Nova Scotia

Introduction

We begin our first full year of work with laser-like focus on healthcare. It is a priority for Nova Scotians, and it is foundational to our economy and future.

Budget 2022-23 contains historic investments. More than that, we are making thoughtful investments that will result in systemic changes you can feel.

Solutions for Healthcare

On the Speak Up for Healthcare Tour we listened to healthcare professionals. We heard that the system must change, and that the people who work in it need support and respect.

We are at a turning point. The pandemic put enormous pressure on a system that was already experiencing significant challenges. Our plan is about bold solutions. We will address the core issues of recruitment and retention, access to care, and outdated infrastructure, while making much needed investments in long term care and addictions and mental health.

We are already doing things differently. We:

- Established the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment with a sole focus on recruiting and retaining the healthcare professionals needed in Nova Scotia.
- Expanded virtual care to Nova Scotians on the waitlist for a family doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Expanded access to e-mental health resources.
- Offered jobs to all graduating nurses.
- Opened urgent treatment centres in North Sydney and Parrsboro.
- Added vehicles and staff to double patient transfer capacity and let paramedics focus on emergencies.
- Invested \$57 million to attract and retain people to work in continuing care and open beds for seniors faster.
- Began redevelopment on the IWK Emergency Department to expand capacity to double its size.
- Opened recovery support centres to help people struggling with substances and gambling.
- Administered over 507,800 third doses of COVID-19 boosters.
- Opened a new facility in Kentville to train family medicine residents.
- Worked to reduce the surgical backlog by performing less-complex procedures at Scotia Surgery.
- Invested in hearing and speech technology for newborns, children and others.

We will do even more.

Laying the Foundation for Mental Health

Mental health is just as important as physical health. It affects us physically, financially and socially. Good mental health can lead to a longer, happier and more fulfilling life. We created the Office of Addictions and Mental Health to drive positive solutions. Already, change has begun with expanded addiction recovery help, new e-mental health tools and the introduction of a multidisciplinary recovery support model for withdrawal.

Transformation in addictions and mental health continues this year. In April 2022, Nova Scotia's first mental health acute day hospital will open at the QEII Health Sciences Centre to support those in need of more intensive but not inpatient care. We will not stop there. Virtual care will expand to include mental health support. Investments in services to help people withdraw from addictions will increase. And more change will come as we begin work toward universal addictions and mental health coverage.

Access to Primary Care

For too long we have talked about the problems of accessing primary care. It is time for solutions. Nova Scotians will have a patient-focused health system with enough professionals to provide care when needed – in person or virtually. To achieve this, we will focus on four areas:

1. patient access and flow;
2. work-life balance and human resources;
3. improved technology; and
4. sustainable services in rural communities.

Solutions for primary care start with the people who deliver it. Innovative recruitment and retention strategies, such as our plan to hire all graduating nurses, will make Nova Scotia a place of choice for doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. Comprehensive recruitment efforts are underway. We are encouraging physicians with roots in our province to “Come Home to Nova Scotia.”

Funding for the Primary Care and Specialist Physician Incentives programs has increased by nearly \$10 million. New programs designed to inspire more doctors to establish family practices outside the central zone continue. We will bring more paramedics to Nova Scotia and add patient transfer drivers and vehicles to free paramedics for emergency care. A restricted temporary license will allow graduates to start work while they wait to write the Canadian Organization of Paramedic Regulators exam.

We will also continue to expand virtual care and train healthcare professionals here at home. We are adding nursing seats and will fund the additional medical school seats added in 2019. A relationship with the Michener Institute will explore innovative ways to train more in demand healthcare professionals.

Expanded hours, novel approaches at the IWK and construction of a new operating room at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital will help reduce surgical backlogs. To address wait times, we will add beds and staff at the Dartmouth General and improve access and flow. A new command centre will move patients out of emergency rooms faster and make the entire system more efficient.

As our population grows, so does the demand for services. Investments in the Newcomer Health Clinic will increase. The Brotherhood Initiative will expand and start a Sisterhood model for women of African descent.

Hospice services in Cape Breton, Halifax and the Annapolis Valley will receive more support; and we will make investments in medications and devices, the Family Pharmacare Program and cancer medications.

Investing in Dignity for our Seniors

Nova Scotia's seniors have a right to respect and dignity. Those living in, waiting for or working in continuing care know there are gaps – long waits for admittance, shared rooms and staff spread too thin. We will do better.

Continuing care assistants (CCAs) take care of our loved ones in their homes or in long-term care facilities. In Budget 2022-23, our CCAs become the highest-paid in Atlantic Canada. We established a direct care staffing standard so CCAs, and others, can provide a consistent level of long-term care. To meet the standard, we will recruit nationally and internationally, fully fund tuition and allow CCAs to work and learn to enter the workforce earlier.

We are adding 500 long-term care beds to more than 2,000 new or improved beds already in progress at 27 facilities across the province. These projects will create or improve more than 2,800 beds to shorten waits and help more couples stay together. The Seniors Care Grant will help seniors remain at home.

Solutions for our Economy

With our distinct advantages and valuable assets, Nova Scotia's economic potential is immense. We need to capitalize on that potential and continue to grow our economy. As it and our population reach new heights, so do our opportunities. Our vision for growth starts with a larger, more diverse workforce, bringing in more young people with the right skills to meet our needs and help Nova Scotia propel to its fullest capacity.

Economy and Workforce

In 2021, we promoted opportunities in trades and healthcare, made additions to the Occupations in Demand immigration stream to meet needs in the service sector, encouraged remote workers to relocate here and worked with the federal government to make the Atlantic Immigration Program a permanent pathway. By the end of the year, we welcomed a record-breaking 9,020 permanent residents and surpassed one million people. From here, we will drive toward our population goal of two million by 2060.

In 2022-23, we will attract more newcomers, fill labour gaps and strengthen our workforce. In collaboration with businesses, communities, post-secondary schools and others, we will draw and retain more young people, entrepreneurs and skilled workers for healthcare, education, service industries and construction. We will also streamline the immigration process to make coming here easier.

As our economic conditions improve following the pandemic, we will grow in ways that improve quality of life. With our acceptance of all recommendations from the Nova Scotia Minimum Wage Review Committee, workers will earn a minimum wage of \$15 by 2024. We will also return provincial income tax on the first \$50,000 of income for workers aged 30 and under in designated trades.

Nova Scotians need to be ready to take advantage of the opportunity growth brings. As labour shortages appeared in 2021-22, we introduced skills training and employment opportunities in boatbuilding and the music industry. We will continue to identify gaps and opportunities in 2022-23 and provide skills development and lifelong learning initiatives that help Nova Scotians improve their circumstances.

The film sector helps to create jobs and draw international visitors and investments to our province. Provincial funding support, a new soundstage and content creator fund for the film sector will set the sector up for opportunities like never before. Budget 2022–23 will also support a robust Film and Television Production Incentive Fund for new projects.

Post-secondary schools must also anticipate and meet the needs of our current and future labour market for skills and size. The development of a post-secondary housing strategy will begin to house the additional students we are attracting. A review of the governance and structures of our universities will also ensure they are efficient, effective, accountable and serving the needs of Nova Scotia's students and our future economy.

Business

Consumer behaviour changed fast, and local businesses had to respond during the pandemic. Local businesses made sacrifices for our public health. Our resource sectors are leading contributors to our economy, communities and food security. There is no better time to support local businesses and key sectors.

This year, we will launch Nova Scotia Loyal to encourage the consumption of products made, manufactured or substantively produced here. The Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy will create awareness of, improve access to and increase local production to achieve our goal of 20 per cent local consumption by 2030. We will promote locally harvested, grown and produced seafood, agri-food and beverage products using consumer outreach and marketing.

Increasingly, sustainability drives innovation, lowers the cost of business and helps companies create new products. To help small enterprises transition to clean energy and reduce emissions, we will increase funding for energy efficiency programming. Sustainable innovation will help with pandemic recovery and future growth, and we will encourage businesses and sectors to push this new frontier. The Innovation Rebate Program, now permanent, will help companies adopt technologies and become more sustainable and competitive. We will help businesses adapt to the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act and the upcoming Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth.

Nova Scotia must export and increase its connectivity to the world. The Export Development Program will continue to help Nova Scotia businesses increase national and international sales, adopt technology and improve competitiveness. Increases to the Halifax International Airport and Sydney Airport Authority Air Access funds will expand flights and destinations. With high-speed internet or satellite, Nova Scotia businesses have access to global markets. That is why getting Internet to every household is a priority. We are continuing to see significant progress. Over the next year, the Internet for Nova Scotia Initiative will invest in the satellite hardware program.

Housing

Affordable housing helps community economic development, boosts consumer spending and increases available workers. With affordable, safe, stable housing, families are more secure, health outcomes improve as well as performance in school and immigrants can integrate into their communities faster. Already, we have taken steps to make that a reality for more Nova Scotians. We have:

- Provided funding to create 1,100 new affordable housing units.
- Offered more than 4,400 rent supplements to help Nova Scotians afford the cost of rent.
- Provided wrap-around services for the under-housed.
- Increased funding for shelter operators.
- Invested in the Diverting Families Program for those in housing crisis.
- Established the HRM Housing Task Force to remove barriers and expedite housing development.
- Made significant investments in Indigenous supportive housing.

In 2022-23, our work continues as we implement the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission recommendations and invest in new affordable housing units, make repairs to public housing and perform building upgrades to reduce emissions. We will develop a provincial supportive housing approach to help children, families, and individuals live safe and healthy lives, and a supportive housing model for people experiencing homelessness. This model, a first of its kind in Nova Scotia, will address barriers to stable housing such as physical and mental health challenges.

Solutions for our Future

In the future, Nova Scotia will be healthier and greener. Children are mentally and physically well and prepared for a successful life from an early age. Nova Scotians have the diversity, knowledge and skills they need. Communities continue to be welcoming and connected and find strength in their differences. Poverty, racism, accessibility and women’s and senior’s issues are acknowledged and addressed.

Environment

Our environmental goals – carbon neutrality, the phase-out of coal, more renewable energy – are ambitious. They are also achievable. The new Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act (EGCCRA) is a vital first step, as is strengthening Efficiency Nova Scotia and introducing programs to address energy poverty and efficiency for families and businesses.

In 2022-23 we will work toward the EGCCRA goals, develop a climate plan, and prepare for climate change impacts. Work to modernize the environmental assessment process begins and efforts to protect our waters, land and the lives and industries they support continues. The federal government requires provinces and territories to implement more robust carbon pricing systems for 2023-2030. Government is analyzing options and will implement a program in the best interest of Nova Scotians.

Education

Education is central to our province’s future. The system will focus on the long-term preparedness and success of all children. Wellbeing, learning, achievement, inclusion and cultural responsiveness are our priorities.

High-quality early learning and childcare programs impact long-term outcomes. Through the Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, we will invest \$605 million more in federal funding over five years into the childcare system. By the end of 2022, Nova Scotia families will see a reduction of 50 per cent, on average, in childcare fees, and pay about \$10 per day by 2026.

A workforce strategy will result in higher wages and free tuition, books, and bursaries for early childhood educators.

Already, the Healthy Schools Grant provided every school with a \$5,000 grant and another dollar per student for mental/physical health and cultural awareness. We also covered the increased cost of milk. Last year, we funded 277 new inclusive education positions to meet diverse learning needs. In Budget 2022-23, the health and wellbeing of our children remains at the forefront. Healthy Schools Grants continue, and the development of a Physical Activity and Fitness Framework commences. We will complete the African Nova Scotian Education Framework for services including mental and physical health. An additional \$15 million will allow us to hire more inclusive education support.

To better prepare students for life, we will introduce financial literacy and teach them about healthy eating and cooking. We will expand civics education and add a curriculum on Netukulimk and environmental stewardship. A broader skilled trades program with non-traditional options will increase and diversify enrollment. For education staff, we will listen with open minds, provide classroom support, and offer ongoing professional development in areas like mental health literacy. To meet demand for substitute teachers, Bachelor of Education students in their final practicum placement can teach and receive payment as substitutes.

Supporting Nova Scotians

Inclusive, accessible, sustainable, safe, welcoming – these qualities describe communities where people want to live and visit. Budget 2022-23 makes investments that support Nova Scotians.

We allotted more than \$10 million to wrap-around support, shelter and culturally suitable housing for those experiencing homelessness. This critical work continues in Budget 2022-23 with the development of a five-year plan to reduce child poverty. We will also support children by redesigning the foster care system and creating a Child and Youth Commission to advance the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth.

To fight racism and discrimination, we established the All-Party Committee on Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives, strengthened the ban on street checks and started work at the African Nova Scotia Justice Institute. Next, we will create an Equity and Anti-Racism Strategy. We will work with African Nova Scotians to develop a plan aimed at systemic racism in the justice system. We will deliver culturally appropriate employment programs and advance the recommendations of the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry and the Wortley Report. Work with the Mi'kmaq community on an Indigenous Justice Action Plan will continue.

To further our communities, we will make them safer, more accessible and better connected. In 2022-23:

- An accessibility plan (2022-2025) and the first accessibility standard for the built environment launches.
- Work to create a human trafficking prosecution team begins.
- Major increases to the Gravel Road and Rural Impact Mitigation programs continue.
- Infrastructure investments through the Rink Revitalization Fund, Recreation Facility Development Grant, Community Facility Improvement Program and Business and Community ACCESS-Ability Grants continue.

Conclusion

Nova Scotia is the best place in the world to live. We have our challenges, but they are surmountable because now it is time for solutions. Budget 2022-2023 lays the groundwork for inventive solutions that build on each other over the next four years. Fixing problems in one area will result in improvements across the board.

We start with bold solutions for healthcare because personal health and wellbeing are essential building blocks for a vibrant province, high quality of life, and thriving economy. We lay the foundation for a green and evolving economy with the capacity to innovate and expand. And we position Nova Scotians for a fair and prosperous future.

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