

BUDGET

2022-23



Solutions for Healthcare Solutions for Nova Scotians

Honourable Allan MacMaster
Minister, Finance and Treasury Board

Budget Address



Introduction

Today, I am pleased to present the 2022–23 provincial budget.

This budget is a compassionate budget. It is for all the people and their families who waited for a doctor, a surgery, a nursing home room, a place to live. At its core, this budget is about solutions for the most basic needs we have today.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022–23 comes at a pivotal time for Nova Scotia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the strength of our public health systems, and the resolve of our communities, our businesses, public services and our people. We have made personal sacrifices to protect one another.

The world is different today, forever changed. Our province is facing challenges that cannot be ignored.

This is why we need this compassionate budget—a budget that brings people back together and offers solutions for the priorities we all know matter most—taking care of our people, rebuilding our economy and reimagining our province's future.

How lucky we are today to sit in this Chamber free of conflict on our shores.

For the past number of weeks, we have seen the people of Ukraine stand up against tyranny, and they are fighting with their lives. They are showing a spirit that will not be broken. Our hearts go out to the people of Ukraine and our doors will remain open to those who need safe refuge.

Mr. Speaker, last August, Nova Scotians voted for change. They voted for new ideas. They wanted solutions and a new government that would take action.

Pretending there are quick fixes to problems that have developed over decades is fruitless.

Solving problems requires hard work. Finding real and lasting solutions starts with listening and working alongside Nova Scotians.

We are listening.

This government has moved decisively since being elected seven months ago. Every minister was provided with a clear mandate in September. We could have waited until our first budget to begin taking action. We didn't wait at all.

We started right way.

- We started to address critical staffing shortages in healthcare and long-term care, giving Continuing Care Assistants a 23 per cent raise and covering the cost of their training.
- We rolled out a new Seniors Care Grant, which helps seniors get more help in and around their homes.
- We doubled the funding for local roads, which are vitally important connections within our rural communities.
- We announced plans to expand the number of long-term care homes and private rooms across the province.
- We doubled the grant to municipalities and towns to help with the growing costs of providing municipal services like police, transit and fire protection.
- We released an action plan for Housing and Homelessness and began funding projects and supports immediately.
- We introduced new environmental legislation with ambitious goals that will guide Nova Scotia toward a cleaner, healthier environment.
- We also kept our commitment to fixed election dates in our very first legislative session.

These actions, and many other investments made since September, strengthen our communities and set the stage for Budget 2022–23.

“Solutions for Healthcare, Solutions for Nova Scotians” is the name of Budget 2022–23.

With projected revenues of \$12.7 billion, and \$13.2 billion in planned spending, our expected deficit will stand at \$506.2 million.

As you will hear today, this budget reflects this government’s laser focus on finding solutions for healthcare. It also offers solutions for our economy and for our future.

Let me start with Solutions for Healthcare.

Solutions for Healthcare

Today's healthcare system was mostly designed in the middle of the last century. Many of our hospitals were built at that time, too.

For far too long we have been hearing about Nova Scotia's high rates of cancers and chronic disease. We have an aging population with complex needs. And, thousands are waiting for a family doctor, for a specialized treatment or surgery, mental health care and long-term care.

And, as we all know, the pandemic has put enormous pressures on every part of the healthcare system, in every community.

It was the last thing that a system—already under tremendous pressure—needed.

We have an incredible group of healthcare workers in this province—dedicated, well-trained professionals who want to be part of making the system better. They know that money alone won't do it. We need to be innovative and open to doing things differently.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight two people who are making advances in healthcare today.

Dr. Stephen Beed is an adult intensive care doctor. Dr. Beed also created a transformative device to help with a longstanding problem—turning patients who are critically ill without injuring staff.

Dr. Karen Cross is a surgeon who specializes in advanced tissue injury and wound care. She recently relocated to Nova Scotia and is already making a big impact. Dr. Cross has developed a hand-held device that takes images of a patient's skin, so specialists can virtually provide a diagnosis and advice for treatment – no matter where in the province the patient is. And it works on every colour of skin, unlike other skin health technologies.

You don't have to go far to find talent in Nova Scotia's healthcare system. It's full of professionals who go the extra mile to serve their patients.

But they tell us they are tired and have been losing hope. It's our job to give them hope, that things can change and to turn that hope into action.

These challenges in our health system are not ones that can continue to be ignored or solved by tinkering at the margins. They need solutions, they need more funding and they need a government willing to act.

Budget 2022–23 includes a \$5.7 billion investment in healthcare. That's an increase of \$413.4 million from last year. We will ensure every dollar is used to make changes and improvements that put patients first and provide the highest quality of care.

It starts with having the healthcare team in place, where we need them most. They truly are the foundation of our healthcare system.

That's why we established the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment to focus on recruiting more healthcare workers.

Having more nurses in the system means that more nurses can do their best work, provide better care for their patients and take much-needed breaks.

Starting this year, we will add 200 more new nursing seats across the province – 28 more at Cape Breton University, 26 more at Dalhousie University, 26 more at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish and 120 more practical nursing seats at Nova Scotia Community College.

It was notable that our premier made a direct offer to nursing students last Fall—upon graduation, all new nurses from Nova Scotia schools will be offered a job in the province. We need them and we want them to stay here.

We also need new and better ways to train and recruit more doctors. And we know, the more healthcare professionals we train here, the more who will fall in love with this place and want to stay.

Budget 2022–23 is laying the foundation for mental health.

Our team has been talking about the gaps in mental healthcare for many years and we are excited about the changes now underway.

This government made sure the Office of Addictions and Mental Health had dedicated leadership. I'd like to acknowledge the member for Cape Breton East who is a Registered Nurse and worked in the mental health system before being elected. He brings his own experiences to the role and is working hard to find ways we can better support those who need our help.

New addiction recovery support centres have recently opened in New Glasgow and Dartmouth, with three more centres expected to open in the next two years in Truro, Cape Breton and Halifax.

Understanding that recruiting mental health and addictions care providers is challenging, we need to consider new ways to ensure people can access services. This budget expands access to virtual care options, including community mental health and addictions outpatient clinics and services at emergency departments by hiring 22 more clinicians over the next two years.

We will add two more mental health and addictions clinical assistants in the Eastern Zone while we recruit much-needed psychiatrists. We will also fund four new psychology residents between Nova Scotia Health and the IWK Health Centre.

With \$1 million, this budget will support the Province's first mental health acute day hospital at the QEII to deliver intensive mental health treatment while allowing patients to stay closely connected to their families.

And we will see further progress this year to establish universal mental health care for those without coverage or who have exhausted their coverage. The Minister and his team are committed to engaging with a broad range of stakeholders to support the development of this new approach.

This government is pleased to work in partnership with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia on many fronts.

Recently, we provided \$2 million for the Mi'kmaq to lead the development of a culturally responsive mental health and addictions strategy. This strategy will guide the creation of a Mi'kmaw mental wellness system that incorporates their culture and values and improves access to care and supports.

Budget 2022–23 is improving access to primary and specialized care.

We're investing more money this year in technology and staff to further expand virtual care services. Every person who doesn't have a doctor or nurse practitioner and is registered with the Need a Family Practice Registry will have access to virtual care.

Virtual Care gives people same-day access to a family doctor or nurse practitioner online through a computer or mobile device. They can diagnose, prescribe and make referrals to other care.

About 60,000 Nova Scotians have access to virtual care already. There have been 10,000 appointments since the service launched. Patients are having good experiences and saying that it's convenient and efficient.

In addition, I am delighted to share that this year, Nova Scotia Health and Dalhousie University Medical School will work together to provide 3,500 more Nova Scotians access to the care they need by early summer. They plan to further involve family medicine residents in taking on Nova Scotians from the Need a Family Practice Registry through the Dalhousie Family Medical clinic and other similar clinics.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is also focused on reducing surgical backlogs and wait times. There is funding to schedule more operating room hours and to open 28 more beds at the Dartmouth General Hospital for surgical recoveries. We'll pay for more cataract surgeries and expand operating room capacity in Cape Breton.

These are concrete actions that will help thousands of people waiting for their surgeries.

There is more funding for the many Nova Scotians who need access to specialized care—for cardiac and renal programs, for medications and medical devices and for a new obesity clinic in the Eastern zone. And more funding for hospice care, too.

Mr. Speaker, this year, the Province will launch a system to collect and analyze race-based data in healthcare.

Created with a community-based working group, people will be invited to voluntarily provide their racial identifiers. Over time, the health system will have the data to better understand how communities need different healthcare support and how we may work at a community level to better serve people.

Two such initiatives will be supported by our budget this year. More money will be provided for preventative health and primary care services for refugees through the Newcomer Health Clinic.

And, we will see an expansion of the Nova Scotia Brotherhood Initiative, which provides culturally appropriate health services for men of African descent. A new Project Sisterhood will begin this year.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022–23 is also investing in continuing care and the people who provide that care.

Funding for more staff will support a new standard that sees at least 4.1 hours of one-on-one care for every long-term care resident. It will cost \$25 million, but who can put a price on providing quality care and dignity for residents in the place they call home.

Staff caring for clients need our support too, which is why we are investing in more workplace safety, safe handling and mobility equipment.

CCAs are a crucial part of the workforce and we are serious about hiring 1,400 more. We're covering tuition, have a targeted immigration strategy to attract and retain new CCA's and have introduced new approaches like work-and-learn opportunities. We also know the \$9,000 a year raise that we just announced for CCAs will help.

Amy Lake is one of 90 continuing care students working in long-term care facilities under the tuition support and work-and-learn program. She is studying at CBBC Career College and working at Dykeland Lodge in Windsor. She says she is grateful to have the opportunity to be in the program and work in an amazing place while doing her training. Further, she says this opportunity has given her the ability to further her education without financial concern and stress on her family.

We are also being aggressive with our plan to open 2,800 more long-term care spaces for Nova Scotians who are waiting at home and in hospital. Until they open, with \$11 million, we will extend or convert more than 190 new long-term care spaces, including Veterans Affairs spaces. This will help create more bed capacity more quickly, and support patient flow within the health system.

To help our seniors stay in their homes longer, we are providing nearly \$30 million for the Seniors Care Grant, which was launched last fall for Nova Scotians aged 65 and older. This grant gives seniors some extra support to help pay for household services like snow removal, grocery delivery, lawn care and small home repairs.

Mr. Speaker, over 40 per cent of the \$1.6 billion capital plan this year is being directed to healthcare.

Generational investments are being made in the QEII and the Cape Breton Regional Hospital redevelopment projects.

From the Yarmouth Emergency Department, South Shore Regional Hospital, a health centre in North Cumberland, projects at Dartmouth General and Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth, to the Emergency Department at the IWK Health Centre—all of these will see progress this year.

Our investments and partnerships with foundations and community groups are also funding more advanced technology, like a new MRI in Bridgewater and new robotics in Halifax.

These projects and other changes throughout the system will support modern healthcare that will attract new health professionals.

Continuing to fund a modern and responsive healthcare system requires a growing economy and a larger tax base. And, for that, we need an economy where everyone feels they have a chance to contribute.

Solutions for Our Economy

Mr. Speaker, in December I presented a mid-year fiscal update to Nova Scotians for 2021–22.

One of the great surprises we announced was \$1 billion in unexpected higher revenue for the province.

The track of the pandemic, and how it would impact our province and our economy, was largely unknown. Yet our economy performed better than expected through both 2020 and 2021.

Our GDP contracted 2.5 per cent in 2020, the second-lowest of all provinces and significantly better than the estimate of a 5.3 per cent reduction.

In 2021, Nova Scotia's economy made a significant recovery from the pandemic and by September, exports and employment were higher than pre-pandemic levels. In December, Nova Scotia's population crossed over one million people.

That's not to say everyone had the same experience. The people who work in tourism, hospitality and some other service industries were harder hit—challenged by changing conditions and the starts and stops of restrictions.

Now, with restrictions lifted and impressive levels of vaccination, Nova Scotians want to look forward. And while we face new economic uncertainties, like the conflict in Ukraine and the potential for new COVID variants, we can still be optimistic about where we are heading.

Budget 2022–23 is making investments to strengthen our workforce and our businesses.

Employers are hiring and there are opportunities for those looking to upskill and gain new employment opportunities. Carpenters, electricians, plumbers, heavy equipment operators, roofers and IT and healthcare professionals—these are just a few examples of high-demand, well-paying career paths open right now.

Nova Scotians who may need more support connecting to the workforce can get help. There are jobseeker supports through Nova Scotia Works and other programs like wage subsidies, career counseling and financial supports for certification fees and tuition, technology requirements and training courses.

Involving more young people in the trades is critical. With new funding, we hope to raise awareness among middle school students about careers in skilled trades and double the number of students in skilled trades programming.

Further, we will launch a new financial incentive to help attract and retain young skilled workers.

The More Opportunities for Skilled Trades program aims to attract and retain young workers in industries with labour shortages. Starting in the 2022 tax year, people under the age of 30 who are employed in eligible trades will receive a refund of personal income tax paid on their first \$50,000 of earned income.

We know Nova Scotia's population has been growing by about 10,000 each year over the past few years. But we need to step it up. We have set an ambitious long-term population growth target of two million people by the year 2060.

We're implementing broad-based and targeted recruitment solutions to attract more people—through immigration and in-migration—and to keep them here in Nova Scotia.

We're expanding the immigration team and providing more support to community-based settlement organizations, which are critical to helping people when they arrive and start their new lives here.

Companies that want to make forward-looking investments in their employees and their operations have a supportive partner in this government, Mr. Speaker.

The Province is making the Innovation Rebate Program permanent with annual funding of \$12 million. These rebates encourage private sector investment in their own facilities, in innovative processes and in green technologies to reduce emissions and become more sustainable.

Our recent \$12 million investment in tourism is helping the sector get ready for this year's tourism season. Much of this funding is being used to boost regional tourism marketing and help more operators go digital.

Increasing air access is the key to growing tourism. We recently provided nearly \$20 million for our two largest airports. The Halifax International Airport Authority will have more funding in its air access fund to attract new travel routes and new business. The Sydney Airport Authority will complete much-needed upgrades and create its own air access fund for business development.

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

These investments will have a positive impact in every community across the province and showcase local talent.

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia's talented artisans and innovative entrepreneurs also benefit when Nova Scotians use their purchasing power to buy well-crafted, quality, sustainable products that are made here at home.

We will continue to encourage the buy-local movement with a new Nova Scotia Loyal program this year, which is under development now.

Our businesses are looking to a diverse range of international markets, too. In 2021, international merchandise shipments increased 18.1 per cent. We saw significant growth in exports to the United States, the European Union and Indo-Pacific markets.

These are great opportunities for our seafood producers, manufacturers, natural resources sectors and agri-food businesses—most of which drive the economies of our rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, every member in this Chamber knows that the one need that cuts across all sectors and all businesses in this day-in-age is access to high-speed internet. Work to connect homes and businesses with fibre-op is happening under existing contracts. For some of the hardest to reach customers, that will mean we need to find satellite solutions.

Innovation drives economic growth and this government is making decisions that will have long-term, positive impacts.

The government was pleased to recently invest \$2.5 million in the Verschuren Centre for Sustainability in Energy and the Environment for a new biomanufacturing centre in Sydney. This new centre will create high-tech jobs, attract new business and help find new solutions for business challenges.

In the Fall, the government released a plan of solutions and action for housing.

We could have waited, but we chose to act immediately. We rolled out close to \$35 million to support more than 1,000 new affordable housing units, including 425 new rent supplements.

In this budget we're doing even more. With \$15 million more for affordable housing programs and \$2.7 million for new rent supplements, more Nova Scotians will be able to access housing and support to help with the rising cost of rent.

We'll do what needs to be done to make sure Nova Scotians can afford a place to call home. We will leverage every dollar we can, working with the federal and municipal governments as partners, to identify and remove barriers so that developers and builders can get on with it.

We will also begin three projects this year to build new NSCC campuses in Dartmouth and Pictou, knowing that more housing options for these students can help alleviate some of the pressure on those communities.

We know how hard it has been for people to find housing. Employers, particularly in rural areas, are telling us that lack of housing availability is affecting their workforce and our local economies. Budget 2022–23 also introduces new tax measures for non-resident homeowners. If they are renting to Nova Scotians, they will not pay the non-resident property tax.

Solutions for Our Future

Nova Scotia's future is bright. We want it to be bright for everyone.

Budget 2022–23 will invest \$54.2 million more in programs that support people with disabilities.

This budget recognizes that children with disabilities are more likely to achieve their full potential when they receive services at a younger age and families are supported to care for their children at home.

That's why we are investing \$3.5 million more in the Direct Family Support for Children program, which will increase support for families that have a child with a disability living at home.

In addition, over the next two years, we will develop a range of programs and services to meet the diverse needs of children with disabilities and their families.

With \$8.8 million, we are removing the cap on the Independent Living Support program. Opening this program to address the waitlist will provide more people with the supports they need to live with the maximum level of independence and autonomy.

This year, too, we will help more people move from larger residential centres to more community- and independent-living options, with the right supports in place.

We are also investing \$3.5 million to help young adults move from long-term care homes into community placements where they can live more independently with people of a similar age.

These investments will help people like the clients that L'Arche Cape Breton in Iron Mines, Inverness County, works with every day.

In addition to operating a residential home, L'Arche offers day-time programming where their in-home and community clients engage in activities together. This can help families gain respite or allow them to go to work.

I've met with the Executive Director and Community Leader, Mukthar Limpao. He tells me that the demand for inclusive and meaningful opportunities is growing across the province and is pleased to hear this government is considering the needs of these community members in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, we know thousands of Nova Scotians are living in poverty and want more for their children. We share their concern and want to help provide every child with the opportunity to thrive.

Planning is underway on approaches to reduce childhood poverty. With \$12.5 million in this budget, families will see an increase to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. This will put more money in the hands of low-income families so they can meet the needs of their children.

Additional investments this year will advance our work to redesign the Foster Care program. At the heart of this work are people willing to provide safe, stable caregiving in a home setting for children in need. We owe it to them to provide adequate financial supports, such as higher daily rates.

Homelessness is another very real and complex problem. It affects people in different ways and prevents them from moving forward. That's why we need to work with community groups and others on a range of responses.

This year, nearly \$17 million will be used for new and continued supportive housing initiatives to help with people's safety and well-being, including the cost of harm reduction services. We are supporting community-based service providers that work directly with people in need, like Out of the Cold in Halifax. We are also providing more funding for emergency sheltering options and volunteer-based shelters in rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that abuses against women, children and other vulnerable people are still a part of our society is heartbreaking. Budget 2022–23 is investing \$2.1 million more this year to help prevent domestic violence.

We expect to see more grants reach community organizations and partnerships for initiatives, prototypes and pilots that better respond to people's needs, promote gender equality and address barriers facing the most vulnerable Nova Scotians.

I believe that those who protect us should, in turn, be protected by their government. Over the course of four fiscal years, the government will cover the \$80 million in liability costs to ensure firefighters—both paid and volunteer—receive presumptive cancer coverage for 13 additional cancers and heart attack coverage through the Workers' Compensation Board. About 6,600 firefighters and their families will receive this benefit.

Keeping another promise, we are helping Nova Scotians who are paying for fertility services with a new Fertility and Surrogacy annual rebate of up to \$8,000 to offset some of the costs associated with these services.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022–23 also invests in the care, education and well-being of our children.

More families will be supported with the cost of early childcare. Pre-primary classes will welcome new children as more families choose this option for their four-year-olds.

And this year, with \$12 million in additional funding, we are putting a new model in place for pre-school-aged children with autism spectrum disorders. Supports will be tailored to the needs of each child and their family. We expect diagnostic assessments will be done more quickly and parent-coaching programming will be expanded across the Province.

This budget invests a further \$15 million to continue implementing the recommendations from the Commission on Inclusive Education.

More funding will be available to meet the growing need for settlement services, interpretation and translation resources within the public school system to help children whose first language is not English.

The Healthy Schools Grant for all public schools will continue and we are also introducing a new Sports and Arts Tax Credit to help families offset the costs of their children’s registration in sports and the arts.

This budget invests in revitalizing our communities, infrastructure and transportation systems that support a growing economy.

Highway twinning on most of our 100-series highways is well underway, but this government hasn’t forgotten about our rural roads. This year’s capital plan includes a new \$30 million dollar envelope for bridge repair and renewal and we are doubling rural road maintenance budgets.

In the last few months, we invested \$57 million to expand energy efficiency programs that address energy poverty and improve efficiency for Nova Scotians and businesses. We directed \$44.9 million from Green Fund revenues to worthy projects, too.

Our programs will help reduce GHG emissions and help people convert to cleaner heating and other energy options. We’re trying to green the electricity system by introducing more renewable energy sources and improving sustainable transportation infrastructure with more electric vehicle charging stations.

Conclusion

For the past two years, Nova Scotians have made tremendous sacrifices. They have shown the world what taking care of one another looks like. They have been resilient. This government is willing to match the determination of the people we serve.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to doing what was promised during the 2021 general election. We know it will take time and resources and it will take disciplined focus on the most important priorities first.

We strive to be a compassionate government, committed to listening and to finding creative solutions that help Nova Scotians thrive.

Budget 2022–23 offers solutions for healthcare, solutions for Nova Scotians and solutions to get our province moving forward.

We are looking to the future with optimism.

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