Transforming the Health Care System for Nova Scotia

Response to the Provincial Health Services Operational Review Report 2006-2007
Thanks

Thousands of health care providers in more than 40 communities across Nova Scotia shared their insights and experiences with Corpus Sanchez International to ensure the sustainability of the health system and provide improved health services to all Nova Scotians. We extend our gratitude to these people for their commitment to providing Nova Scotians with high quality, safe, and appropriate care.

We thank the consultants for presenting us with the most comprehensive review performed to date of the provincial health care system. It is clear from this review that transformation needs to happen, and that every day we wait will only make these changes more difficult and more necessary. The status quo is no longer an option.

We also thank the District Health Authority/IWK Board Chairs and the CEO Council for embracing and sharing the vision of a transformed system that better meets the health needs of Nova Scotians.

We look forward to working side by side with these and other dedicated and talented health system leaders and with the citizens of Nova Scotia in transforming our health system.
Transforming the Health Care System for Nova Scotia

Response to the Provincial Health Services Operational Review Report 2006-2007

Highlights

The government of Nova Scotia and its health system partners will address all 103 recommendations from the Provincial Health Services Operational Review, beginning now, and rolling out over the next few years. This will allow us to transform Nova Scotia’s health care system, making it more effective, efficient, and sustainable for all Nova Scotians now and in the future.

This document outlines government’s response to the review of Nova Scotia’s health system and the direction that health system leaders in government and in the district health authorities and IWK will take to meet our commitment to Nova Scotians.

Helping People Stay Healthy

• Individuals and families will have access to a registered nurse over the phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, through a new self-care/telecare service.
• Individuals and families will have access to a broader range of primary health care providers and primary care services closer to home.
• Patients living with chronic disease will have access to better education and supports to help them manage their own health needs more effectively.
• Individuals and families will have more access to appropriate outpatient services, and access to emergency services when they are needed.
• Nova Scotians dealing with a mental illness will have improved access to community based services and innovative approaches to supporting individuals and families.

Addressing the Changing Needs of Seniors

• Nova Scotians will have access to a wider variety of services and supports, including home care, to help them maintain their independence.
• Services like palliative care, respite options, and caregiver services will be enhanced and expanded to provide the greatest flexibility and support to individuals needing alternate levels of care.
• Seniors with mental illness or challenging behaviors, and those who care for them, will have more access to supports and services to address their needs.
• Nova Scotians will have shorter waits for long term care beds.

Supporting Health Professionals

• The pressure and workload on nurses will be reduced by giving them the tools and support they need to use their skills to full scope where they are needed.
• Investment in areas like lab, pharmacy and diagnostic imaging will take into consideration a predicted shortage of health professionals in these areas.
• As a result, critical staff in these areas will have access to the newest technology and best practices to allow them to work more efficiently and better serve patients and other health professionals.

Investing for Better Results

• Appropriate use of technology will allow administrative professionals to spend less time on transactions and instead focus their skills on key operational and strategic decisions for the health system.
• Investments will be made in new and innovative approaches in priority areas like primary health care and mental health services by tackling efficiencies and standardization throughout the health system, without negatively impacting patient care and without layoffs.
• Decision making will be based on population health needs and on evidence that is reliable, timely, and provincial in scope.
• Consideration of public-private partnerships will occur when it meets the requirements of the Canada Health Act.
Message from the Minister

In 2006, Deputy Minister Cheryl Doiron and the CEOs of the district health authorities and the IWK initiated a review of the province’s health system. Its purpose was to determine if health services in Nova Scotia could be provided more efficiently to allow health dollars to be reinvested into new health services.

What began as an efficiency analysis grew into a comprehensive review of the provincial health system. This resulted in a report that looked beyond efficiency to how resources can be used differently to deliver better care, always with the goal of improving the health of Nova Scotians.

The report focuses our attention on the many challenges facing Nova Scotia’s health system and Nova Scotians themselves in the coming years.

It takes a frank look at our hospital system and notes an over-reliance on hospital-based care and a need for greater investment in community-based primary health care services.

Most importantly, it challenges us as health system leaders and as citizens to make the changes necessary to transform Nova Scotia’s health care system to one that truly meets our changing health needs. The report is very direct in its statement that our health system as it exists cannot continue to meet the changing health needs of Nova Scotians.

By stepping forward together as a system to action the recommendations of this report, we can and will make a dramatic leap forward in ensuring the system that we have built will remain in place for individuals, families, and communities, providing appropriate care when and where it is needed.

This is both an incredible opportunity and a monumental task. But I am confident that this is the right approach — the only approach — to affect the kind of change that will protect, maintain, and enrich health care for generations of Nova Scotians, both now and in the future.

Chris d’Entremont, Minister of Health

Message from the Deputy

It is rewarding for me that what originally began as an efficiency analysis has led to a shared vision for a health care system that will meet the changing needs of Nova Scotians for generations to come.

This review would not have happened without the leadership of the CEOs and Board Chairs of the district health authorities and the IWK Health Centre. Their commitment to this project is extraordinary and I feel privileged to be a part of it.

The release of this report is the culmination of much work, not only for the consultants, but also for the leadership and staff in the district health authorities, the IWK, and the Department of Health. Their unwavering commitment to this work is what allowed it to move from an acute care review to a vision for system-wide transformation.

Yet we all know that the real work has just begun. As a system, we are committed to addressing all one hundred and three recommendations from the report over the next three years.

Our initiatives will be focused in four areas: helping people stay healthy, addressing the changing needs of seniors, supporting health professionals, and investing for better results.

Over the coming months, we will engage a wider range of health care providers, other health stakeholders and citizens in a discussion about the health of Nova Scotians. We will call on many of these people, and the hundreds who have been involved to date, to work with us as we develop a detailed implementation plan.

We invite all Nova Scotians to join us on a journey of transformational change that will allow us to create a truly sustainable health system for now, and for the future.

Cheryl Doiron, Deputy Minister of Health
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Introduction

Nova Scotia’s health care system has improved in the past decade:

- We have moved from four health regions and four independent hospitals to nine district health authorities and the IWK, to allow health districts to better address local issues.
- Our ambulance system has grown from a piecemeal service to one of the best emergency health services in North America.
- We have introduced the Family Pharmacare Program and other programs to help people with the increasing costs of medications.
- We have made long term care more affordable through the Cost of Care initiative.
- We have added new diagnostic equipment and improved procedures to reduce the time people need to stay in hospital.
- We have invested in information technology to reduce wait times for test results and to allow consultations between patients and doctors in rural areas and specialists in another part of the province.

We have made significant changes, but must now ready ourselves for the changes we face in the coming years.

Facing reality

We face issues of increasing demand for services, an expected shortage of health care providers, and the financial reality that we cannot afford to continue increasing our investment in health care without taking money from other services that are important to Nova Scotians.

In spring 2006, the CEOs of the district health authorities and IWK Health Centre, along with the Deputy Minister of Health, initiated a review process that would involve input from thousands of Nova Scotia’s health care providers in over 40 communities. The purpose of the review was to determine if health services in Nova Scotia could be provided more efficiently to allow health dollars to be reinvested into new health programs and services.
What began as an efficiency analysis grew into a comprehensive review of the provincial health system. This resulted in a substantial report that looked beyond efficiency to how resources can be used differently to deliver better care, always with the goal of improving the health of Nova Scotians.

The report is the most comprehensive review of the health system to date. It focuses our attention on the many challenges facing Nova Scotia’s health system — and Nova Scotians themselves — in the coming years. It takes a frank look at our acute care system and notes an over-reliance on hospital-based care and a need for greater investment in community-based primary health care services. Most importantly, it challenges us as health system leaders and as citizens to make the changes necessary to transform Nova Scotia’s health care system to one that truly meets the changing health needs of Nova Scotians now and for future generations.

Our health status
Nova Scotians in general are one of the sickest populations in the country, with

- the lowest disability-free life expectancy in the country.
- the highest death rates in Canada from cancer and respiratory disease.
- the second highest rates of diabetes.
- some of the highest rates of obesity.
- growing rates of cognitive impairment and dementias.

The Department of Health Promotion and Protection has done significant work in the past few years to reduce smoking rates, to encourage young people to eat better and exercise more, and to support families to provide the best start possible for our children. This is critical because we have already seen a national trend toward higher levels of obesity in children and youth and, as a result, earlier onset of diseases like diabetes.

Our seniors
While we work toward a healthier population overall, we know that seniors in particular have a greater burden of disease. Since people over the age of 65 are the fastest growing segment of our population, we need to increasingly focus our services on meeting the health needs of this valued group of citizens.

Older Nova Scotians are community leaders, dedicated volunteers, knowledgeable and experienced mentors, loving and generous caregivers, and increasingly, valued and productive employees. Yet when we predict the impact that an aging population will place on our health resources, we must consider the increased cost of providing health services to a growing number of older Nova Scotians. While it costs close to $1500 a year to provide health services for a person under 65 years of age, the cost is more than four times as much for a person over 65 years. Every ten years after that, the cost doubles so that a person aged 85 and older requires about $23,500 a year in health services. Much of this care is provided in hospitals — our most expensive type of care.

Our aging workforce
We face additional challenges from our changing demographics. While we often think about aging patients, we also face a very real problem with an aging workforce. We know that in less than three years, 20 per cent of health care providers in the province will be eligible for retirement.

By 2015, that number increases to 44 per cent. This is an issue across the country, but that doesn’t make it any less concerning. In fact, it only underscores the need for us to change the way we provide care so that we can provide our nurses and other health professionals with more support, a more positive work environment, and more fulfilling careers in both acute and primary health care settings.
Our patients

While it focuses on many areas of the health care system from providers to administrative services, this report — and our response to it — is above all about patients. Now, more than ever, we need to make changes that will allow Nova Scotians to feel confident in managing their health and that will allow patients to receive care faster and closer to home, that will offer health care providers a safer and more fulfilling work environment and that will support all Nova Scotians to live healthier lives.

We are committed to improving the health of Nova Scotians. The health needs of Nova Scotians have changed. Now it is time for the system to change to ensure those needs are met.

Our challenges

Nova Scotians are becoming more and more dependant on the health system and particularly on hospitals as the result of poor health and changing demographics. Human resource challenges mean that we won’t have the staff to deliver the care they need when they need it if we don’t change the way that we provide that care.

Our province has reached a point where it can no longer afford the increased costs that we have been seeing in health care. Provincial government spending on health has been growing at almost twice the rate of provincial government revenue, which is not sustainable.

Even if we had the money, there aren’t enough health care professionals to continue providing services in the same way. In Canada there are expected to be 105,000 nursing vacancies in less than five years. And provinces with more money are competing with us for nurses, physicians, laboratory specialists, and other health professionals. We need to focus on creating a work environment that better supports health professionals, offers more opportunities for career development, and attracts and retains health professionals.

Serious human resource issues exist in the areas of mental health, lab, pharmacy, and diagnostic imaging, and in several other areas. And physician shortages in some areas and changing expectations around workload will continue to grow, forcing us to rethink how we can deliver dependable services throughout the province.

Our health costs

In this province we are currently spending over $3 billion a year on health care for less than 1 million people. That amounts to about half of every dollar spent on programs and services by government. That doesn’t leave a lot in comparison for education, roads, environmental protection, justice, social programs, and many other programs and services that are important to Nova Scotians. And for the most part this increasing investment — 8 to 10 per cent more every year — is not resulting in healthier Nova Scotians.

These costs are growing every year and much of it is being invested in “illness care” in hospitals. The best way to manage these costs is to help Nova Scotians remain as healthy as possible. As people’s health care needs change, we need to shift more emphasis to preventing and managing chronic diseases. We can do this by supporting patients to manage their illnesses and by investing in community-based services and continuing care services to help people stay out of hospitals and in their communities.

Our strategy

By strengthening primary health care, Nova Scotians will be able to maintain their health and receive care close to home, in their own communities. When that isn’t possible, they will receive excellent care in hospitals that are focused on their acute care needs. And if they face a medical emergency, they can trust that they will get the care they need. That is the health care system that Nova Scotians need and deserve.

We all have an incredible opportunity to use our role as health system leaders, as community leaders, and as citizens to help transform the health care environment by bringing about change that will improve services in communities, ensure safe care throughout the province, and create a system that we can sustain for our children and our grandchildren.
Overview

Vision: Generations of Nova Scotians Living Well

The government of Nova Scotia, the district health authorities, and the IWK have a shared mission to work together with individuals, families and communities to promote, improve and maintain the health of Nova Scotians through a responsive and sustainable system.

We are committed to a health system that is safe, accessible, appropriate, effective, and efficient, which will

- acknowledge the role individuals and families have in achieving maximum health and independence.
- celebrate and support local initiatives that help individuals and families maintain a healthy lifestyle and that allow individuals to stay in their homes and communities as much as possible.
- ensure that health providers and caregivers are well supported.
- offer a range of community-based services to enable children, youth, adults, and seniors to maintain their mental and physical health and receive care close to home, in their own communities.
- offer dependable, timely emergency and acute care in hospitals focused on acute care needs.

To achieve these goals, government, the district health authorities, and the IWK will focus on four key areas:

- Helping people stay healthy
- Addressing the changing needs of seniors
- Supporting health professionals
- Investing for better results

1. Helping People Stay Healthy

We know that the health needs of Nova Scotians are changing. Obesity, inactivity, and activities like smoking are contributing to some of the highest rates of chronic diseases in the country, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. These are serious but often manageable illnesses, especially when identified early and managed properly through treatment and education.
Improve Access to Primary Health Care
We will introduce a Selfcare/Telecare system to improve access to health care services. This toll-free health line, operated by registered nursing staff, will be available to all residents of the province 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This enhanced primary health care service will allow a registered nurse to assess an individual’s health condition over the phone and give advice on self-care and on whether or not the caller should seek another level of care.

Invest in Primary Health Care
While hospitals are often focused on the treatment of an illness or injury, primary health care considers the broader factors that affect health such as family, education, employment, income, and social economic situation. Investing in primary health care allows us to deliver services designed to address the changing needs of communities. It allows patients to receive support to manage their chronic diseases, prevent and treat illness, and improve their health. Primary health care providers can be doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, dieticians, or other health professionals. They often work in teams in primary health care centres or clinics.

Expand Services Closer to Home
Community-based services allow patients to receive support and treatment in a more familiar environment. While some services need to be provided in hospitals, preventative care, disease management, and follow up care can often be delivered in a community setting. Mental health is one area where expanding community-based services has improved care for patients.

Strengthen Mental Health and Addictions Services
The district health authorities and IWK are committed to ensuring that people with mental illness and addictions get appropriate care by continuing to recruit for new specialists, looking at the best use of the skilled professionals available, and continuing to invest in innovative programs and community-based services. This will improve patient care and lessen the strain on the dedicated professionals working in acute care in the mental health system.

2. Addressing the Changing Needs of Seniors
Each month, 700 Nova Scotians turn 65. As our population ages, demand for more focused services for our aging population will increase. The continuing care system provides a range of services to people of all ages in their homes, communities, and facility care settings. Through the Continuing Care Strategy, we have begun to enhance and expand these services and implement new and innovative programming to meet the diverse care needs of Nova Scotians.

Expand Palliative Care Services
The Continuing Care Strategy included a commitment to develop a provincial palliative care program that includes home care, oxygen, and medication coverage. This work is underway, and a new provincial Palliative Care Coordinator will lead that work.

Expand Seniors’ Mental Health Initiatives
The mental health of older Nova Scotians is a growing issue that is being addressed jointly through mental health services and continuing care. The province is continuing to expand the challenging behaviours program in both home and long-term care environments. Building knowledge and understanding of the issue is critical, so mental health care providers in the districts have also established a Seniors Mental Health Network to explore better ways to provide care to older Nova Scotians with mental illness or challenging behaviours.
Improve Coordination of Acute and Continuing Care Services
We will increase local management of long-term care to support a faster transition from acute care to continuing care services and to ensure that the services available are meeting the unique needs of the community.

3. Supporting Health Professionals
Nova Scotia has the highest number of physicians per capita than any other province in Canada. We are above the national average for registered and licensed practical nurses. We are also above the national average in many other areas including pharmacists, medical laboratory and medical radiation technologists, physiotherapists, dieticians, and several other professional groups.

At the same time, we expect to face growing challenges with health human resources within the next five years. Our Health Human Resources Strategy will work to address recruitment and retention issues that go beyond doctors and nurses. But since recruitment and retention alone won’t allow us to meet the increasing demands of the next decade, we need to look at working differently to meet the changing health needs of Nova Scotians.

Create a Better Model of Care
By establishing new roles and processes that can better meet changing care needs, we can help reduce the cost of delivering care while improving the health status of Nova Scotians and improving the work environment for nurses and other health professionals. While a new model of care for nurses is our first priority, there are also opportunities to look at new models for other care providers. The district health authorities are committed to supporting nursing staff so they are able to work to their full scope of practice. Those supports may be additional non-professional staff (such as clerks, aides, and porters), technology (such as lifts) or education (such as professional development). They will allow for the standardization of staffing ratios (nurse to patient) to ensure the best use of these valued health professionals.

Address a Predicted Shortage of Laboratory Professionals
We face the possible retirement of almost half of the laboratory services staff in the next few years. To ensure the viability of our province’s lab system, we will review the structure of lab services from a provincial perspective to address human resource challenges and will introduce new technologies to support lab staff. Capital Health and the IWK Health Centre have already begun planning for a joint lab with shared staff and the newest technologies.

Support Pharmacists to Improve Patient Care
Investment in hospital-based pharmacy support staff and technology such as unit dose systems will improve safety and quality. It will allow pharmacists to spend more time on patient education and support on units, which will improve patient care. In addition, we will explore opportunities to work more closely with community pharmacies to support in-hospital services.

4. Investing for Better Results
The district health authorities and the IWK often struggle to provide health care services within their existing budgets. Yet we are investing more than $1.5 billion a year of taxpayers’ dollars to deliver these services. More importantly we as Nova Scotians are making this sizable investment without seeing significant improvements in health status. With an 8 to 10 per cent growth every year in health care costs, maintaining the status quo is not an option. The districts are committed to begin making changes that will reduce acute care costs and free up resources to use in ways that will improve the health of Nova Scotians.

Consolidate Infrastructure and Support Services
Infrastructure and support services like finance and human resources are in many cases under-resourced, with professionals spending much of their time on routine transactions like payroll and benefits. Consolidating some of these services would allow these professionals to focus on the critical work of managing financial and human resources and supporting their senior leadership teams.

“It is clear that the health system and people’s health needs are changing with or without the involvement of government or decision-makers.”

Approach Efficiency in a New Way
We need to use our limited resources efficiently and effectively to improve the health of the population. Districts and the IWK recognize that they need to find ways to save money that do not lessen patient care or place an undue burden on staff. There are opportunities within the system to do this, including initiatives like standardization of equipment and changing discharge hours to ensure that resources are available during the busiest time periods.

Invest Where It Counts
The majority of our health dollars are currently invested in acute or hospital-based care. We recognize that this needs to change. The district health authorities, the IWK, and government have committed to allocating discretionary funding to primary health care services, including mental health services. Investing in new technology to support health professionals and improve quality and safety will also contribute to a more efficient and effective system.

Improve Information Management
An increased focus on information systems for improved research, data collection, analysis, and evaluation will improve support for evidence-based decision making. This will contribute to better care delivery and allow us to better evaluate the impact of programs and services on the health of Nova Scotians.

Explore Public-Private Partnerships
Government is exploring partnerships between the public and private sectors to address the extensive infrastructure needs of the province. These partnerships are being used across the country and around the world to build hospitals, roads, and other infrastructure on time and on budget. Through these partnerships, government is committed to building responsibly, with a transparent financial process, the infrastructure needed for communities and people. Public-private partnerships will only be considered when they meet the requirements of the Canada Health Act.
To keep Nova Scotians healthy, care must
• be driven by need.
• occur in the right place.
• be delivered by the right provider.
• be supported by the right supportive services.

“A vision for the broadest definition of the health care system will be safe, acceptable, accessible, appropriate, effective, and efficient.”

Conclusion

Over the next few years we will need to make some tough decisions to ensure that we spend taxpayers’ dollars on programs and services that best respond to the needs of Nova Scotians. This will mean realigning current resources and working with our partners and stakeholders, and with Nova Scotians, to develop and implement innovative and effective solutions.

The report by Corpus Sanchez contains over a hundred recommendations intended to improve the health of Nova Scotians.

Some recommendations are straightforward. They allow the districts and the IWK to make changes that will provide services in a better way. These recommendations include improvements for health professionals and staff, more efficient use of time or money, and changes that will allow the districts and IWK to provide care in a way that better meets the needs of patients.

Other recommendations will lead to changes that may affect where or how Nova Scotians receive services. These recommendations are intended to improve safety, to provide more services in communities, or to focus more money in areas that will actually improve the health of Nova Scotians. With these changes comes a commitment from government that no emergency rooms will be closed.

These are very important recommendations, so it is important to take the time to talk to our fellow citizens about them. To that end, we will support the district health authorities as they begin discussions in their communities about health and health care, with a particular focus on health care in rural communities. We will also engage a wide range of health care providers, health stakeholders and citizens as we work toward a health care system that focuses on truly improving the health of Nova Scotians.

Our three-year plan to expand and enhance primary health care services and ensure the best use of acute care resources addresses the report’s recommendations, incorporates input from thousands of health professionals, and reflects the changing health needs of our citizens.
## Implementation Plan

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<td><strong>1. Helping People Stay Healthy</strong></td>
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<td>Improve access to primary health care (5 - 9; 98)</td>
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<td>Selfcare/Telecare Service (46)</td>
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<td>Engage public and stakeholders in development of Rural Health Strategy (23; 24)</td>
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<td>Develop Rural Health Strategy, including emergency health (41-45)</td>
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<td>Focused review of mental health and addiction services, including health human resources, bed strategy, and community-based services (10, 12)</td>
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<td>Increase funding for community-based mental health and addiction services (11)</td>
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<td><strong>2. Addressing the Changing Needs of Seniors</strong></td>
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<td>Increase access to palliative care services (17 - 18)</td>
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<td>Continue to identify solutions for those who need alternative levels of care</td>
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<td>Increase local management of long term care</td>
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<td><strong>3. Supporting Health Professionals</strong></td>
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<td>Expand and implement provincial Health Human Resource Strategy (57; 77)</td>
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<td>Create and implement a model of care for hospitals (37 - 39; 102 - 103)</td>
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<td>Create and implement a model of care for home care (40)</td>
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<td>Address predicted shortage of laboratory professionals (48 - 52)</td>
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<td>Support hospital-based pharmacists to improve patient care (includes feasibility study) (53 - 55)</td>
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<td><strong>4. Investing for Better Results</strong></td>
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<td>Consolidate infrastructure and support services (includes feasibility study) (69 - 76)</td>
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<td>Review clinical services (Clinical Services Task Force) (25-31)</td>
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<td>Improve information management (71 - 72)</td>
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<td>Exploring public/private partnerships in development of a capital infrastructure plan</td>
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*Anticipated time lines are contingent on budgetary planning.*
For more information please visit:
www.gov.ns.ca/health