

Newfoundland & Labrador Association of  
**Social Workers**

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Pre-Budget Submission

January 28, 2011

Presented to: Honorable Tom Marshall

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 1300 professional social workers in this province. The vision of the NLASW is to ensure excellence in social work. As a profession, social work is committed to improving the well-being of individuals, families and communities through intervention and counselling, social policy analysis, collaboration, research, health promotion and community capacity building.

**Profession of Social Work Priorities for Funding**

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) continues to flourish and grow. With new agreements such as the one to develop the lower Churchill, NL can become a leader in social and economic development. 2010 also saw the opening of the Office for Youth Engagement; which demonstrated a strong commitment to the youth of this province. Government also embarked on a series of public consultations to inform the development of provincial strategies including the Long-Term Care and Community Supports Services Strategy, the Early Childhood Learning Strategy, a Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

As a profession, social workers support these policy directions taken by government. It is recommended that government continue to focus on the development of legislation, policies, programs and services in 2011 to meet the needs of children, individuals, families and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. While it is recognized that government has a fiscal and social responsibility to the people of NL, finding the balance between debt reduction, economic growth, and social development is essential to moving forward to creating a province where people want to live and work. The NLASW is encouraged to see the social investments that have been a focus of government and we recommend that investments in policies and programs that meet the needs of the people of this province continue to be developed and enhanced.

In the fall of 2010, the NLASW participated in the public consultation processes to inform the Long Term Care and Community Support Services Strategy, the Early Childhood Learning Strategy, the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Comprehensive written submissions have been submitted to the respective government departments (Health, Education, and HRLE). The NLASW recommends that government move forward on all of the recommendations outlined in these written documents in moving these strategies forward. Horizontal policy analysis is also needed. For purposes of this pre-budget submission, key recommendations from the above noted strategy submissions are captured in the budgetary priorities for 2011.

This brief addresses the following areas:

- 1. Long Term Care and Community Support Services**
- 2. Early Childhood Learning and Child Care**
- 3. Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities**
- 4. Poverty Reduction**
- 5. Early Intervention and Prevention for Children**

### **Long Term Care and Community Support Services**

The premise of the provincial consultation document *Close to Home: A Vision for Long Term Care and Community Support Services* (2010) is to keep seniors and older adults in their home for as long as possible, while also ensuring effective service delivery and enhanced health and well-being. According to the Provincial Healthy Aging Policy Framework, community supports are required to preserve seniors' independence (p. 24). In the 2011 budget year, it is recommended that several key areas be addressed:

- 1) Home care - While the rate of pay for individuals providing home care has increased, the ceiling amount on the funding available to those availing of this

- service has not. Therefore, individuals may not qualify for the same number of home support hours (e.g., five hours instead of eight hours) as they would have previously. This reduction in hours not only puts a negative strain on the individual requiring home support, but also on family members who are providing care. It is therefore recommended that this ceiling threshold be increased.
- 2) Respite Care & Access to Services – Enhanced services at the community level will not only help to prevent premature admissions to long term care facilities, but will also give people choice in making decisions about their health and long term care needs. An individual for example, may only need convalescence or respite care to return home with support and not a lengthy stay in acute care or admission to a long term care facility. The NLASW recommends an increase in respite beds throughout the province, as well as an increased access to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and therapeutic recreation for seniors at the community level.
  - 3) Portable subsidies – It is recommended that funding for portable subsidies for personal care homes be increased.
  - 4) Social workers who practice in long-term care facilities and home and community care programs are experiencing an increase in client case loads overall, and an increase of clients with complex medical, cognitive and behavioral needs. It is recommended that the staffing complements for social work be increased to meet this growing need.

### **Early Childhood Learning and Child Care**

The lack of affordable, accessible and high quality regulated child care is concerning to social workers. Statistics from the Canadian Council on Social Development (2006) showed that in 2003/2004, only 15.5% of children aged 0-12 years had access to regulated child care in Canada. While the number of regulated child care

spaces has increased, the supply is not meeting the demand in this province. Limited access to child care has economic and social impacts. For example, having access to child care that is affordable and high quality, may be a determining factor in one's decision to return to, or enter the workforce. Therefore, the NLASW recommends that government increase the number of affordable, high quality and accessible early childhood learning and child care programs to promote inclusion and healthy child development.

Early learning and child care sets the stage for future academic success and life-long learning. Early learning is also important from a population health perspective. According to the World Health Organization (2008), "investments in the early years, provides one of the greatest potentials to reduce health inequities within a generation." Early learning and child care are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the NLASW recommends that child care be captured within the proposed vision for the provincial early learning strategy whose vision is: "children from birth to age six and their families will have access to a range of supports, services and early childhood programs that will enhance early childhood learning. Literacy programs, within early child care and through connections with family resource centres and community based services, also needs to be supported.

### **Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities**

Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on March 11, 2010. It is therefore timely that the province is developing a provincial strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. According to the NL Disability Office (2010), 75,000 people in NL have at least one disability.

According to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (2010), individuals living with a disability in Canada are more than two times likely to live in poverty than other Canadians. Therefore, the NLASW recommends that investments through the Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2011 are needed to address system gaps and enhance services

for individuals living with a disability in this province. Additional investments are needed in the areas of education, employment, housing, transportation and health care. Specific recommendations addressing these areas have been outlined in our written submission to inform the strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and include, but are not limited to:

- Increasing opportunities for persons with disabilities to attend post secondary education,
- Funding to ensure that individuals have their care needs addressed within the workplace,
- Flexibility in policies to allow individuals to maintain their provincial drug care until replacement coverage is secured through employer,
- Exploration of housing options for persons with high risk behaviors

### **Poverty Reduction**

The NLASW has been actively engaged in each phase of the poverty reduction strategy and commends Government on actions taken to reduce poverty in this province. As we move forward it is recommended that government continue to explore and address several key areas over the next year. These areas include the widening economic gap, food insecurity, and homeless and housing.

1). The Economic Gap – The economic gap between the rich and the poor continues to increase. Campaign 2000 (2009) argues that governments must “avoid across the board tax measures that disproportionately benefit wealthier Canadian families and entrench inequality.” Therefore, the NLASW recommends that government continue to review tax policy and the impact on the widening economic gap.

2). Food Security – It is acknowledged that investments have been made in previous budget years to address food security in NL. However, food insecurity continues to be an issue for many individuals and families in our province. According to

Food Banks Canada (2010), food bank use in NL increased by 2.6% from March 2009 to March 2010. Access to affordable and nutritious foods is not the same in all communities, and the cost of food transportation is a factor. It is recommended that this issue be explored over the next year and that a budgetary commitment is made.

3). Housing and Homelessness – According to Carter and Polevychok (2004), “inequalities in housing and housing markets also have the potential to shape inequalities in health.” The lack of safe, affordable and accessible housing continues to be an issue for individuals and families in NL. The NLASW recommends that investments to increase social housing made in the last few years be continued and enhanced, particularly as it relates to seniors with low incomes, individuals living with a disability and low wage earners. According to the Alberta College of Social Workers (2010) “safe and affordable housing creates a more positive feeling of neighbourhood and contributes in important ways to community cohesion and security.”

### **Early Intervention and Prevention for Children**

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Service continues its' transition from Health and Community Services to the new department. While the focus of the new department will be protective intervention services, it is recognized that early intervention and prevention for children and families must continue to be a priority of government. Investments and enhancements are needed in areas where early intervention and prevention services are provided (i.e., children's mental health, family services, community based programming). The NLASW also recommends that government explore the option of having social workers in the primary, elementary, junior and high school systems.

### **Summary**

The NLASW was encouraged by policy directions taken by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in budget 2010 in the areas of poverty reduction, mental health and addictions and long-term care; and in the public consultations that were

initiated in the fall of 2010. It is by building on our strong foundation that we will continue on the path to a prosperous and healthy province.

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