

July 2023

FORWARD MOMENTUM

A PROGRESS REPORT FROM
INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO
KAREN OLDFIELD

Nova Scotia Health



A MESSAGE FROM KAREN OLDFIELD

Interim President & Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Health



Nova Scotia Health has made true progress since I shared *Momentum* with you last fall. In September, I outlined the areas of my personal focus for measurable positive impact: access to care, retention and recruitment, and surgical waitlists.

In this update, *Forward Momentum*, I am pleased to highlight a few examples of the accomplishments that Nova Scotia Health's staff, clinicians and community partners have contributed to—all of which are moving the healthcare needle in a positive direction. More than ever, our organization is accountable to Nova Scotians. We can now use our health data to demonstrate how, together, we are transforming care delivery to build the world-class healthcare system Nova Scotians need and deserve.

I'm now just one month shy of reaching two years as your interim CEO. I am proud to share *Forward Momentum* with you as it reflects the expertise, innovation and dedication of the employees, physicians, medical learners, and volunteers of Nova Scotia Health who have done the heavy lifting to make these positive changes a reality. I want to sincerely thank each and every one of you.

PS. I have received a lot of inquiries about parking at the Halifax Infirmary and other issues. I want you all to know that we are working on it and will have an update soon.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen".

ACCESS TO CARE

Providing more timely and reliable access to healthcare services

Providing more reliable and timely access to healthcare services across the province is both an ongoing challenge and a key goal for Nova Scotia Health. Since the release of Momentum last September, access to primary care has increased using key guiding principles – innovation, expanded scope of practice, and, frankly, daring to do things differently.

VirtualCareNS

In the fall, the capacity of VirtualCareNS expanded to support services for all Nova Scotians on the Need a Family Practice registry. As a result, more than 60,000 Nova Scotians registered for the service that connects them directly to a practitioner's care.

As a result, patients who would not have regular access to a primary care provider can now access medication prescriptions or refills and be referred to diagnostic imaging and other care services. From **October 2022** through to **March 2023**, VirtualCareNS averaged over **250** daily visits between patients and practitioners - over 31,000 visits in five months.

Mobile Primary Care Clinics

In fall 2022, after providing relief care for Cape Breton communities impacted by Hurricane Fiona, the Mobile Primary Care Clinics began to expand around the province. These clinics, staffed by nurse practitioners and primary care physicians, are now available across the province to bridge gaps in services. The services are available to those with and without a care provider and alleviate pressure on local emergency departments.

From **October 2022 through to March 2023**, more than **50** clinics offering general care and special clinics for respiratory infections were held across the province. These clinics provided over **3,500** patient visits – 10 per cent of those visits were pediatric patients (including newborn infants) without a family care provider. In **March 2023**, the clinics received a staggering **1,249** visits.

The most common care needs seen at these clinics are minor ailments that need access to a care provider but don't necessarily need to be seen at the emergency department.

Virtual Emergency Departments

In the winter, Nova Scotia Health's emergency departments experienced increased pressures and as a result the *Action for Health – Improving Emergency Care Plan* was released. Included in this plan was the expansion of Virtual Emergency Departments. After the success of the pilot program at Colchester East Hants Health Centre the program expanded to Strait Richmond and Yarmouth Regional hospitals. Virtual care providers can order laboratory testing or diagnostic imaging, as well as prescribe medications.

Since launch, more than **1,550** visits have been made to Virtual Emergency Departments. This program has contributed to a **one-hour reduction in waiting time** for other emergency department patients.

In addition, the addition of patient advocates in emergency departments is receiving excellent feedback. Data analysis of emergency department measures put in place in January reveals that ambulance offload times have started to come down in many sites across the province.



Urgent Treatment Centres

Nova Scotia Health's Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs) see patients with unexpected, but not life-threatening health concerns. Of the seven UTCs across the province, four have opened since September. These clinics average **3,462 monthly visits**.

Community Pharmacy Primary Care Clinics

In February, Community Pharmacy Primary Care Clinics (CPPCC) were launched within 12 pharmacies across Nova Scotia. In partnership with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, these clinics offer assessment and prescribing services, treatment of common and minor ailments, injection and immunization services, chronic disease care, and mental health and addiction services.

In its **first month**, the CPPCCs booked nearly **3,000** appointments, with **12,000** appointments between **February 1 and May 1, 2023**.

In May, an additional **14** clinics opened across the province.

These measures have resulted in the creation of more than 52,000 additional appointments for Nova Scotians to access health services across the province.



Mental Health and Addiction Services

April marked one year since the Mental Health Day Hospital opening at the QEII Health Sciences Centre Abbie J. Lane Building and it has already made a positive impact in both psychiatric care and inpatient bed management across the province, saving around **3,617** inpatient days.

The day hospital eases pressures on inpatient acute psychiatric units, emergency departments and Emergency Health Services without compromising patient care or outcomes. It also provides an additional option for admission from emergency departments – supporting overall provincial bed management and access and flow. A similar day hospital will soon open in Cape Breton.

In addition, several initiatives have launched through the fall and winter that provided enhanced (and often online) support services to Nova Scotians experiencing uncomplicated mental illness, including:

- A Peer Support Phone Service, and single-session counselling service called Access Wellness Nova Scotia are now active and offer care, advice, and support to those experiencing non-emergency mental health and addictions concerns.

- A new e-Mental Health tool called Tranquility launched, supporting those with mild to moderate anxiety and depression.

Lastly, a new Recovery Support Centre opened in Dartmouth, and several sites transitioned to the new Withdrawal Management Provincial Model, to better help Nova Scotians living with addiction.

We are here to listen and support you.

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Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line: 1-888-429-8167
Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
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Mental Health and Addictions Intake Service: 1-855-922-1122
Connects you to our community based programs.
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Peer Support Phone Service: 1-800-307-1686
A toll-free, non-crisis, province wide service, available to all 18 years of age or older.
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Access Wellness Nova Scotia:
A free single-session supportive counselling service for individuals, couples or families. Call 1-833-691-2282 or visit AccessWellnessNovaScotia.com to book an appointment.



SURGICAL WAITLIST

Laser-focused on eliminating the surgical backlog by 2025/26

In December, I sat before the Standing Committee for Health to discuss surgical backlog and waitlists. With full knowledge of the planning and work of the perioperative network, I was able to say with confidence our surgery waitlist would decrease. And indeed, during the last fiscal year, preoperative services has made considerable progress in achieving our goal.

During the past fiscal year, Nova Scotia Health performed **1,873** more surgeries than pre-pandemic levels with **4,863** more endoscopies and cystoscopies performed in the same period.

To facilitate more surgeries, **26** new inpatient medical beds were added to the system. When there is more inpatient capacity, there are more surgical beds which directly impact the capacity to perform much needed surgeries.

Nova Scotia Health is focused on increasing outpatient joint replacement surgeries with **1,193** hip and knee replacements performed, a **14-fold** increase from the **85** same-day replacements performed in 2019/20.

Finally, this past year more than **4,000** people were removed from the surgical waitlist – with more names removed than added. This is essential for reducing overall surgical wait times.

The trend is heading in the right direction as Perioperative Services continues to invest in changes to simplify the surgical referral process.

In March, Nova Scotia Health launched e-Referral for surgery. This system creates a single intake for all surgery requests. This summer, the program will expand to referrals for diagnostic imaging procedures.

Other projects that will contribute to increased surgical capacity include exploring family physician anesthetists in sites across the province and work to increase the number of seats in the perioperative nursing program.



RECRUITMENT

Attracting healthcare talent to Nova Scotia from all over the world

There is a tremendous need for healthcare talent in all jurisdictions across Canada and Nova Scotia is not exempt from this challenge. As result, recruitment teams at Nova Scotia Health are extremely active on the provincial, national, and global circuit.

Over the past fiscal year (April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023), Nova Scotia Health has recruited **155** physicians, **1,256** nursing professionals (**870** registered nurses, **364** licensed practical nurses and **22** nurse practitioners).

Since the first *Momentum* report, Nova Scotia Health has hired an additional **500+** nursing professionals (registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nurse practitioners) and **20+** new doctors. This number is constantly growing as new starts are entering our system every day!

From **October 2022** through **March 2023**, Nova Scotia Health recruitment teams attended **31** recruitment events with **46** more events planned for this fiscal.

If you follow Nova Scotia Health recruiters on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Instagram, daily posts show how far and wide these teams travel to find candidates and promote Nova Scotia Health opportunities. Recruiters are pounding the pavement to find the best healthcare professionals to deliver the best care and services for Nova Scotians.

To continue to attract and keep new healthcare talent, Nova Scotia requires modern, world-class care facilities and technology. The *More, Faster* plan reflects the necessary forward momentum we need to replace aging infrastructure while also retaining new providers. Construction as part of the QEII Halifax Infirmary expansion began in May and eventually will see the hospital expanded to have **216** new beds, **16** new operating rooms, a new emergency department, and new space for cancer and ambulatory care.

More, Faster includes more beds, more operating rooms, two new and larger emergency departments, and several other builds and expansions in Halifax Regional Municipality.

Finally, after many years of negotiation, a contract was awarded in February to establish **One Patient, One Record** the electronic clinical information system that will give Nova Scotia Health and IWK Health professionals access to a patient's complete, up-to-date, profile in real time.



SUMMARY

Care Nova Scotians need and deserve

Nova Scotia Health staff, clinicians and partners are working continually to improve health care services for patients and their families—as well as their communities. Every Nova Scotia Health team member has a personal commitment and motivation to improve healthcare in our province. Whether it be through our personal health experiences or those of a loved one – building a better health system is a responsibility that each one of us takes seriously and are equally passionate in achieving for you, for me, for all of us.

What's next? For me, it is head down full speed ahead on our priority areas. And, I will take the summer months to drive around Nova Scotia visiting our sites and meeting Nova Scotia Health employees along the way. I will be starting my travels shortly and I hope to meet and speak with as many front line staff as possible. Please come to say hello and share your thoughts.

See you soon,



