

A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Continuing Care

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Introduction

Fixing healthcare is the number one priority for Nova Scotians, and the number one priority for Government. It won't happen overnight.

It will take bold action, innovative new ways of delivering the care Nova Scotians deserve, and significant investments across the healthcare system. We have started on a path to change and modernize the way Continuing Care is provided.

Fixing problems in one area will improve care for all. For example, having a strong workforce and more long-term care beds available means a shorter hospital stay for patients waiting for long-term care. Hospitals are not home. Seniors deserve care in a home-like environment and hospital beds are needed for other pressing healthcare services.

On the Premier's Speak Up for Healthcare Tour, many people said that investing in long-term care and home supports would have a profound impact on healthcare. This is why we created a stand-alone department responsible for seniors and long-term care.

There are hundreds of elderly parents and grandparents in hospital beds and over a thousand people waiting far too long at home for a bed in a long-term care home.

We have an opportunity to build a best-in-class system

We will build a system that is more responsive and delivers the care people need, where they need it and in the right way. That means offering programs and services that meet the needs of a diverse and ever-changing population – both those who need care and their caregivers.

We will build a system that is accountable and transparent. That means reviewing governance, legislation, policies, programs, licensing agreements and funding models. It also means being willing to do things differently and use technology and other tools to support continuous improvement.

We will build the right workforce and better support the workforce we already have. That means improving staffing levels across the system, investing in recruitment, education and workplace safety, and respecting and valuing a culturally diverse workforce.

That work begins now

We need to urgently hire hundreds more Continuing Care Assistants, LPNs, RNs, and allied health professionals like dietitians and occupational therapists, and we need to better support the providers we already have.

We also need to make more rooms readily available to those waiting for care.

To start, the Province is investing almost \$57 million over the next two-and-a-half-years to ensure Nova Scotians get the care they need as they age and staff get the support they need to provide this care.

These investments will meet the needs of seniors now and into the future by:

- hiring more people now;
- respecting and valuing the people already working; and
- providing more rooms, more quickly.

Immediate Recruitment Initiatives - Hiring More People Now

We need to start by recruiting more workers. Government has already announced an investment to hire 13 Nurse Practitioners and six Continuing Care Assistant recruiters. Additional investments include:

- \$22 million to bring over 2,000 Continuing Care Assistant students into the system over the next two years by covering 100 per cent of the tuition costs associated with their training. The introduction of a work and learn program will expose students to the worksite earlier and provide more opportunities to earn money while they learn.
- \$3.1 million in tuition rebates for current Continuing Care Assistant students who are already enrolled in existing programs.
- \$2.1 million to recruit Continuing Care Assistants internationally and across Canada. As many as 200 people will be offered up to \$10,000 for relocation expenses in exchange for a two-year work commitment.
- \$1.3 million to increase the Human Resources Innovation Fund to a total of \$2 million over two years. The fund is administered by the Health Association of Nova Scotia to attract workers to parts of the province where staffing is the most challenging.
- \$630,000 for more people (from 300 to 600) to have their prior skills and experience recognized, so they can apply for the many available positions in continuing care.

Immediate Retention Initiatives - Respecting and Valuing the People already Working

Continuing care health professionals are experts with huge hearts who provide complex care for our most vulnerable seniors. They deserve respect and appreciation for working under very difficult conditions. Welcoming new people to work beside them will help, but those already providing care deserve support, too.

The Province is investing:

- \$8 million to provide long-term care homes with an extra five per cent funding for direct care roles in homes. This will reduce pressures on existing staff by helping facilities hire more staff, including other healthcare professionals (for example, dietitians or occupational therapists) to provide care, and to move casual and part-time workers to full-time.
- \$1.3 million to increase the Professional Development Fund to \$2 million over two years. This fund supports orientation, skills training and other educational activities that improve workers' abilities to deliver quality care and to advance in their careers.
- \$1.4 million to implement standardized scheduling practices that help make scheduling staff more efficient and responsive to staff preferences.
- \$466,000 to pilot a Wellness Support Program that will offer injured or ill staff access to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work services and psychological services.

Immediate Capacity Initiatives - Providing More Rooms, More Quickly

Close to 300 people are waiting in hospitals for a room in long-term care at any given time in Nova Scotia. That is not where our seniors should be living, and it creates additional pressures in our hospital system.

Adding more beds through new buildings and renovations takes time, but we are acting now to bridge the gap until these beds are ready.

The Province is investing:

- \$5.9 million to license and fund 30 Veterans Affairs Canada Beds for Nova Scotians who need them. These beds are empty because there

are no longer large numbers of Veterans who require them. While Veterans still have priority access, we will use any available beds for those waiting in hospital for long-term care.

- \$6.1 million to convert and license beds in residential care facilities and assisted living facilities to nursing home level care beds.
- \$1.8 million to extend an agreement with Shannex and the Sisters of Charity to keep 23 temporary nursing home beds open for another year.
- \$3.1 million to hire temporary staff through employment agencies while we build a larger workforce. This will ensure all long-term care beds can be open and properly staffed to provide safe and quality care.

Conclusion

These are first steps and just part of our commitment to improving the Continuing Care system for employees and people who need care. Our mission to renovate and build 2,500 new single-bed rooms over the next three years continues. As well, these recruitment investments are part of our overall effort to hire 600 nurses and 1,400 Continuing Care Assistants.

We know that building new long-term care facilities and hiring the workforce we need takes time. The solutions we're proposing now will bridge the gap until we can open the doors to new facilities and more staff.

The Province will also move forward soon on other actions, including the Continuing Care registry, increasing direct care hours in long-term care, and solutions for workplace safety.

A skilled workforce and the appropriate care environments are critical to allowing seniors to live and be cared for with dignity and respect. These solutions are important steps toward achieving that goal and improving continuing care for all Nova Scotians.

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