

Social and Economic Well-Being Plan
Written Submission
September 28, 2022

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.

As an organization, NLCSW believes that a social and economic well-being plan for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) must reflect the social determinants of health. NLCSW's [Social Determinants of Health Policy Framework](#) highlights the importance of the social determinants of health framework in the development of health and social policies aimed to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities.

The development of a social and economic well-being plan coincides with the work of Health Accord NL, and there will be some overlap. The Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, established by the World Health Organization, noted several overarching recommendations for creating better social conditions for health: 1. Improve daily living conditions, 2. Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources, and 3. Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action.

In improving daily living conditions and enhancing equitable access to essential services and supports, NLCSW highlights three priority areas in building a social and economic well-being plan for the province. These priority areas include: 1) mental health, 2) poverty reduction, and 3) seniors.

Mental Health

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

The mental health needs of children and youth remain a primary concern for parents, educators, and health care professionals. Children and youth spend a significant portion of their time in schools. This is an environment in which they learn and grow; academically, socially, emotionally, and developmentally. However, schools do not operate in a vacuum from family and societal issues. COVID-19 exacerbated many of the issues already impacting children and youth including mental health challenges (suicide, anxiety, depression, substance use, self-harm), poverty, child abuse, bullying, and discrimination. A recent report from Children First Canada (2022), cited these as

among the top 10 threats to childhood in Canada. With regards to mental health, the report noted that teachers “shared concerns for student mental health, with 74% of Canadian teachers expressing concern for their student’s mental health” (p. 26).

Children First Canada (2022) recommends increased funding for youth mental health and improved access to services including prevention strategies within schools. NLCSW maintains that the integration of social workers in the K-12 education system would increase access to mental health services and other essential supports in schools to enhance the social well-being of children and youth. The integration of social workers in schools is also a key recommendation in the Big Reset Report (Premier’s Economic Recovery Team) that was released in 2021. 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

Poverty Reduction

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

Issues related poverty, low income, precarious housing and homelessness, and food insecurity and inflation in the price of food, continue to impact on 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, capturing 90,000 people, experienced food insecurity.

Income is a key social determinant of health; one that provides access to the other determinants of health such as food security, housing, and education. NLCSW recommends annual increases to the minimum wage in keeping with a living wage. For more information on NLCSW’s recommendation pertaining to the minimum wage see https://nlcsw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Minimum_Wage_Review_Consultation_2022.pdf

Policy changes to the income support program to ensure that income support rates can adequately meet the essential needs of those requiring this support in terms of housing, food security and social inclusion, is also an important and timely strategy.

In addition to economic security, there is a need for:

- Continued investments in safe and affordable housing
- Enhanced access to affordable, high quality early childhood learning and childcare.
- Investments to address the rising economic gap between the rich and the poor.

Seniors

- **Enhancements to financial supports to seniors.**

The ability to live independently in one's home impacts social well-being. NL has an aging population and there are many supports needed for those who wish to remain in their own homes or community of choice which includes:

- 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.
- Improved access to safe, affordable housing options.
- Enhanced dental and vision care coverage, and access to specialized equipment such as wheelchairs regardless of where one is living.

Conclusion

As an organization, NLCSW has participated in many consultations pertaining to policies and strategies to enhance the health and social well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador; including the annual pre-budget consultation initiated by Government. All NLCSW policy submissions can be accessed at <https://nlcsw.ca/social-work-in-nl/health-social-policy>. Grounded in the social determinants of health framework, NLCSW believes the priority areas captured in this written submission, through action, evaluation, and sustained commitment will enhance the well-being of all people who call Newfoundland and Labrador home.

References

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