

Newfoundland & Labrador Association of

**Social Workers**

## Pre-Budget Submission



Presented to: Honorable Cathy Bennett  
Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

## **Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW)**

NLASW is the regulatory body and professional association for over 1550 professional social workers in this province. The vision of the NLASW is excellence in social work.

As an organization, the NLASW is committed to advancing health and social policy to ensure the well-being of the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador. In this submission, it is our intention to provide input and recommendations for the 2017 provincial budget and long term provincial planning.

### **Profession of Social Work Priorities for Funding**

This brief addresses the following priority areas for government consideration. These are in line with the policy directions outlined in the *The Way Forward* document.

- 1. Social Work in the K-12 Education System**
- 2. Health Care Service Delivery**
- 3. Seniors**
- 4. Child, Youth and Family Services**
- 5. Poverty Reduction**

### **Social Work in the K-12 Education System**

To enhance accessibility and reduce wait times for mental health services and programs for children and youth, the NLASW recommends that the Department of Education and Early Child Development examine the staffing complement within all provincial schools and move forward with a model to incorporate social workers in the K-12 school system.

Schools are often the first place where mental health issues are identified and there is growing momentum and support for social workers in our provincial education system. In a recent report of the *Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador 2015-16*, it was recommended that “Government give serious consideration to the inclusion of social workers as professional employees within schools to support existing personnel”.

Social workers are one of the largest providers of mental health care in the province. The integration of social workers in the provincial K-12 education system is consistent with *The Way Forward* document released by government in 2016 as mental health is on the agenda for the *Premier’s Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes*. Embedding mental health within the school infrastructure will allow for a

coordinated and seamless service delivery model; while improving student educational outcomes.

For more information on the role of social work in schools, please visit [http://www.nlasw.ca/pdf/Position\\_Statements/social\\_workers\\_in\\_education\\_system.pdf](http://www.nlasw.ca/pdf/Position_Statements/social_workers_in_education_system.pdf) to review the background paper prepared by the NLASW.

### **Health Care Service Delivery**

The NLASW recommends that budgetary investments continue to advance primary health care, enhance mental health programming and initiatives, and support early intervention and prevention policy directions.

Health care needs are becoming more complex and addressing the physical, mental and social aspects of health across the lifespan is critical to effective health care service delivery. NLASW believes that health care must integrate the social determinants of health, and therefore, the full integration of primary health care is crucial to reducing inequities and improving health outcomes. This recommendation is consistent with government's plan to adopt a health-in-all-policies approach and expand primary health care teams as outlined in *The Way Forward* document. The NLASW published a position statement on the social determinants of health which can be accessed on the NLASW website [http://www.nlasw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Social\\_Determinants\\_of\\_Health.pdf](http://www.nlasw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Social_Determinants_of_Health.pdf)

NLASW was pleased to see that funding for mental health was given priority in the new federal-provincial health care agreement. The NLASW recommends that government continue to support the work of the All Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions and focus on initiatives to increase accessibility to mental health care through the health care system and community based programs. For specific recommendations please see the NLASW submission to the All Party Committee at [http://www.nlasw.ca/pdf/Social%20Policies/Enhancing\\_Mental\\_Health\\_and\\_Addictions\\_Services.pdf](http://www.nlasw.ca/pdf/Social%20Policies/Enhancing_Mental_Health_and_Addictions_Services.pdf)

### **Seniors**

Investments focused on enhancing the health and well-being of older adults is imperative. The following strategic policy directions are recommended:

- 1) Enhanced access to home care for seniors. Currently, there are not enough home support hours available to seniors. A cost benefit analysis between 24-hour home support and institutional care may be timely.
- 2) Improved access to convalescent services, respite care, and adult day care programs. This will provide support and relief for families.
- 3) Increased access to mental health services for seniors in long term care.

- 4) Greater access to more affordable assisted living for seniors.
- 5) Heightened policy initiatives to assist seniors who are living, or at risk of living in poverty.
- 6) Review of the operational standards for long term care, with due consideration for spousal admissions.

Other areas where investments will create costs savings to government include expanded access to palliative care, including home based palliative care; enhanced coverage of medications and other medical supports for seniors living at home; and improved access to allied health professionals.

### **Child, Youth and Family Services**

Action 2.22 in *The Way Forward* document speaks to government's vision to improve performance of child protection services. Having a mandate to ensure the protection of children and youth in this province requires significant investments and support. The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development must continue to ensure that issues such as capped caseloads, appropriate supervision ratios, access to continuing professional education and human resource planning remain a priority in the delivery of child protection and in care services.

### **Poverty Reduction**

Newfoundland and Labrador has a progressive *Poverty Reduction Strategy* and the province must continue to move forward in alleviating and preventing poverty with an enhanced focus on those living in extreme low income. Many individuals facing extreme low income have complex needs. These needs include homelessness and inadequate housing, mental health and addictions, limited education, food insecurity, and lack of employment opportunities. Adopting a health-in-all-policies approach and addressing these priority areas is imperative to advancing the poverty reduction strategy.

A review of the minimum wage policy to ensure those who work do not experience poverty is another recommended policy direction that must be a priority in alleviating and preventing poverty. Annual increases to the minimum wage that are indexed to inflation or tied to the average wage increase for the province, whichever is higher, would be the ideal option.

### **Summary**

The NLASW looks forward to continuing to work with government in informing policy and program development in meeting the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. As a province we need to re-envision the way services are delivered and

recognize the importance of early intervention and prevention activities that will improve health outcomes and result in cost savings down the road.