

2023-2026

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## Health and Community Services





## MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

I am pleased to present the Department of Health and Community Services' 2023-26 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 Strategic Plan was developed in accordance with the strategic directions of the Department and outlines the priorities for the next three years. It represents our commitment to improving outcomes in the areas of population health, recruitment and retention, and our health care system. The Department has already made significant progress in these areas and the 2023-26 Strategic Plan will continue to drive meaningful change that is inclusive of the healthcare needs of all people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This Plan's development was guided by recommendations made by Health Accord NL, which aims to meet the current needs of our health and community services system over a 10-year period. It also aligns with the priorities of the provincial government and is supported by **Budget 2023: Your Health. Our Priority**. This Plan will complement the Health Accord and help the Department and its entities make the health system sustainable for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Osborne". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey rectangular background.

Hon. Tom Osborne  
Minister of Health and Community Services



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## **DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW**

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

Under its mandate, the Department works to provide leadership, coordination, monitoring, and support to Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services – the new provincial health authority – and other entities that deliver health care programs and services across the province. It also ensures the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the health care system. As well, the Department is responsible for effectively administering and providing funding for insured medical and hospital services, dental and pharmaceutical services, and the purchase of seats and bursary programs for students in select health professional or technical fields, to build capacity and help create a stable health workforce.

### **Mandate**

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

### **Primary Clients**

The Department, in particular works with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, and other entities funded by the Department. The Department also works collaboratively with stakeholders such as educational institutions, research centres, community-based organizations, Indigenous organizations and governments, municipalities, regulatory bodies and agencies, boards, and commissions. As well, the Department engages in partnerships and collaborative initiatives with the Federal Government, other provincial and territorial governments, and a wide array of health-related organizations.

## 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.
2. Monitoring and Reporting – Regular monitoring and evaluation of legislation, programs, plans and funding outcomes are important to 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.

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/>.

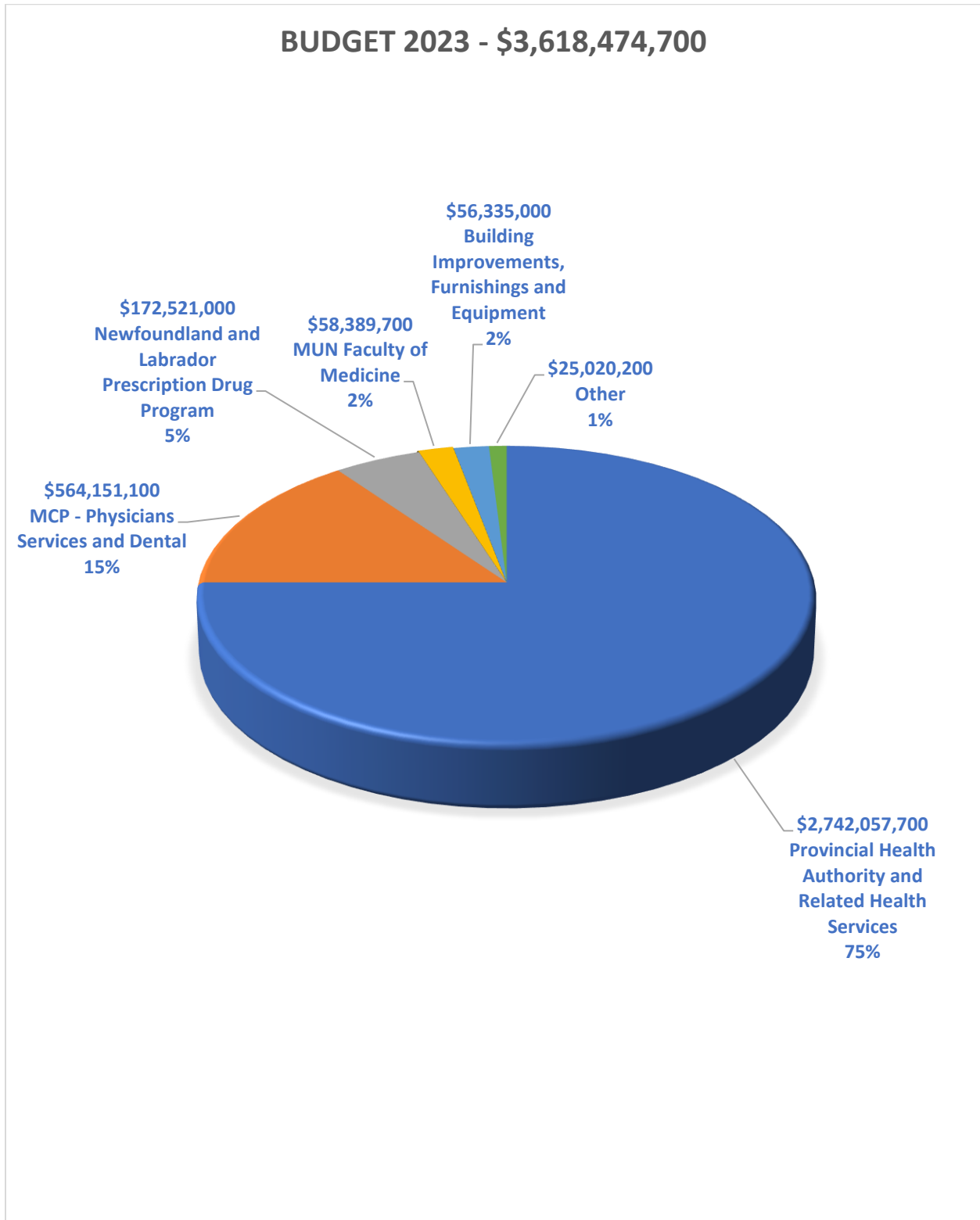
## Department of Health and Community Services Staff Complement

Division	# of	
	Employees	Budget
Minister's Office	4	\$ 336,600
Executive Support	15	\$ 1,920,500
Communications	3	\$ 272,900
Financial Services	14	\$ 893,300
Information Management	11	\$ 1,093,900
MCP St. John's	6	\$ 312,900
MCP GFW	33	\$ 1,940,100
Audit Services	12	\$ 846,400
Pharmaceutical Services	19	\$ 1,386,400
NLPDP Assessment Office	12	\$ 612,600
Physician Services	14	\$ 1,264,700
Regional Services	15	\$ 1,355,700
Provincial Blood Coordinating Program	3	\$ 184,000
Infrastructure Management	1	\$ 110,800
Public Health	25	\$ 2,076,500
Mental Health and Addictions	10	\$ 936,800
Primary Health Care	6	\$ 402,600
Policy, Planning and Evaluation	11	\$ 1,609,300
Health Workforce Planning	4	\$ 388,200
Air and Road Ambulance	8	\$ 1,108,700
Recruitment and Retention	5	\$ 519,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>\$ 19,572,500</b>

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



## Where Health Dollars are Spent



## STRATEGIC ISSUES

Health care expenditures currently account for approximately 39 per cent of the provincial budget. However, the health outcomes of people in the province do not reflect the high level of expenditures. For the 2023-2026 planning cycle, it was important for the Department of Health and Community Services to take into consideration the province's health care needs before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the current demographic and health needs of Newfoundland and Labradorians. This is the first full planning cycle since the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in far reaching impacts on the health system that the Department continues to address.

Health Accord NL, released in 2022, is a 10-year plan to reimagine the health care system to best deliver services to meet the needs of people in communities throughout the province. The recommendations were developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including Indigenous leaders and health care professionals.

As outlined by Health Accord NL, the social, economic, and environmental factors, referred to as the social determinants of health, have the greatest impact on our health—60 per cent overall. Genetic makeup and biology influence about 15 per cent of health outcomes, while 25 per cent of the impact is related to the health system. The Department continues to actively review the Accord's recommendations and is taking action to address the social determinants of health and rebalance the health care system. To achieve this, the Department of Health and Community Services plans to focus on the following three strategic issues:

1. Population Health
2. Recruitment and Retention
3. System Transformation

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The work under each of the strategic issues is cross-cutting in nature and requires the Department to work collaboratively across various lines of business and with health stakeholders and organizations to address the province's health care needs.

In each of these priority areas, a three-year goal and yearly objectives are identified to guide the Department towards achieving its outcomes. Indicators are identified for each goal as well as the first year's objective, to demonstrate progress and how the Department aims to achieve success. The second and third year's indicators will be identified in subsequent annual reports.

Guided by Health Accord NL, the Provincial Government's Budget 2023 makes the largest-ever investment in health care, which includes a \$300 million dollar increase from 2022-23. This will drive meaningful change across the health care system that will improve access to primary care and provide integrated service delivery, including supporting a stable workforce, while strengthening the fiscal health of the province in the future.

## Strategic Issue 1: Population Health

The Department recognizes the impact that the social determinants of health have on the health of individuals, families, and communities across the province. These include socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood/community and physical environment, employment, and social support networks, as well as access to health care. To address the social determinants of health, the Department of Health and Community Services must work with other government departments and organizations in other sectors. For this, the Department continues to implement a Health in All Policies approach which requires consideration of the health impact of major policy decisions on individuals, communities, and populations throughout the province.

Understanding the province's demographics is imperative when taking action on improving population health. There has been a decrease in the percentage of children under 15 years of age and an increase in the percentage of adults over 65 years of age. Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest rate among all provinces of children and youth with medically complex needs. For the aging population, it is important to note that in 2022, the median age in the province was 47.8 years of age and it is expected to increase to 49.1 years in 2042. This creates some challenges for the Department as it continues to address the health and wellness of its residents.

The Department continues to focus on improving population health (including mental health), across the lifespan by enhancing all the services individuals receive from birth until the end of life. The changes facing the province present both challenges and opportunities for everyone and especially for the health care system. This Plan continues the Department's response to meet these challenges.

**Goal:** By March 31, 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services will have implemented initiatives that address the social determinants of health and improve population health and wellness outcomes for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Indicators:**

- Increased early intervention programs for children and youth (e.g. Strongest Families);
- Increased supports to help seniors age in place;
- Increased options for adult day programming;
- Increased access to mental health and addictions services;
- Increased access to Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP);
- Initiated the development of provincial standards for six of the Public Health Core Programs by 50 per cent;
- Completed a provincial population health assessment that will inform a five-year public health plan; and
- Continued a Health in All Policies approach to address the social determinants of health through government policies that guide actions beyond the health sector.

**Objective 1:** By March 31, 2024, the Department of Health and Community Services will have implemented initiatives to improve health and wellness of the population.

**Indicators:**

- Increased usage of smoking cessation programs;
- Increased usage of Bridgethegapp.ca and programs located therein;
- Increased access to Opioid Dependence Treatment Hubs;
- Increased access to services provided by 811 HealthLine;
- Reduced wait times for mental health and addictions services;
- Expansion of the Home Dementia Care Program;
- Increased Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP) beneficiaries through a review of eligibility criteria for the Access, Assurance and 65+ Plans; and
- Completed indicator framework for the population health assessment.

**Objective 2:** By March 31, 2025, the Department of Health and Community Services will have supported further initiatives that improve population health and wellness.

**Objective 3:** By March 31, 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services will have continued to support initiatives aimed at improving population health and wellness.

## Strategic Issue 2: Recruitment and Retention

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is experiencing a global shortage of health care professionals. The shortages have led to numerous challenges in the health system in Newfoundland and Labrador, including decreased access to primary care providers, longer wait times for specialists and surgeries, and emergency department diversions and closures. Furthermore, many health professionals in the province are choosing to work in casual or part-time capacities to ensure they have the desired work-life balance.

The Department recognizes the value and important work that health care professionals do, in all areas of the province. To retain current health professionals, the Department continues to actively engage health profession regulatory bodies, advocacy associations, and unions to identify issues and improve current working conditions. The Government is also procuring new and modern equipment and infrastructure to allow them to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently.

As well, the Department has to be a competitive recruiter on a national and international level in the global labour market and economy. **Budget 2023** dedicated more than \$23 million for these efforts to help attract health professionals to practice in Newfoundland and Labrador. The **Come Home Campaign** targets Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have lived away from home and continues to be a successful initiative for the province.

The Department also continues to work to build capacity in post-secondary health programs in needed professions by increasing the number of seats and creating careers pathways for targeted populations. Funding and support, such as tuition reductions, bursaries, and bonuses are offered in exchange for return-in-service, to retain professionals upon completion of their programs. This will help create a steady stream of health professional graduates and build the stable health workforce that is needed in the province.

**Goal:** By March 31, 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services will have continued to implement policies and programs that directly support and improve recruitment and retention initiatives that lead to a stable workforce to ensure we are globally competitive.

**Indicators:**

- Increased number of seats and graduates in post-secondary health educational programs;
- Strengthened the practice ready assessment (PRA) program for physicians;
- Implemented clinical skills and training assessment program for physicians;
- Continued work with health profession regulatory bodies to streamline licensing processes;
- Continued work with Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services to establish a strategy to build quality workplaces;
- Implemented national and international recruitment initiatives;
- Reduced number of vacancies in the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services;
- Increased support to communities for recruitment and retention; and
- Implemented incentives for health care professionals based on identified need.

**Objective 1:** By March 31, 2024, the Department of Health and Community Services will have continued to provide funding and support to attract and retain health care professionals across the province.

**Indicators:**

- Completed a Health Human Resource Plan for the province;
- Increased number of seats in the Medical Residency Program;
- Increased number of internationally-educated health professionals licensed to practice;
- Increased measures to incentivize Newfoundlanders and Labradorians living away to return to the province to work in their field;



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- Implemented additional bursaries and grants with return in service agreements, where appropriate, to increase domestic supply of health care professional students;
- Continue to implement measures to stabilize the long term care workforce;
- Increased accessibility for Licensed Practical Nursing students with Blended (D2L) Program;
- Completed study on attrition root causes and solutions for the Practical Nursing Program;
- Completed Midwifery Feasibility Study for a possible program offering in Atlantic Canada; and
- Continue to work with Academy Canada to support International Personal Care Program.

**Objective 2:** By March 31, 2025, the Department of Health and Community services will have implemented further initiatives to attract and retain health care professionals for the provision of health care services that contribute to a stable workforce.

**Objective 3:** By March 31, 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services will have implemented initiatives that recruit and retain an increased number of health care professionals for the provision of health care services and contribute to a robust and stable workforce.

### Strategic Issue 3: System Transformation

System transformation is key to helping create a more balanced and efficient system across community, long-term care, and hospital services. 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.

**Budget 2023** sees an investment of more than \$21 million in new Family Care Teams, which will provide access to primary health care for 80,000 individuals, with more teams to be established over the next few years. The Department will also ensure a virtual care strategy is put in place and will work to increase virtual care access to underserved populations across the province. Furthermore, the Department has also worked with health profession regulatory bodies to establish an expanded the scope of practice for pharmacists and nurses to increase access to health care services.

The Department continues to review recommendations in the Health Accord and is making strides toward a provincial approach to health care delivery, which helps create balance and connectivity in the system. On April 1, 2023, the four regional health authorities became one Provincial Health Authority – Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services – taking an integrated approach to health care governance and delivery. As well, the Department has started consolidating the 60 separate road ambulance services into a single, integrated service with centralized dispatch to support it. An investment in a new Health Information System will remove barriers to communication for health professionals regarding patients and improve the continuum of care.

This Plan will help support rebalancing the health system. This includes reducing wait times for services as well as backlogs for specialists and surgeries through specialty care outreach using virtual and travelling clinics. In addition, investments in new physical infrastructure will continue to provide a more efficient delivery of health care

services. A key focus of system transformation is ensuring that a patient gets the right care, at the right place, at the right time.

**Goal:** By March 31, 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services will have improved health care delivery for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador by providing a more balanced and efficient health care system.

**Indicators:**

- Increased number of Family Care Teams;
- Reduced the number of patients waiting to be attached on the provincial patient Registry (Patient Connect NL);
- Decreased usage of non-emergent visits to emergency departments;
- Increased access to primary care through implementation of a virtual care strategy;
- Increased health care access points through professions with an expanded scope of practice, including pharmacists and nurses;
- Reduced wait times for surgery;
- Implemented a new Health Information System across the province;
- Consolidated ambulance services;
- Implemented a Provincial Data Governance Model;
- Increased access to virtual care for underserved populations; and
- Increased access to community-based supports and care services.

**Objective 1:** By March 31, 2024, the Department of Health and Community Services will have commenced improving and strengthening the delivery of and access to health care by implementing initiatives that support a provincial approach to health care delivery.

**Indicators:**

- Established 18 Family Care Teams across the province;
- Increased the number of patients attached to a Family Care Team;
- Decreased non-emergent visits to emergency departments;

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- Implemented appropriate virtual care modalities to meet patient needs;
- Reduced wait times for non-urgent elective surgeries;
- Continued to develop a provincial Emergency Department Program;
- Increased utilization of community-based supportive care options for seniors;
- Increased utilization of Short Stay option in personal care homes;
- Reduced number of individuals placed in long-term care from acute care; and
- Commenced integration of ambulance services and dispatch systems.

**Objective 2:** By March 31, 2025, the Department of Health and Community Services will have implemented further initiatives to improve health care delivery and support rebalancing the health care system.

**Objective 3:** By March 31, 2026, the Department of Health and Community Services will have continued to implement initiatives that improve health care delivery and rebalance the health care system.

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