

Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Budget
2023 Pre-Budget Submission

The Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) regulates the practice of social work in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) under provincial legislation titled the Social Workers Act, SNL 2010, c.S-17.2. The vision is Excellence in Social Work.

Over the past 30 years, the NLCSW has consistently recommended that the provincial budget contain priorities for enhancing the health and social well-being of individuals, families, and communities in the areas of mental health, health care, children and youth, poverty reduction and seniors. NLCSW most recently provided a written submission as part of the consultation process for the Social and Economic Well-Being Plan and the Minimum Wage Review, and engaged in consultations to inform the work of Health Accord NL.

Health and social policy development must reflect the social determinants of health as outlined in NLCSW's [Social Determinants of Health Policy Framework](#). Given the tremendous work and comprehensive published reports that have been completed, including the Big Reset Report, NLCSW believes it is imperative that Budget 2023 contain financial commitments aimed at enhancing the health and social well-being of the people of this province, now and into the future. This submission highlights relevant recommendations from previous NLCSW submissions pertaining to mental health, health care, poverty reduction, and seniors.

Mental Health

- Integration of social workers in the K-12 education system.

The mental health needs of children and youth is an ongoing and growing concern for parents, educators, and health care professionals. Social workers are one of the largest providers of essential and comprehensive mental health services in the province and NLCSW continues to recommend the integration of social workers in the K-12 education system. This is also a recommendation outlined in the Big Reset Report (Premier's Economic Recovery Team) that was released in 2021.

Schools are environments where children and youth learn and grow; academically, socially, emotionally, and developmentally. However, we know that many kids are

struggling with issues such as anxiety, depression, substance use, poverty, child abuse, bullying, and discrimination. Children First Canada (2022) cited these as among the top 10 threats to childhood in Canada and recommends increased funding for youth mental health services and supports, and improved access to services within schools.

The integration of social workers in the K-12 education system would increase student access to mental health services and other essential supports in schools, provide support and resources to educators, and build essential linkages with families. For more information on the role of social workers in the K-12 education system visit https://nlcsw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/social_workers_in_education_system.pdf

Health Care

- Advance community teams

The integration of community teams in health care service delivery is important in enhancing access to health care in communities across NL, reducing health care costs, and improving health care outcomes across the social determinants of health. This is consistent with recommendations from the Health Accord NL.

Community teams, when optimized to their full capacity with the integration of professionals including social work, can be the bridge leading to health care reform that not only enhances individual health but the health of our population.

- Human Resources for Social Work

Social workers provide essential services in health and social service delivery. This includes, but is not limited to, health care, mental health, long-term care, and child, youth, and family services. However, recruitment and retention issues remain a significant challenge with high vacancy and turnover rates in programs areas across NL, particularly in rural and remote locations. A Social Worker Workforce Model Report was recently completed by the Government of NL that contains recommendations for addressing workforce stability and growth. This report is available at <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/files/SW-Workforce-Model-Final-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Poverty Reduction

- Investments and policy directions to reduce, alleviate and prevent poverty.

Issues related to poverty, low income, precarious housing and homelessness, food insecurity and inflation continue to impact the health and well-being of the people of this province. For example, a 2022 report out of the University of Toronto on household food insecurity in Canada, found that 17.9% of NL households, approximately 90,000 people, experienced food insecurity.

Income is a key determinant of health, and annual increases to the minimum wage should be in line with an appropriate living wage. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2019) describes a living wage as a wage that a household would need to meet their basic needs and allow for a good quality of life.

In October 2022 the Government of NL announced the implementation of a targeted Basic Income Program for youth receiving residential services through the Youth Services Program. It is important that these types of programs continue and are expanded to meet the needs of the youth who require this support to thrive in transitioning to the workforce.

Continued changes to the provincial income support program are also needed to ensure that adequate support is provided to those in need of this program. Given the current housing shortage in NL, there is also a need for continued investments in safe and affordable housing.

Seniors

- Enhancements to financial supports to seniors

Providing services and supports that would assist seniors to live independently within their own homes or in communities close to their support networks, is fundamental to enhancing the health and social well-being of seniors throughout the province. Budget 2023 should consider the following:

- An increase in home support hours and flexibility in how those hours can be utilized so that seniors can remain in their home of choice for as long as possible.
- Increased efforts to recruit and retain home care workers throughout NL to maximize the benefits of a Home First program.
- Improved access to safe, affordable housing options for seniors.
- Enhanced dental and vision care coverage, and access to specialized equipment such as wheelchairs regardless of where one is living.
- Assistance to low-income seniors with rising home heating costs.

Conclusion

As an organization, NLCSW has participated in numerous government consultations focused on policies and strategies to enhance the health and social well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. NLCSW policy submissions have contained consistent recommendations that are grounded in the social determinants of health framework and can be accessed on the NLCSW website at <https://nlcsw.ca/social-work-in-nl/health-social-policy>.

References

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