

INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

January 2024

Technology and partnerships

It was a highlight of my time as interim-CEO of Nova Scotia Health so far to be on hand when Premier Houston announced the launch of the YourHealthNS app in November. YourHealthNS helps Nova Scotians better navigate the healthcare system. It's a one-stop shop to book services, navigate care, and find information easier and faster, right from a mobile device or computer. At the same time, we expanded virtual care, allowing attached patients two virtual visits per year for simple needs like prescription renewals.

Since then, the app has been downloaded more than 170,000 times. At the end of January we announced a pilot that will allow about 12,000 Nova Scotians in four clinics across the province access to their medical records through YourHealthNS.

On another landmark day in January, we shared that Nova Scotia Health was entering into a 10-year multi-disciplinary oncology partnership with Varian. The \$175 million partnership builds on a long-standing relationship between Varian and Nova Scotia Health and is designed to deliver value across the Nova Scotia Health system by accelerating the patient journey from screening to survivorship.

Our partnership with Varian had already benefitted Nova Scotians. Cancer care patients in Nova Scotia started receiving care on the first-in-the-world Ethos radiotherapy system with HyperSight imaging solution in January 2024. Powered by artificial intelligence, Ethos allows care teams to target tumour sites while protecting surrounding organs from potential damage. For some patients, this could mean a reduction in the number of treatment sessions needed to complete a course of radiotherapy from the standard 20 down to just five.

In these and other ways, Nova Scotia Health is moving the markers for people in this province.

Action for Health Plan

Nova Scotians can now stay up to date on Action for Health through a monthly newsletter featuring news and stories on initiatives that are transforming healthcare. Subscribe [here](#).

The [Action for Health](#) website was updated in late November to reflect progress in several key areas between July 1 and September 30. Highlights included:

- Increased the number of registered continuing care assistants (CCAs) by more than 800 over the past year.



- Decreased the vacancy rate for workers at Nova Scotia Health and IWK Health.
- Decreased the rate of people admitted to hospitals with complex needs that could have been addressed through primary care.
- Increased number of visits to recently added primary care options, including community pharmacy clinics and virtual care

Health Human Resources

Recruitment

Nova Scotia Health recruitment teams remain very active participating in international, national and community career events. .

Nearly 1,000 Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) are anticipated to join the health system by the end of fiscal year (March 31, 2024).

We have hired 471 doctors since 2021. Factoring in retirements and other departures, that represents a net gain of 260 doctors in Nova Scotia between April 2021 and end of December.

Year	Total Docs Recruited	Net Gain
2021-2022	163	89
2022-2023	168	86
2023-Dec. 31, 2023	140	85
	471	260

Not only have we grown our workforce, but we have also retained them. Our retention bonuses, new agreements with nurses and doctors, and commitments to hire all nursing graduates are working. As of November 2023:

- 99.9% of all job offers made were accepted.
- 98% (27,906/ 28,612) of employees retained their employment with NSH
- 96% (11,438) of employees hired in the past two years are still with the NSH)

Access to Primary Care

The expansion of primary care clinics, including collaborative family practice teams, primary care clinics, after-hours clinics, urgent care centres, and urgent treatment centres, continues.

More people in Digby County now have access to primary healthcare with the addition of nine new healthcare professionals to the Digby Collaborative Family Practice team. Based out of the Digby and Area Health Services Centre, the team also runs clinics in Weymouth and Bear River and supports the clinic at Islands Health Centre in Freeport. [Digby Collaborative Family Practice Team Expands | Government of Nova Scotia News Releases](#)



The healthcare team at Clare Health Centre will grow thanks to a renewed partnership between Nova Scotia Health, the Municipality of the District of Clare and the health centre. More than 4,000 people in Clare, Weymouth and Digby will have the opportunity to become attached to a primary care provider over the span of two years. [New community partnership will expand access to care at Clare Health Centre | Nova Scotia Health \(nshealth.ca\)](#)

We are seeing more than 60,000 Nova Scotians each month receiving primary care at expanded primary care access points, including:

- Virtual Care Nova Scotia
- Mobile Primary Care Clinics
- Primary Care Clinics
- Urgent Treatment Centres and Urgent Care Centres
- Pharmacy Primary Care Clinics, Pharmacy+ Clinics, and community pharmacies

We are providing Nova Scotians unprecedented access to primary care, which is often more accessible and faster than waiting to see your family doctor.

Surgical Strategy

eReferral

With the one-year anniversary of surgical eReferrals fast approaching, we are about to surpass 15,000 surgical eReferrals, with record referral volumes over the past two weeks. We are also poised to exceed 2000 electronic referrals for MRIs and 1200 ultrasound eReferrals.

While we appreciate that change is rarely easy, and will continue to support providers through this transition, I am convinced our launch of electronic referrals for surgery, MRIs and ultrasounds will come to be seen as one of the greatest system transformations of our time.

Or, as one primary care provider and physician leaders recently put it -- *there has never been a referral process for surgical referrals this sophisticated that has feedback to the patient, referring clinician, and the surgeon.*

Yarmouth Regional Hospital achieves meritorious outcome for surgical patient care

The American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (ACS NSQIP®) has recognized Yarmouth Regional Hospital as one of 78 ACS NSQIP participating hospitals that have achieved meritorious outcomes for surgical patient care in 2022. As a participant in ACS NSQIP, Yarmouth Regional Hospital must track the outcomes of inpatient and outpatient surgical procedures and collect data that assesses patient safety and can be used to directly improve surgical care quality. Congratulations and thank you for your commitment to excellence.

[Local hospital receives international recognition for meritorious outcomes from the American College of Surgeons | Nova Scotia Health \(nshealth.ca\)](#)

Access & Flow

SAFER-f

Nova Scotia Health has piloted and is expanding a care model called the SAFER-f Patient Flow Medicine Bundle. SAFER-f is a set of evidence-based practices that the team of care providers use to prevent unnecessary waiting for patients and improvements in flow through the acute care system, getting patients to the place they call home sooner. It is expected that 70% of medicine and medical/surgical units will have implemented a quality improvement approach to introduce the SAFER-f bundle by the end of 2024.

Alternate Level of Care (ALC) Designation

The Provincial ALC Project is designed to standardize the ALC designation process in all acute care settings within Nova Scotia Health; promoting consistency in reporting ALC data to facilitate agile, operational decision-making. It will also make it possible to accurately report on ALC patients, helping to better understand our patient population and patient flow pressures. ALC Designation Project updates include:

- The official Nova Scotia Health ALC definition to identify patients who no longer require inpatient medical acute care services provided at their current facility, based on meeting the ALC criteria.
- A new Provincial ALC Status Policy is being published (end of January 2024).
- A new ALC Status Form, available in March 2024.
- A change in practice and the benefits to clinical staff, physicians, and patients.
- Clarity on ALC and Long-Term Care.

Care Coordination Centre

There is active work being done with many departments and services to build relationships and align policies practices, strategies, and workflows as C3 rolls out across the province.

Examples include:

- Provincial Repatriation Policy published January 23, 2024. Education is ongoing provincially to establish smoother care transitions for patients.
- Tertiary Provincial Service Waitlist change management ongoing to establish a streamlined process to ensure timely access to specialty services for all Nova Scotians.
- Ongoing presence of C3 team at provincial sites to provide change management and educational support.

C3 is providing real-time visibility to the status of beds in the Central Zone and at regional facilities across the province, supporting decision making for staff and reducing wait times for Nova Scotians. This feature is on track to be in all Nova Scotia Health facilities by February 2024. In addition, patient care providers outside Central Zone are now able to orchestrate and prioritize daily patient care through expansion of the Patient Manager function to some of the province's regional hospitals. In leveraging C3, frontline providers can advocate for patients by escalating barriers to timely care and discharge, allowing them more time spent with patients and families. This, along with the other improvements we are making, will:

- o Reduce cancelled surgeries.
- o Find available beds.

- o Improve patient experience (less time waiting in hospital)
- o Coordinate the movement of patients.

Nova Scotia Health Quality Award Winners

In October a call for applications for the 2024 Nova Scotia Health Quality Awards went out to our staff, physicians, learners and researchers. These awards celebrate the incredible work happening across the organization in support of quality improvement, patient safety, patient experience and teamwork. We received 12 high-quality submissions. In January, we announced this year's winners. They are listed below:

- Healthcare Innovation Team award: **Virtual Care @ Your Library Pilot Project**
- Award of Excellence in Mental Health and Addictions Quality Improvement: **Extending access to specialty group psychotherapy services for individuals with relationship trauma and complex stress disorders**
- Excellence in Patient Safety Award: **Implementing SercuAcath with Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) Line insertions to reduce catheter related complications such as site infection, migration, and dislodgement**
- Excellence in Patient Experience Award: **Dedicated Inpatient Trauma Care at the QEII Health Sciences Centre: A Novel Trauma Consult Service**
- Excellence in Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (Idea) Award: **Nova Scotia Health Critical Care Skin Assessment Working Group**
- Patient and Family Choice Quality Award: **Shifting from “Teach & Tell” to “Collaborate and Empower”:** **Creating a culture of self-management across the healthcare system through the Behaviour Change Counselling Development Program**

Healthcare Infrastructure

Bayers Lake Community Outpatient Centre

The new facility opened to patients in November and will officially be handed over to Nova Scotia Health by the redevelopment operations readiness team in mid February. To date there have been almost 16,000 patient visits to ambulatory clinics (excluding primary care visits). The interior design received a gold award in the Healthcare Interior Built category at the International Interior Design Awards 2023.

Bedford transitional care facility

A contract has been signed with an external service provider (Shannex) and the site is on track to open in the Spring of 2024. The naming of the facility is under consideration.

QEII Health Sciences Centre (Halifax Infirmary)

Preparations for a new MRI continue with an expected completion in April. The temporary MRI trailer will then be removed. Work also continues on the Summer Street lobby and entrance.

CBRM Redevelopment Project

Cape Breton Regional Hospital

- Construction of the new Cape Breton Cancer Centre and Clinical Services Building is underway. Planning for spaces that will eventually be vacated in the existing hospital is underway (examples: current ORs will transition to an Ambulatory Procedure Unit, space for Cape Breton University's medical school learners to be identified).

Northside

- Construction of the Northside Health Complex is underway. It is expected to be complete in 2026-2027.

Glace Bay

- The design for expansions and renovations to Glace Bay Hospital's emergency department, surgical services area and Ophthalmology Clinic is complete.

North Cumberland Health Care Centre

The new North Cumberland Health Care Centre in Pugwash is scheduled to open to patients spring 2024. The new facility will provide enough space for the services housed in the current hospital and in the primary health collaborative practice next door to be under one roof.

South Shore Regional Hospital

- The addition of a two-story building is well underway. It will house a larger emergency department, a complete endoscopy unit, and a 12-bed dialysis unit.
- The dialysis/endoscopy area is structurally complete, and underground mechanical and electrical installations. Expected completion date for Emergency, Endoscopy, and Dialysis units is Fall 2025.
- A new MRI and expanded day surgery clinics are also part of the construction plans.
- The expansion will increase the hospital's footprint by 30%, bringing more healthcare services closer to residents.

Yarmouth Regional Hospital Emergency Department

- Government approval provided in 2020 to complete a pre-design package: incl. facility condition assessments, functional program review, site analysis, and early concept studies. Approval not provided at that time to proceed with construction.
- Design work complete. DHW and Dept. Public Works will be seeking full project funding for construction and new emergency generators. Partners worked collaboratively throughout the design process with stakeholders on final design to best serve communities into the future.

Cancer Care

The Colchester East Hants Health Center went live with a new Oncology Information System on December 4th, 2023. This system allows clinicians to document electronically on their patients and allows Computerized Provider Order Entry (CPOE) for safer ordering and delivery of chemotherapy to patients.

By the end of March 2024, the Cancer Care Program will have created an additional 22,823 visits at regional sites in Nova Scotia to receive chemotherapy or supportive care during their cancer treatments.

Lung Screening Program

A new screening program will help save lives by preventing lung cancer and finding it earlier.

The Lung Screening Program, which includes clinical assessment and computerized tomography (CT) scans, targets people at very high risk of developing lung cancer. The program also provides information about lung health and help to stop smoking.

“Cancer touches every Nova Scotian in one way or another, either directly or through friends, family or community members,” said Health and Wellness Minister Michelle Thompson. “Fixing healthcare includes improving cancer screening and care. The Lung Screening Program is the latest of many changes across our cancer care services that will help prevent or find cancers earlier, improve outcomes and save lives.”

Nova Scotians aged 50 to 74 who have smoked daily for 20 years or more at any point in their lives can contact the program and have a nurse assess their personal risk of lung cancer. The assessment will determine if they would benefit from screening with a chest CT scan.

People who call the program will receive information about lung health and, if applicable, smoking cessation supports.

The Lung Screening Program is available now in the central health zone (Halifax Regional Municipality and West Hants) by calling 1-833-505-LUNG (5864). It will be rolled out across the province over the next two years.

Patient Relations

Encouraging, receiving, and responding to feedback from patients and families is an important part of Nova Scotia Health’s mandate. The Patient Relations team helps to facilitate the feedback process by working with patients, families, and teams to identify what lies at the heart of feedback. Through focused attention and effort, Patient Relations closed 1,450 files between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2023.

Communication and Attitude and Courtesy remain the areas where we have the greatest ability to influence positive change through simple actions. Nova Scotia Health’s Communicate with Heart program, available to all employees and physicians, helps to reinforce and support a focus on service excellence and empathic communication. Communicate with Heart is made up of two modules, START with Heart and Respond with HEART; registration for upcoming sessions is through [LMS](#).

Our People

Pulse survey

As part of our continuous effort to enhance our work environment and the well-being of our employees, we launched the 2024 Nova Scotia Health Pulse Survey on Jan. 30. We want to hear about the experiences of Nova Scotia Health employees and physicians – the positives and the challenges they face every day. This survey is a chance for employees and physicians to contribute to positive changes within our workplace.

Once the survey is complete, aggregate/group responses will be reviewed by People Services senior leadership for discussion and action planning within the senior and executive leadership teams.



The 2024 Nova Scotia Health Pulse Survey is an important part of our ongoing conversation, not a conclusion. Employee and physician feedback will provide front line insight, and we are committed to keeping them informed about the actions we take in response to concerns. Transparency is paramount, and we will share the survey results in a way that ensures every employee and physician is well-informed and involved in the process.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation and Accessibility (EDIRA)

In response to the first legislated [Health Equity Framework](#) released in July 2023, Nova Scotia Health has been working with the Department of Health & Wellness and IWK to review the framework and conduct necessary consultation. Nova Scotia Health and its partners are now in the implementation stage of the recommendations.

Nova Scotia Health's Indigenous Health Consultant and African NS Health Consultant positions are both currently vacant. The job descriptions are currently being revised to better reflect the work required, and will be posted soon.

Recruitment is ongoing for Mi'kmaw and Indigenous Patient Navigators to care teams across the province with the goal to improve culture in our facilities, enhance patient care experiences and ensure access to health care. We continue to review policies to set standards for anti-racist and non-discriminatory behaviors.

In Eastern Zone, the leadership team has been meeting regularly with the Indigenous Health Directors to explore ways to improve the Indigenous patient experience. A number of initiatives are underway as result, including culture competency training for the leadership team, and exploring ways to ensure Mi'kmaw community members see themselves in our facilities and spaces, including the creation of dedicated spaces to accommodate Mi'kmaw cultural ceremonies, such as smudging.

Engagement and Accountability

Community Engagement- Annapolis Royal

Two community check-in sessions held in Annapolis Royal, Wednesday, November 8, 2023, were an opportunity for the public to ask questions and provide feedback on their experience with the Annapolis Community Health Centre's Urgent Treatment Centre, as well as learn more about health services in the area, how to access the different care options available including YourHealthNS, visit interactive booths, and chat with our teams from services such as Mental Health & Addictions, Primary Health Care, Diabetes Education, etc. Over 60 people participated in the two sessions. A report on "*what we heard*" from the public at the event, and from online feedback, has been prepared and will be shared with staff, participants, partners, and the community.

Public Engagement

Work is continuing to transition Engage4Health to the single system platform being developed by DHW. Nova Scotia Health is still hosting several long-term projects on its own platform, and once these projects conclude, NS Health will move all its online engagement work to the provincial platform.

The new PFA virtual hub site will be launched on the provincial platform in February. This site will host all the information for PFAs on their volunteer role, upcoming patient engagement opportunities, volunteer education and onboarding, and serve as a communication hub for all PFAs.

The annual evaluation of Patient/Family Advisor experience will be circulated to senior leaders in the first week of February. The report provides an overview of the progress made on the previous evaluation recommendations. The current report has only two recommendations: Enhance leadership commitment to patient engagement across the organization, and research best practices on developing a compensation policy recommendation. Public Engagement and Quality and Patient Safety are partnering to move forward on a process to engage leadership in improving patient engagement results, and Quality is working on a jurisdictional scan of the volunteer compensation policies.

Public Engagement is also launching an online form for gathering the annual engagement plans from NS Health programs as required in the engagement policy. This form will streamline the submission process and enable continuous submissions and reporting throughout the year and make the policy reporting process simpler for users and more efficient for reporting purposes.

Mass Casualty Commission (implementation of Recommendation C13) Engagement

Addictions and Mental Health provided \$64,000 in supplemental funding to Community Health Boards (CHBs) in Northern Zone for their Wellness Grant and Partnership Funds programs in May. The CHBs worked with various community organizations to allocate the funds to a variety of projects supporting mental wellness, community belonging / social isolation reduction, and recreation. These priority areas reflect the findings from the community engagement sessions supporting the Mass Casualty Commission work. Some project examples include: the Community Care & Connect wellness workshop series; SAFEtalk suicide prevention training; Mental Health First Aid training; a mobile internet access program for rural communities; a program for exploring nature and learning life skills; and, a collective cooking program for social connection and supporting those in need.

Community Health Board Support

CHB Review

CHB Support is integrating feedback from the CEO into the presentation of results and recommendations emerging from the CHB Review process, including clarifying measurement and results, and strengthening the links between CHB work on the ground and the strategies outlined in Solution Six (Action for Health plan). The team is working to develop a roundtable to bring NS Health leadership together to better connect CHB work to organization and system priorities and seek feedback on how CHBs can better support information sharing with communities. The CHB Review report is being enhanced and readied for presentation to the Health System leadership table for input.

Community Health Planning

The first phase of community health planning consultations concludes on January 31. Analysis of the feedback received through the online survey and community conversations will happen in February and March. These results will feed into phase two consultations with key Nova Scotia Health programs which will help identify the main priorities for CHBs out to 2029.



CHB Wellness Grants

Planning is underway for the 2024-25 Wellness Grant process. Applications will open in April. CHBs will conduct application reviews through made, with funding decisions by June. In 2023/24, over 280 projects across the province were funded by CHBs using grant funding provided annually by NS Health.

Accountability

Senior Nova Scotia Health leaders have met with standing committees of Province House to answer questions from MLAs on the following subjects:

- Dec. 12 Health committee: Emergency room closures and physician retention

More data and easier navigation of health information

We continue to refine and add to our predicted emergency department wait times site. Our analytics team has made enhancements to improve the accuracy of the prediction tool and more emergency departments will be added to the page in February. The wait times page is among the most used on nshealth.ca with about 7,000 views each week.