



THE PREMIER  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

September 14, 2021

Honourable Michelle Thompson  
Minister of Health and Wellness  
Minister responsible for the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment

Dear Minister Thompson,

Thank you for agreeing to serve Nova Scotians as Minister of Health and Wellness and Minister responsible for the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment.

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*.

As Minister of Health and Wellness 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.

#### Improve Access to Primary Health Providers

- Provide those Nova Scotians on the waitlist with immediate access to a virtual care service.
- Work with the new Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment on long-term strategies to ensure there are enough healthcare professionals to provide timely access to care to all Nova Scotians.

#### Recruitment and Retention

- Focus efforts on retention of our current health professionals.
- Level the playing field with respect to remuneration and pay family doctors at a rate that is in line with that of hospitalists.
- Recognize the need for more local involvement and work with communities to give them the tools for successful recruitment.
- Develop a Clinical Health Services Plan and within three months, empower local leadership teams in each region to complete their clinical health services plan.
- Assist health regions in their local recruitment efforts and strategy.
- Support physicians and/or other relevant health professionals participating in recruitment efforts.
- Ensure foreign physicians, wishing to practice medicine in Nova Scotia, are given an opportunity to do so under a clinical associate program.
- Work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia to establish a clinical associate program.
- Establish a retirement fund for full time physicians who practice patient-facing services.

#### Address Surgical Wait Times

- Cut out the inefficiencies related to the operation of our ORs and allow them to run beyond banker's hours, until the backlog has been addressed.
- Meet the benchmark standards for wait times as established by the Wait Time Alliance, within 18 months of being elected.

#### Expanding Telehealth/Virtual Care

- Further increase virtual care to include some primary consultations with specialists, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and nurse practitioners.
- Complete a full consultation within our first three months in government, in conjunction with Doctors Nova Scotia, to determine what specialties and health providers can expand the scope of their practice to telemedicine, ensuring proper billing codes.
- Adjust the scope and delivery time of One Patient, One Record (OPOR) and change the steering committee for the current process to increase the speed of innovation and deliver the best possible service for patient care.

### Chronic Illness

- Establish, in addition to our focus on the expansion of telemedicine, a new Chronic Illness Treatment and Prevention Program that focuses funding on an in-home treatment model for patients with chronic illnesses, based on the INSPIRED model for COPD patients.

### Fertility

- Establish financial supports for individuals trying to start a family and paying for fertility services in Nova Scotia.

### Prescription Drug Coverage

- Extend presumptive prescription benefit coverage for paid and volunteer firefighters to cover the following additional forms of cancer linked to firefighting: ureter, penile, testicular, breast, esophageal, prostate, skin, digestive tract, multiple myeloma, pancreatic, ovarian, and cervical cancers.
- 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.

### Administration

- Establish, within 12 to 18 months, a new organizational structure for healthcare in Nova Scotia. This new structure will be driven by patient decisions and behaviour and will reduce the duplication within the system and, where necessary, consolidate the Department of Health and Wellness and the Nova Scotia Health Authority to save the administrative burden that is pulling resources away from patient care.
- Establish a Performance Agreement with the Nova Scotia Health Authority.
- Establish conflict resolution policies for health workers.
- Establish a culture of continuous improvement by implementing a Healthcare Auditor, a new Officer of the Legislature.

As Minister of Health and Wellness, you will also support your Ministerial colleagues as they execute their responsibilities. In particular, you will support:

- The Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions to allow private mental health practitioners to take on clients knowing that the MSI will pay them a fair rate for services rendered.
- The Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care as they focus on supporting seniors - and keeping them healthy, living in their own homes, while also working towards building enough long-term care beds to meet the needs of the province.
- The Minister of Agriculture as they examine policies and programs to reduce costs of healthy foods for consumers.
- The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development as they work with the Regional Centres for Education and the Teachers' Union to determine what is possible to expand personal fitness opportunities for all students.
- The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development as they make it a priority to educate high school students about healthy eating and cooking.
- The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development as they review and update curriculum related to physical activity and healthy living.
- The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to establish a Healthy Living Grant for schools.

- The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board as they negotiate with the Federal Government to allow Nova Scotia to keep and expand the federal portion of the physician retirement fund taxable benefit, to be reinvested in health care in our Province.
- The Minister of Advanced Education as they work towards an increase in residency seats.
- The Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services as they issue a tender for telehealth and virtual care services.
- The Minister of Public Works as they develop infrastructure to support the health system.

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 Department'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.

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, slightly slanted style.

Honourable Tim Houston, M.L.A.

Premier of Nova Scotia

Copy to: Jeannine Lagassé, Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness  
Craig Beaton, Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness  
Dr. Kevin Orrell, Deputy Minister & CEO of Office of Health Care Professionals Recruitment