



THE PREMIER  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

September 14, 2021

Honourable Brian Comer  
Minister of Communications Nova Scotia  
Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions  
Minister responsible for Youth

Dear Minister Comer,

Thank you for agreeing to serve Nova Scotians as Minister of Communications Nova Scotia, Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions, and Minister responsible for Youth.

Governing is about people. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, we were given a mandate by Nova Scotians to activate solutions. They responded to our platform, *Solutions for Nova Scotians*, and its vision for our Province. Nova Scotians share the hope you and I have for our beautiful province and its potential.

A brighter future starts with a shared belief in what our province can do. A belief in each other. A belief in our communities. A belief in fellow Nova Scotians. We can put Nova Scotians on the path to financial sustainability and fix healthcare. We can support our traditional industries and build an environment plan that fights climate change. We can make our province a magnet for doctors, students, new residents, investors and tourists alike, and remain proud of our traditions and our heritage.

Fixing healthcare and rebuilding our economy is not for the faint of heart. It will require strong leadership and a willingness to take bold action. Working together, we can get the job done.

The success of all Nova Scotians and improvement of their health, access to health care and quality of life will be our collective success.

We have committed to listen to and respect all Nova Scotians. We have also committed to lead a government which represents all Nova Scotians and is reflective of the modern societal makeup of Nova Scotia, inclusive and respectful of all demographic, cultural and ethnic diversities to advance our collective growth and prosperity. You have been chosen for Cabinet because of your track record and capabilities as a problem solver, as a “solutionist,” as someone who gets things done and is not deterred by complexity. You are a known collaborator who will work with your colleagues on solutions that need all the capabilities of the Government and the public service pulling in the same direction.

As Minister, your leadership and your team will play a critical role in contributing to the commitments we have made and to providing solutions. You are responsible for the conduct of the department(s) you oversee and must be aware of and adhere to the public service's *Code of Conduct and Respectful Workplace Policy* in your interactions with the public service. Most importantly, you are part of a team of solutionists who share a common vision and commitment to *Solutions for Nova Scotians*.

We all need support at some time in some way. Access to mental health care is a right, not a privilege. Mental health care is health care. Access should not be exclusive to those who are fortunate enough to have insurance coverage or who can afford private care; access should be truly universal.

We have incredibly dedicated front-line mental health professionals in Nova Scotia who work in both the private and public systems. They dedicate their lives to the betterment of others. Thousands of Nova Scotians, both young and old, struggle with mental health conditions that are likely manageable if they had access to the appropriate supports. These individuals are being unfairly penalized by bad government policy. They have the right to expect access to regular, reliable, publicly-funded mental health and addictions treatments.

As Minister of Communications Nova Scotia you will:

- Within the first 90 days of your mandate, prepare a timeline for completion of all tasks below over the next four years. The initial timelines are to be updated quarterly thereafter.
- Work with Departments to ensure the priorities and initiatives of Government are shared with Nova Scotians in a timely and accessible way.

As Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions you will:

- Within the first 90 days of your mandate, prepare a timeline for completion of all tasks below over the next four years. The initial timelines are to be updated quarterly thereafter.
- Monitor wait times for mental health services and be accountable for inappropriate delays.
- Work with organizations inside and outside of government to ensure management of standards of care and best practices and model of care.
- Recruit and engage mental health professionals, including putting care before all else by opening access to appropriate resources where the public system is failing.
- Compile and analyze robust data to determine where improvement is needed and where the department is seeing success.
- Be responsible for working with individuals, communities, and community organizations to make sure that every resource is on the same page, striving for the same goal - overall community wellness. Where appropriate, establish long-term core funding that empowers these organizations to focus on doing what they do best.
- Be responsible for prioritizing and collaborating across Education and Early Childhood Development, Justice, Community Services, and other departments as required.
- Work cooperatively with the Healthcare Auditor as they collect feedback from public use of the system, conduct performance audits and risk analysis of any new innovation or change planned for the health system.
- In conjunction with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, place considerable

emphasis on addictions programming by ensuring a proper distribution of services across the Province and an educational component in the curriculum for students to learn the harms associated with drugs and alcohol.

- Introduce universal addictions and mental coverage through legislation that guarantees every Nova Scotian access to allied mental health professionals.
- Establish billing codes so that approved mental health professionals are working for the benefit of all.
- Establish mechanisms to allow private practitioners to take on clients knowing that the MSI will pay them a fair rate for services rendered.
- Develop a system whereby those individuals who have access to private coverage will have to exhaust their insurance funding first.
- Engage with a wide variety of licenced professionals with recognized clinical specialties in mental health, addictions, therapy/counselling, including, but not limited to: Registered Psychologists, Registered Social Workers; and Registered Counselling Therapists.
- Integrate mental health services into a proper, modern full-service telehealth program for Nova Scotians. The immediate response system must be multi-faceted, including telehealth and virtual care.
- Champion a three-digit mental health crisis line [9-8-8] in addition to the new virtual mental health programing.

As Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions, you will also support your Ministerial colleagues as they execute their responsibilities. In particular, you will support:

- The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to expand mental health training for teachers who wish to participate.
- The Minister of Health and Wellness to conduct a full review of the formulary that decides what drugs are covered and which are not, to ensure the formulary meets the needs of Nova Scotians.

As Minister responsible for Youth, you will also support your Ministerial colleagues as they execute their responsibilities. In particular, you will support:

- The Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration as they attract a mix of entrepreneurs and youth to all parts of our Province

As we progress through our mandate, we will work together to identify further refinement and priorities of focus.

Within the first six months, and as part of your Office's mandate, you will work with me and other Departments in reviewing the role and effectiveness of Agencies, Offices and Crown Corporations with a goal of ensuring the most efficient and accountable methodology for the undertaking of their respective tasks.

We have a clear mandate and the vision and the determination to take decisive action to solve problems for people by giving them hope for health, universal mental health care, dignity for our seniors and a new opportunity for aging well. We will invest in our future. We will build a Nova Scotia with more people, more jobs, better jobs and more housing and infrastructure for people. We will do this with an overriding commitment to sustainable prosperity, establishing Nova Scotia as a world leader.

Honourable Brian Comer

Page 4

We will overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving the incredible opportunities within our reach to improve the well-being and quality of life every Nova Scotian deserves.

I look forward to working with you to improve the lives of all the people of Nova Scotia and change the course of our Province now and for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tim Houston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "H".

Honourable Tim Houston, M.L.A.

Premier of Nova Scotia

Copy to:        Laura Lee Langley, Deputy Minister of Communications Nova Scotia  
                     Donna MacDonald, Associate Deputy Minister of Communications Nova Scotia  
                     Jeannine Lagassé, Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness  
                     Craig Beaton, Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness