

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022-2023



Office of the
SENIORS' ADVOCATE
Newfoundland and Labrador

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE



I am pleased to present the 2022-2023 Annual Performance Report for the Office of the Seniors' Advocate (the Office). This report has been prepared in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act** provisions for a Category Three entity.

When I began my appointment as the Provincial Seniors Advocate on June 15, 2022, that position had been vacant for over a year. As well, we were just coming through the pandemic and adjusting to life with Covid-19 amongst us. So one of my priorities was re-establishing the presence of this Office on a provincial scale and reconnecting with seniors, their families and supporters.

As evidenced by this report, 2022-2023 was an extremely busy and productive time for the Office of the Seniors' Advocate. We launched a large-scale provincial engagement process, produced a report on the status of recommendations which this Office called for in 2019, strengthened our relationship with numerous community partners and held our first in-person meeting with the national seniors' advocates.

This report concludes the commitments made in our 2020-2023 Activity Plan. But much work remains, and we have outlined our areas of focus for the next three years in our current Activity Plan.

With more and more seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador struggling with the rising cost of living and access to primary health care, I have strengthened my commitment to the improvement of policies, programs and services for seniors.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

SUSAN WALSH, MSW, RSW
SENIORS' ADVOCATE NL







OVERVIEW

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate was created through the **Seniors' Advocate Act** which came into force on July 5, 2017. The purpose of the Office is outlined in the Act, as well as the powers and duties of the Seniors' Advocate.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate is an independent statutory office of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, and therefore not under the authority of any government department.

This report is an annual requirement for a Category Three entity in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act**.

PERSONNEL

The Seniors' Advocate is appointed for a term of six years with the possibility of reappointment for a second term of six years. The Advocate is an officer of the House of Assembly and reports directly to the Legislature through the Speaker of the House.

The Office has three permanent staff: two Systemic Advocacy Consultants and one Administrative Officer. These staff are members of the Public Service of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

VISION

Through the voices of seniors, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will promote positive changes to the systemic issues impacting seniors, programs and services.

MANDATE

The Office is established to identify, analyze and address systemic issues impacting seniors. Systemic issues are those which are found within an overall system, rather than a specific or individual concern.

This Office identifies and addresses systemic issues and makes recommendations for improvements to seniors' services and programs provided to seniors living in Newfoundland and Labrador. While the Office of the Seniors' Advocate does not have legislative authority for individual advocacy, the Office receives hundreds of requests for advocacy from seniors and their family members. Staff assist with information and support as well as recording the matter to monitor if it is a systemic issue.

The Office has the authority to conduct interviews, surveys, consultations and make information requests. From this research and analysis, the Seniors' Advocate can decide to make recommendations for improvements to seniors' services and programs. All recommendations are monitored for progress and the results are reported publicly on an annual basis. All incomplete recommendations will continue to be monitored, and reported on. Through engagement and public awareness, research, reviews and systemic advocacy, this Office ensures that the collective voices of seniors are heard.

Section 3 of the **Seniors' Advocate Act** outlines that the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is established to:

- *identify, review and analyze systemic issues;*
- *work collaboratively with seniors' organizations, service providers and others to identify and address systemic issues; and*
- *make recommendations to government and government agencies respecting changes to improve services to and for seniors.*

PRIMARY CLIENTS

The **Seniors' Advocate Act** defines a "senior" as an individual who is 65 years of age or older, or less than 65 years of age and receives seniors' services. Seniors' Services are defined in the legislation as programs, services or systems of support, prescribed in the regulations, that are related to health care, personal care, housing, transportation or finances that are used by or associated with seniors.

Given the definition of seniors in the Act, this Office is also responsible to advocate for people under 65 years of age. In practice, the Office typically serves people 50 years of age and older, which is 47.1 per cent of the province's population, according to most recent data.

VALUES

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate believes strongly in its role as an independent voice for seniors in this province.

| Value | Action Statement |
|--------------|---|
| Independence | Powers and duties will be applied in an open, unbiased manner. There will be no conflict of interest or undue influence during any stage of the review process. Every effort will be made to provide timely, accurate and fair recommendations. |
| Respect | Every individual in contact with the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will be treated with respect. Differing opinions will be valued in an open, collaborative spirit. |
| Diversity | Every person is unique and the seniors' population, as a group, are not all alike. Differences in experiences and opinions will be welcomed and used to build an open, accepting and strong service to the public. |
| Empowerment | This office will support and encourage seniors to use their voices. Seniors will know that their issues are important and that they have a role in making positive changes. |



LINES OF BUSINESS

Systemic Advocacy

Systemic issues impact large numbers of people. The Office of the Seniors' Advocate can identify, analyze and review systemic matters related to seniors. These systemic issues are brought to the attention of the Office through input from individuals, organizations, and service providers; as well as research and media reports. The issues fall under five broad categories: health care, personal care, housing, transportation or finances.

Systemic reviews may include research, consultations and information requests. Conclusions drawn from reviews may form the basis of recommendations to government, government agencies, service providers and community groups respecting legislation, policies, programs and services impacting seniors. The Advocate will closely monitor all recommendations to assess how they are implemented.

Collaboration

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate works with seniors' organizations, public or private service providers (as per the regulations in the Act) that fund or deliver seniors' services, and others to identify and address systemic seniors' issues.

This Office does not have the legislative authority to investigate individual seniors' issues nor resources for individual advocacy but will refer seniors to appropriate resources.

Public Awareness

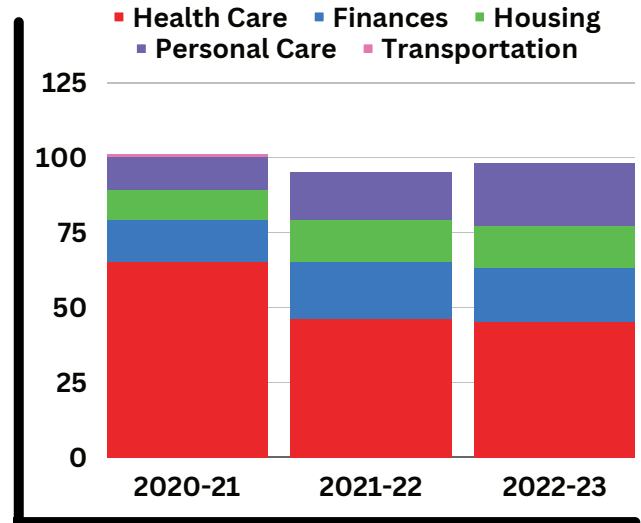
The Seniors' Advocate listens to seniors and voices their concerns. The Office of the Seniors' Advocate works to make sure the public is aware of its duties and powers. Members of the public are invited to contact the Office for information about the **Seniors' Advocate Act** and the operation of the Office.

The Advocate has committed to ongoing outreach throughout the province to gather data and share information with the public, especially seniors. Where it is in the public interest, or in the interest of a person, department or government agency, the Advocate may publish reports as related to the Advocate's powers and duties. These reports may or may not be the subject of a report made to the House of Assembly under this Act.

HIGHLIGHTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

During the reporting period of April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate engaged in many activities including systemic advocacy, education, outreach and public engagement. Highlights of this time period include:

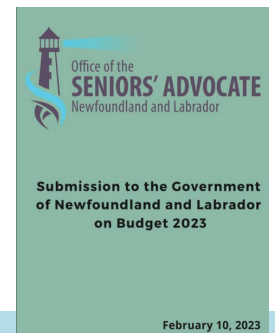
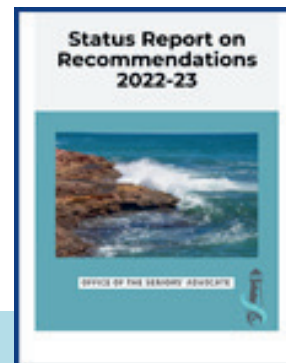
- Issues brought to the attention of the Office have consistently been assigned to five overarching categories as outlined in the Act. As shown in this graph, during the three-year reporting period of the Activity Plan (2020-2023) health care has consistently been the major area of concern for seniors and stakeholders. It is noteworthy that concern with finances has increased over the reporting period.



- Reported on the status of all outstanding recommendations made by the Office and publicly released a Status Report on Recommendations. This report will be an annual feature while there are outstanding recommendations. www.seniorsadvocate.nl.ca/pdfs/StatusReportOnRecommendations2022-23.pdf

- Launched a public engagement process reaching out to seniors, families/caregivers and service providers throughout the province. In total, 1,087 surveys were completed (913 from seniors, 135 from caregivers, and 39 from service providers), and approximately 390 seniors attended 15 in-person and two virtual engagement sessions. Feedback was outlined in a report entitled What We Heard: Engagement with Seniors, Family Members and/or Caregivers, and Service Providers and will guide the Office's actions and strategic direction.

- In February, NL's Seniors' Advocate joined Canada's other Seniors' Advocates: Isobel MacKenzie (BC) and Kelly Lamrock (NB) in Ottawa to meet with leaders and decision makers, including the Federal Minister of Seniors, Kamal Khera, to advocate for improvements to services for seniors.



HIGHLIGHTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Substantial Recommendations:
 - Successfully called for government action to review the Personal Care Home and Long Term Care system with an external expert advisory panel and committee of community stakeholders.
 - The Office advocated for the required drivers medical examination form fee to be covered under MCP and not paid out-of-pocket by seniors. This recommendation was accepted by the provincial government.
- For the first time, the Office forwarded a submission to the Department of Finance, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, to inform the preparation of the 2023-24 budget www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/pdfs/BudgetSubmission2023.pdf.
- The Advocate and staff completed numerous education and community engagement sessions including a panelist at the Premier's Roundtable on Gender Equity, education session to nurses through the College of Registered Nurses NL and the Seniors Advisory Committee for the City of St. John's.
- The Office began creating a quarterly newsletter to inform seniors and stakeholders of the work of the Office as well as providing information of importance to seniors, particularly related to seniors' services and programs.
- The Advocate participated in 20 media interviews to speak on matters impacting NL seniors.



REPORT ON PERFORMANCE

ISSUE 1: OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate will continually network and connect with seniors, their families and stakeholders in order to successfully monitor systemic issues. We will continue to strengthen partnerships with community organizations and government departments/offices/agencies to increase collaborative opportunities.

Objective: By March 31, 2023 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have increased opportunities to engage seniors and others.

INDICTORS

Continued engagement of seniors' organizations, community organizations, municipalities, governments and others.

Engaged SeniorsNL, Office of the Citizen's Representative, and others.

Developed and Implemented a provincial outreach plan.

Extended offers to engage with groups and/or stakeholders.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Presented to/attended 34 seniors' events, participated in 106 meetings and met with 10 municipalities to discuss the importance of Age-Friendly Communities. Met with one federal minister, six provincial government ministers, two Members of the House of Assembly and two Members of Parliament to advocate on matters of importance to seniors.

Results of data collection and shared concerns were discussed as needed. Individual concerns were referred as appropriate. At the request of the Office, the Office of the Citizens' Representative began collecting data on the number of seniors' calls it receives and that information regarding seniors' issues is shared on a quarterly basis.

The Office launched a comprehensive public engagement process reaching out to seniors, families/caregivers and service providers throughout the province. This initiative included a public survey available online and on paper and public engagement sessions held both in person and online. In total, 1,087 surveys were completed (913 seniors, 135 caregivers, 39 service providers) and approximately 390 seniors attended engagement sessions held in 15 communities and two virtual sessions which included accessibility features. The report is entitled What We Heard: Engagement with Seniors, Family Members and/or Caregivers, and Service Providers.

Participated in 26 events/information sessions to address matters of importance to seniors.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

Through outreach and public engagement opportunities the Seniors' Advocate interacts with, and listens to, seniors, families, stakeholders and organizations throughout the province to gain a better understanding of the systemic issues affecting seniors. While the COVID-19 pandemic did impact outreach ability in previous years, 2022-23 saw an unprecedented increase in outreach and engagement. Provincial outreach will continue to be a major priority of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate as a way to both inform and learn.

ISSUE 2: PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to promote its role, duties, powers and processes. The Office commits to continuing to promote awareness of systemic issues impacting seniors as well as findings and/or recommendations of systemic reviews undertaken by the Office.

Objective: By March 31, 2023 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to promote increased awareness of its role, duties, powers and processes.

INDICATORS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Enhanced the Website.

Ongoing monitoring and enhancements to the website ensures the format remains accessible and relevant. Its purpose is to inform as well as solicit input. For electronic communication, the public may use email or an online Public Engagement Form.

Increased social media presence.

The Office continued to expand its social media presence on Twitter. The Office developed and posted 163 Tweets. As well, the Office developed a Facebook Page: Seniors Advocate NL.

Distributed Information Cards.

Educational/promotional Office of the Seniors' Advocate Information Cards were circulated via mail as requested and hundreds were handed out at consultations and other events.
<https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/pdfs/OSA-InformationSheet.pdf>

INDICTORS

Developed and distributed other promotional materials, reports and submissions

Participated in media interviews.

Issued news releases and information articles.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Office released the following reports and submissions: Status Report on Recommendations; Annual Performance Report 2021-2022; Submission to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador on Budget 2023; and What We Heard: Engagement with Seniors, Family Members and/or Caregivers, and Service Providers. The Office launched a quarterly newsletter. Promotional materials were distributed: business cards, logo-inscribed notebooks and flashlights. Further, a display board was developed outlining details about the Office and its role.

The Seniors' Advocate completed 20 media interviews to speak on matters of importance to seniors.

Seven news releases/media advisories were issued on matters related to seniors. An email list of seniors and families who wished to receive information, newsletters, etc. in an electronic format was also created. There are 408 people in this group.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate continues to avail of opportunities to promote its activities and inform the public. Participation in radio, television and online events has been critical for sharing views, activities and policies of the Office as well as sharing important information that seniors should know about. The 2022-23 fiscal year saw a sharp increase in public awareness and education which has significantly increased awareness of the Office and its role, as evidenced by 902 calls for advocacy assistance during 2022-23 which was double the number received the previous year.



ISSUE 3: TRACKING, TRENDING AND IDENTIFYING

For the next 20 years, the province's population will continue to age. This trend will create a paradigm shift as the focus for many policies, services and programs must be on the needs of older adults. The Office of the Seniors Advocate commits to continuing to monitor and identify trends related to systemic issues impacting seniors.

Objective: By March 31, 2023 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to identify and monitor systemic seniors' issues.

| INDICTORS | ACCOMPLISHMENTS |
|---|---|
| Enhanced procedures to identify and monitor systemic seniors' issues. | All issues brought to the attention of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate are collected in the HPE Records Management System. The database's tracking capability is one tool used to assess whether issues are systemic. The database also shows trends: ongoing or emerging. Other factors such as age, gender, and geography also inform the Office in prioritizing issues for further review or analysis. |
| Enhanced the electronic records management system. | The HPE Records Management System was customized to suit the needs of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate. The Administrative Officer is responsible for administration and maintenance of the System. Staff regularly monitor the efficiency and relevance of the data collected and/or reported to ensure data is accurate and relevant. |
| Received and reviewed matters related to seniors. | Nine hundred and two advocacy requests were received (compared to 456 requests during 2021-22) and all systemic matters were/are being reviewed. |

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

The HPE Records Management System is the Office's primary sorting and tracking tool. It collects and organizes data to make it easier for the Office to see emerging issues or individual issues which may become a system concern for seniors. This is one tool to inform trending on systemic seniors' issues which require analysis and may result in recommendations for change.

ISSUE 4: REVIEWS

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate was established to identify, review and analyze the systemic issues impacting seniors. When necessary, the Office will make recommendations to policy-makers and service providers about enhancing seniors' programs and services. The public will be informed of all reviews, findings and any actions resulting from reviews.

Objective: By March 31, 2023, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to implement systemic review(s) where necessary.

INDICTORS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Identified areas where a systemic review is warranted.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate identified priority issues for review including a review of the Long Term Care and Personal Care Home system. Reviews and recommendations are all publicly announced.

Made recommendations and informed the public.

Through the release of the Status Report on Recommendations and the 2023 Budget Submission, the Office made public the status of all previous recommendations and new recommendations.

Conducted research.

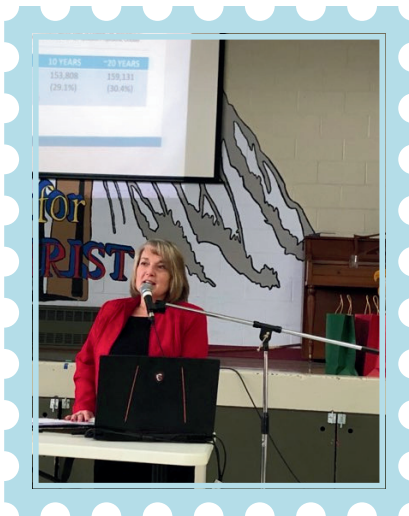
All systemic issues require significant research which may include literature reviews, jurisdictional scans, consultations, surveys, focus groups and interviews. The release of the What We Heard Report included current data and trends on seniors' issues.

Consulted with seniors, service providers and the public.

Nine hundred and two people contacted the Office directly or through engagement and community outreach sessions to request advocacy. The Office consulted with service providers and community groups. During 2022-23 there were additional engagement opportunities with municipalities. The Office launched a comprehensive public engagement process reaching out to seniors, organizations, municipalities, families/caregivers and service providers throughout the province (discussed on pages 7, 8 under Issue 1).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

All issues and concerns brought to the attention of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate are recorded in its database. Analysis of the data can indicate whether an issue is becoming systemic or has potential to become systemic over time. While individual issues are not under the legislative authority of the Office, staff make every effort to refer the person to an appropriate resource if it is available. The Advocate has the legislative prerogative to decide how to address systemic issues. When issues are identified as within the purview of this Office, a review may take place resulting in: reports with recommendations; position papers for public awareness; opinion pieces; or any other means the Seniors' Advocate determines will garner the best results for positive systemic change.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The greatest challenge during the 2022-23 year was reenergizing and reintroducing an Office that had been vacant for over a year. On June 1, 2021 the previous Seniors' Advocate retired but the present Seniors' Advocate did not assume her new role until June 15, 2022. In addition to the adjustments during this time without an Advocate, the world was adapting to the new way of conducting business due to COVID-19. The Office remained open but was quite limited in its ability to meet its full mandate, especially the production of reports, making recommendations, engaging in proactive public awareness events or provincial outreach. The new Advocate, Susan Walsh, also had to reintroduce the Office to the public and remind seniors that the Office was still quite viable and there to bring their issues to light. Ms. Walsh began work on June 15 and on June 16 held a news conference to provide information on the priorities of seniors, which would be the focus of the Office. On June 17 Ms. Walsh conducted her first television interview; the first of many media events over the coming months. On the 6th of July, Ms. Walsh began meeting with Ministers, Members of the House of Assembly, government officials and community organizations and by August a provincial public engagement process had been launched along with a plan for consultations throughout the province. This also included the development and implementation of a public survey which was available online and on paper. Public engagement sessions in 15 communities and two online sessions were attended by approximately 400 seniors. An unprecedented number - 1,087 - surveys were completed and the findings released in a What We Heard Report in March 2023.

An ongoing challenge is the inability of the Office to conduct individual advocacy. Its legislation, the **Seniors' Advocate Act**, allows for systemic advocacy only so the hundreds of calls for individual advocacy must be redirected. The Office takes very seriously its responsibility to ensure that individuals are aware of the Office's requirement to refer individual issues to appropriate offices or programs. Explaining this limitation can be very frustrating for all parties, especially when an individual has already made numerous calls seeking help or is especially upset.

Another continuing challenge for the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is related to human resources. In addition to the Seniors' Advocate, the budget supports two Systemic Advocacy Consultants and an Administrative Officer. These four individuals serve a population of approximately 124,000 people aged 65 years and older and 248,000 people aged 50 years and older which represents 47 per cent of the entire population of NL. Estimates indicate we will continue to see increased aging of NL's population for at least another 20 years. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Office has seen a tremendous increase in requests for advocacy and engagement opportunities with the Seniors' Advocate over this past year. We have also seen an uptick in the need for reviews of matters which requires in-depth research, data collection and analysis. This additional work, and some of the technical skills sets it requires, is not funded within the Office's current human resource structure.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are based on information provided in the Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for Year Ended 31 March 2023.

| Estimates | Actual | Amended | Original |
|---|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| OFFICE OF THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE | | | |
| <i>Current</i> | | | |
| 7.1.01. OFFICE OF THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE | | | |
| 01. Salaries | 403,960 | 404,000 | 373,100 |
| Operating Accounts: | | | |
| Employee Benefits | 702 | 800 | 5,700 |
| Transportation and Communications | 18,228 | 8,500 | 45,900 |
| Supplies | 2,918 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Professional Services | 240 | 900 | 9,000 |
| Purchased Services | 66,042 | 66,800 | 44,000 |
| Property, Furnishings and Equipment | 10,172 | 10,200 | 4,000 |
| 02. Operating Accounts | 98,302 | 102,200 | 113,600 |
| Total: Office of the Seniors' Advocate | 502,262 | 506,200 | 486,700 |

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