

Strategic Plan

2026-2029

Health and
Community Services





MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

I am pleased to present the Department of Health and Community Services' 2026-2029 Strategic Plan, in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. As Minister of Health and Community Services, I acknowledge that I am accountable for the preparation of the plan for this Category 1 entity and the achievement of specific goals and objectives contained within. This plan covers the period from April 1, 2026 to March 31, 2029.

This strategic plan was developed in accordance with the strategic directions of the department and government overall and outlines the priorities for the next three years. This plan represents our commitment to improving outcomes in the areas of access to health care, recruitment and retention, and healthy communities, all of which were outlined as key priorities for government in the Progressive Conservative platform. The department has already made significant progress in these areas, and the 2026-2029 Strategic Plan will continue to drive meaningful change that is inclusive of the health care needs of all people in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador remains committed to an "all of government" approach to Gender-Based Analysis Plus, which will be used in the implementation of this strategic plan.

This plan's development was guided by the commitments our government has made, reflecting a focus on addressing the current needs of our health and community services system over the long term. It also aligns with priorities and is supported by **Budget 2026: Opportunity for All of Us**. This plan will help the department and its entities strengthen the health system and ensure its sustainability for the future.

Sincerely,

Hon. Lela Evans

Minister of Health and Community Services

Table of Contents

DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW	3
Mandate	3
Primary Clients.....	3
Vision	4
Lines of Business	4
Department of Health and Community Services Staff Complement.....	6
Where Health Dollars are Spent	7
STRATEGIC ISSUES	8
Issue 1: Access to Health Care	9
Issue 2: Recruitment and Retention	11
Issue 3: Healthy Communities	13

DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW

The Department of Health and Community Services is responsible for setting the overall strategic direction and priorities for health and community services throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

The department provides leadership, coordination, oversight, and support to Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (the provincial health authority), as well as other organizations that deliver programs and services throughout the province. It works to ensure the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the health system.

The department is also responsible for administering and funding insured medical and hospital services, dental and pharmaceutical programs, and education and training initiatives, including seats and bursaries for students in selected health professions and technical fields. These efforts support capacity-building and contribute to a stable, sustainable health workforce.

Mandate

The Department of Health and Community Services' mandate is to provide leadership and direction for effective and efficient delivery of health and community services.

Primary Clients

The department works closely with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to support the delivery of health and community services across the province. It also collaborates with a wide range of stakeholders, including educational institutions, unions, research centres, community-based organizations, Indigenous Governments and Organizations, municipalities, regulatory bodies, and various boards and commissions.

In addition, the department engages in partnerships and joint initiatives with the federal government, other provincial and territorial governments, and a broad range of health-related organizations to advance shared priorities and strengthen the overall health system.

Vision

The Department of Health and Community Services' vision is for individuals, families and communities to achieve optimal health and well-being.

Lines of Business

The department's main lines of business include:

1. Policy, Planning, Program Development and Support – The department provides a leadership role for developing policies, legislation and plans. This includes programs under a legislative framework, such as communicable diseases, environmental health, the Hospital Insurance Plan, the Medical Care Plan (or MCP), and the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program. The department is also responsible for legislation pertaining to the regulation of health professions. Finally, this line of business also includes programs not under a legislative framework, including Indigenous health, chronic disease control, emergency preparedness, health care workforce planning, mental health and addiction services, and wellness and health promotion.
2. Monitoring and Reporting – The department performs regular monitoring and evaluation of legislation, programs, plans and funding outcomes as an important mechanism to help maintain the effectiveness of the health and community services system.
3. Provincial Public Program and Services Administration – While the department does not directly deliver most health care services, there are programs for which

the department provides direct supervision, control and service delivery. This includes the provision of bursaries and incentives to students in select training programs according to established criteria, distribution and storage of vaccines, grants for select community agencies, payment and remuneration for medical services, dental services, drug programs, and other similar programs, records of immunizations, and the storage and distribution of the National Emergency Stockpile.

Additional information on the Department of Health and Community Services, its mandate and lines of business can be found at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/department/>.

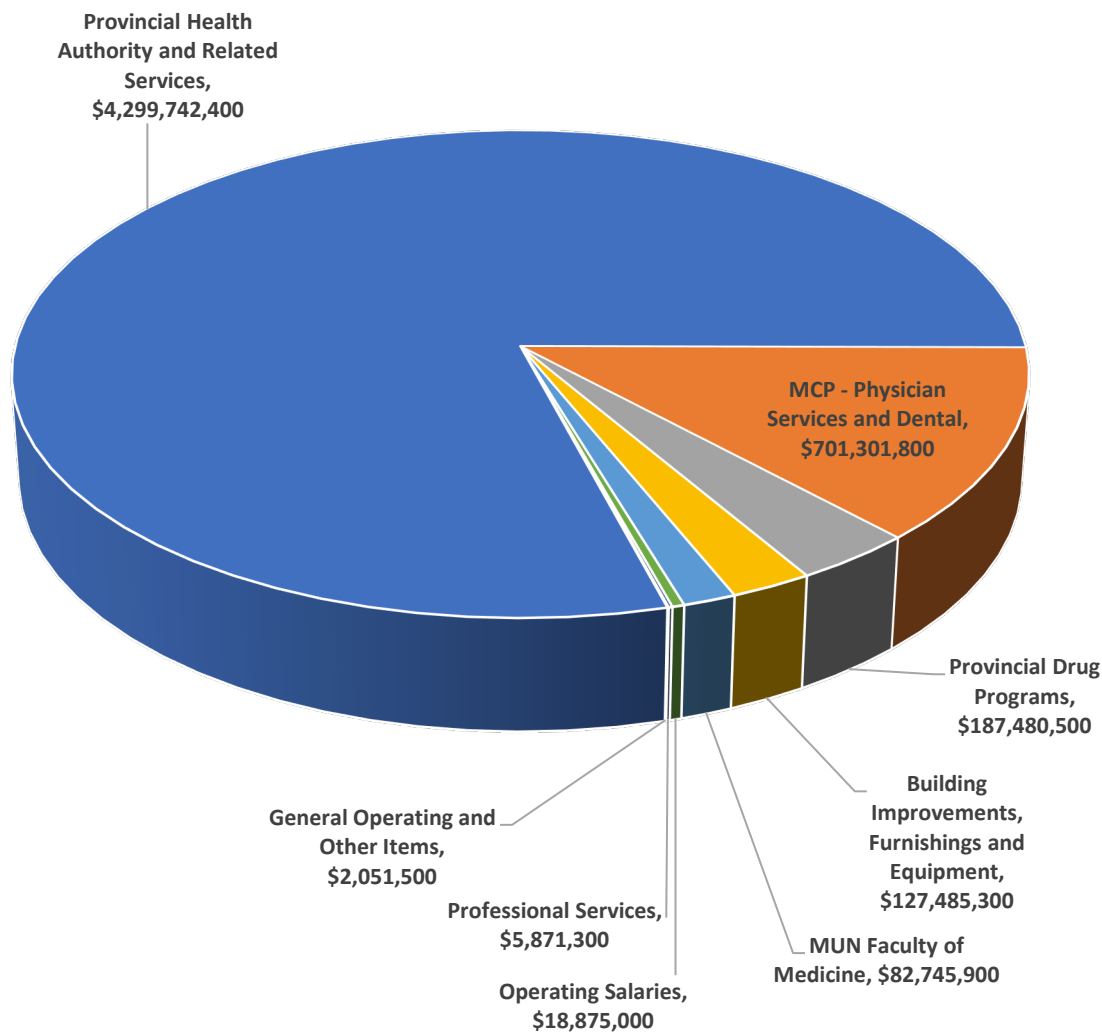
Department of Health and Community Services Staff Complement

Division	# of Positions	Budget
Minister's Office	5	\$ 509,200
Executive Support	12	\$ 1,484,000
Communications	4	\$ 373,100
Financial Services	16	\$ 561,800
e-Health and Information Management	8	\$ 855,100
Administrative Support (e.g. office supplies, postage, copier charges)	n/a	\$ 897,200
MCP St. John's	10	\$ 485,800
MCP Grand Falls-Windsor	37	\$ 2,141,400
Audit Services	14	\$ 1,100,900
Pharmaceutical Services	21	\$ 1,654,400
NLPDP Assessment Office	12	\$ 612,900
Physician Services	16	\$ 1,558,200
Regional Services	13	\$ 981,100
Provincial Blood Coordinating Program	5	\$ 362,300
Infrastructure Management	1	\$ 110,700
Public Health	27	\$ 2,825,000
Mental Health and Addictions	14	\$ 1,093,800
Primary Health Care	5	\$ 422,500
Policy, Planning and Evaluation	12	\$ 1,325,800
Health Workforce Planning	6	\$ 547,900
Data Governance and Privacy	7	\$ 622,100
Air and Road Ambulance	9	\$ 1,132,600
Recruitment and Retention	5	\$ 518,500
Total	259	\$ 22,176,300

Contact information for the Department of Health and Community Services and its divisions can be found at <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/departments/contact/>.

Where the Dollars are Spent in the Health System

Budget 2026-27 - \$5,425,553,700



STRATEGIC ISSUES

Health care is a top priority for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, with continued investment aimed at improving access, efficiency, and long-term system sustainability. Budget 2026-27 committed \$5.4 billion to health care. This investment reflects the province's evolving health needs, including shifting demographics, growing demand for services and ongoing challenges such as health workforce shortages, long wait times and need for improved access, particularly in rural and remote communities.

In keeping with the strategic direction of government and the Health Accord NL, the Provincial Government continues to focus on strengthening and modernizing the health system. To address these challenges, the Department of Health and Community Services is focusing on three key strategic issues:

1. Access to Health Care
2. Recruitment and Retention
3. Healthy Communities

The plan focuses on improving access to care by supporting the recruitment and retention of health care professionals, particularly in rural and underserved areas, while continuing to expand services such as primary care and mental health supports. It also places importance on strengthening infrastructure and capacity through investments in hospitals and medical equipment. Ongoing efforts aim to enhance efficiency and help reduce wait times through improved system management and expanded programs.

These strategic priorities require collaboration across the health system and with community partners. Together, they aim to create a more accessible, sustainable and patient-focused health care system that meets the needs of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians now and into the future.

Issue 1: Access to Health Care

An efficient health care system is one in which individuals have appropriate access to the services they need and where provincial financial investments make the most impact. Newfoundland and Labrador experiences unique challenges to ensuring equitable access to health care for its residents due to geography and demographic challenges. Access to services is not only about availability of these services, but ensuring residents have appropriate, timely and coordinated health care, regardless of where they live or their life circumstances. Addressing these challenges is a strategic priority for the Department of Health and Community Services.

Goal: By March 31, 2029, the Department of Health and Community Services will have increased equitable access to health care for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador by increasing health system efficiency and decreasing wait times.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2027, the Department of Health and Community Services will have launched procurement and planning processes to enhance and expand diagnostic infrastructure, including the purchase of new diagnostic requirements, and urgent care in the province to support decreased wait times for such services.

Indicators

- Worked with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to advance the PET scanner in Corner Brook.
- Commenced procurement, recruitment and renovation planning for two new MRIs in Grand Falls-Windsor and Happy Valley-Goose Bay to support reducing wait times.
- Worked with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to add additional acute care beds at the Health Sciences Centre to increase capacity.
- Worked with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services for the purchase of six echocardiogram machines for the Health Sciences Centre to reduce wait times for cardiac care.

- Worked with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure on the planning for the Urgent Care Centre in Conception Bay South.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2028, the Department of Health and Community Services will have implemented diagnostic equipment and continued planning urgent care service enhancements to support decreased wait times for diagnostic services and urgent care.

Objective 3: By March 31, 2029, the Department of Health and Community Services will have decreased wait times for MRIs and PET scans and continued the procurement process for urgent care in Conception Bay South.

Issue 2: Recruitment and Retention

Health professionals deliver quality care in all areas of the province. Recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge for the provincial health sector, and in health systems throughout the country. Health professional shortages and high vacancy rates in certain occupations have led to numerous challenges in the health system in Newfoundland and Labrador. Challenges include longer wait times, decreased access to primary health care, specialists and surgeries and offload delays for emergency services. Ensuring a stable and productive health workforce is key to delivering quality and accessible health care services for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Goal: By March 31, 2029, the Department of Health and Community Services will have contributed towards stabilizing the health care workforce by directly supporting and improving recruitment and retention initiatives.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2027, the Department of Health and Community Services will have worked with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, with respect to high demand health professions, to conduct a review on recruitment efficiency within Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and launched select recruitment initiatives.

Indicators

- Reviewed baselines and key performance indicators (e.g. average time to recruit and hire) for staffing vacant positions to identify opportunities to work with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to increase efficiency in the recruitment process.
- Reviewed staffing shortages at the Urgent Care Centre in St. John's, and recruitment issues associated with opening the Urgent Care Centre in Mount Pearl, to stabilize both services and develop a robust plan to support the forthcoming Urgent Care Centre in Conception Bay South.

- Worked with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to identify options to address unique recruitment and retention challenges for certain professions beginning with clinical psychologists, family doctors in Family Care Teams and pharmacists.
- Developed a plan to reduce vacancies for medical radiation technologists in order to support the new MRIs.
- Developed a plan to staff new acute, transition and long-term care bed infrastructure investments outlined in Budget 2026.
- Worked to reduce vacancies in paramedicine in collaboration with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and Medavie Health NL.
- Expanded targeted education and training programs that include conditional offers of employment with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to students entering programs with identified workforce shortages.
- Developed a plan to expand nursing enrolment capacity by working with the Faculty of Nursing.
- Developed a Provincial Nurse Travel Team pilot to reduce reliance on agency nurses.

Objective 2: By March 2028, the Department of Health and Community Services will have increased workforce stability and retention of nurses and nurse practitioners working in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Objective 3: By March 2029, the Department of Health and Community Services will have supported workforce stabilization of high vacancies professions.

Issue 3: Healthy Communities

The social determinants of health influence the health of individuals, families and communities across the province. These social determinants include socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood/community and physical environment, employment and social support networks, as well as access to health care. Newfoundland and Labrador has an aging population and vast geography that presents unique challenges to ensure residents have equitable access to safe and quality care across their lifespan. Improving health begins with understanding the unique needs of residents and reflecting their perspectives in service delivery, which ultimately will help shape health outcomes. The Department of Health and Community Services collaborates with departments, organizations and communities to build and strengthen connections that advance health equity, and to ensure diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making. Engaging Indigenous Governments, Organizations and Communities is essential to understanding the inequities experienced by Indigenous people in Newfoundland and Labrador and embedding their culture, knowledge, resilience and priorities into programs and services.

Goal: By March 31, 2029, the Department of Health and Community Services will have implemented health care initiatives that positively influence social determinants of health for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Objective 1: By March 2027, the Department of Health and Community Services will have enhanced regional input into health care decision-making and expanded access to mental health services, and vaccines equitably.

Indicators

- Worked towards the establishment of a Labrador Regional Health Council to reflect Indigenous perspectives, and priorities of Labrador residents in health care.

- Expanded access to addictions treatment, including community based detox, at the Humberwood Treatment Centre in Corner Brook.
- Expanded eligibility for the publicly funded RSV (Respiratory syncytial virus) vaccine to cover all infants under six months and all adults 75 years of age and older.
- Expanded mobile crisis response teams to strengthen support for people with mental health and addictions needs.
- Expanded access to social worker supports in schools for students.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2028, the Department of Health and Community Services will have strengthened population-based planning using health data to address emerging health trends.

Objective 3: By March 31, 2029, the Department of Health and Community Services will have begun implementation of select services to address identified health needs and emerging trends.

