



# **Accountability Report**

## 2023–24

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Office of Addictions and Mental  
Health



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Accountability Report 2023–2024

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## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Accountability Statement .....	2
Measuring Performance.....	3
Strengthen Workforce .....	3
Increase Access to Mental Health and Addictions Services (community and hospital) .....	3
Build in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion into OAMH supported Programs and Services.....	5
New Models of Care and Expansion of Services .....	6
Financial Summary and Variance Explanation .....	8
<i>Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act</i> .....	9

## Introduction

The Office of Addictions and Mental Health (OAMH) works with Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA), the IWK Health Centre and community partners to provide mental health and addictions education, prevention, treatment and recovery programs for Nova Scotia.

Health system transformation was a priority of OAMH in the 2023-24 fiscal year. This was supported by OAMH, NSHA and IWK's collaborative work to implement Universal Mental Health and Addictions Care. The focus areas of this work included:

- Investing in the formal health care system, such as investments in Integrated Youth Services, Mental Health Day Hospitals, and Recovery Support Centres.
- Tapping into capacity that already exists in our communities, private sector, universities and virtually to improve access, and
- Enhancing integration – making it easier for people to get the care they need at the right time from the right provider.

Delivering Universal Mental Health and Addictions Care is supported through Action for Health, the government's multi-year roadmap to transform the health system. Action for Health outlines solutions for creating a world class health system that will be ready when Nova Scotians need it, is responsive to their needs, and provides reliable care they can count on.

This report outlines the achievements of OAMH over the 2023-24 fiscal year and the work underway to ensure every Nova Scotian receives the mental health and addictions care they need and deserve.

## Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Office of Addictions and Mental Health for the year ended March 31, 2024, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of the Office of Addictions and Mental Health outcomes necessarily include estimates, judgements, and opinions by the Office of Addictions and Mental Health management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of the Office of Addictions and Mental Health management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Office of Addictions and Mental Health 2023-24 Business Plan.

*Original signed by*  
Hon. Brian Comer  
Minister

*Original signed by*  
Kathleen Trott  
Deputy Minister

# Measuring Performance

## Strengthen Workforce

In 2023-24, OAMH provided \$306,000 to Dalhousie University to support the Master of Nursing, Advanced Practice, Mental Health & Addictions program. The program will begin in September 2024. Funding will be provided annually for academic, administration and operating support.

OAMH has undertaken work to develop a provincial Mental Health and Addictions Health and Human Resource (HHR) Plan, which will support and strengthen the mental health and addictions workforce. The Mental Health and Addictions HHR Plan is intended to align and nest under the Action for Health Workforce Strategy. The Action for Health Workforce Strategy provides overarching strategy and guidance to grow and develop the health system workforce in Nova Scotia, and our Mental Health and Addictions HHR Plan outlines specific actions we will take. Our Plan aligns with the Action for Health Workforce Strategy by focusing on four pillars: retain, recruit, educate and learn, and redesign. Actions completed in 2023-24 include:

- OAMH engaged through a range of meetings and workshops with representatives from various sectors, including community-based organizations, professional regulators, colleges, associations, government, NSHA and IWK leadership, and individuals and families with lived experience. NSH/IWK staff provided their thoughts on how improvements could be made in the areas of scheduling, team culture, mentorship, career advancement, research, leadership, physical and psychological safety, training and development, recognition, technology, equity, diversity and inclusion, and support for hard to fill positions.
- OAMH attended joint NSHA/IWK all-staff town halls to share information and next steps on the plan and engaged with front-line workers to hear their ideas on how to improve staff retention, recruit new staff, and strengthen services and supports. Over 600 frontline NSHA and IWK staff completed a survey indicating their priority areas for change to aid in retention efforts.
- OAMH and NSHA/IWK leaders assessed and prioritized the most effective and feasible solutions to address Nova Scotia's most pressing HHR workforce challenges. These solutions build upon current work underway.
- Building supports to address the impact of working in a trauma-exposed workplace is vitally important for creating safer spaces for staff and physicians working across mental health and addictions services. NSHA and IWK continued to implement a trauma-informed care approach across their mental health and addictions care system.

## Increase Access to Mental Health and Addictions Services (community and hospital)

[Mental Health Acute Day Hospitals](#) provide community-based outpatient (day) treatment including help with monitoring medications and group and one-on-one therapy. The Mental Health Day Hospital at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital opened in July 2023. Two additional sites in the Northern Zone (Colchester East Hants Health Centre) and the Western Zone (Valley Regional Hospital) will be launched in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

OAMH has continued to support [existing e-mental health and addictions applications](#) and new initiatives that integrate mental health services into virtual health programs for all Nova Scotians. Additional crisis supports were developed and virtual assessments initiated in Eastern and Northern Zone Emergency Departments.

OAMH, along with health system partners, have worked with federal counterparts to implement the 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline. This Helpline is a new three-digit helpline that provides urgent, live support by phone and text for people in Canada who are thinking about suicide or worried about someone else who may be thinking about suicide. It is available in English and French, 24 hours a day and seven days a week, to everyone in Canada. The 9-8-8 service launched in Canada on November 30, 2023. OAMH and Provincial partners are working together to integrate the 9-8-8 system into existing Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Lines in 2024/25, in a way that works best for Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians can continue to access the Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line (the Provincial Crisis Line) toll-free at 1-888-429-8167, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for themselves or someone they are concerned about. The Provincial Crisis Line (PCL) connects Nova Scotians to trained clinicians and is available to anyone across the province.

OAMH continues to support existing multi-year agreements with community-based organizations across Nova Scotia. In addition to this, work on developing the [Community Wellness Framework](#) was undertaken throughout 2023-24, which will serve as a guide to provide opportunities for growth and annual and sustained funding to community-based organizations to deliver mental health, wellness and addiction services and support. The total value of the Framework is \$6.7M, which includes one year project funding that will be coordinated through the Nova Scotia Mental Health Foundation, research and innovation project funding and multi-year funding for community-based organizations to provide services and supports.

OAMH supported expansion of several human-centered, trauma-informed harm reduction and mental health programs, including managed alcohol programs, overdose prevention sites, Pause Mental Health Clinic, Out of the Cold and Mobile Outreach Street Health (MOSH). OAMH has increased investments in these initiatives by \$2.5M in 2023-24. Work and investments focused on:

- Stabilization centres which provide short-term placement for individuals experiencing acute intoxication. Within 2023-24, OAMH worked with their partners at Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) to support finding a location for the service which is anticipated to open next fiscal year. Funding has been confirmed for 2024/25.
- Managed alcohol programs (MAP) which provide a safe supply of alcohol to people with severe alcohol use disorder, prescribed by a physician.
  - The first managed alcohol program was established in the HRM at the North End Community Health Centre (NECHC) in 2020, and a multi-year funding agreement was put in place in 2023-24. In August 2023, the site was serving 24 individuals and planning intake for five additional individuals. Individuals can be connected to other services and supports as required.
  - Establishing a new MAP site at the Ally Centre of Cape Breton in January 2024. The focus was setting up the site, and working with supportive housing partners to support program participation. Operating hours were extended for the Ally Centre, including their Overdose Prevention Sites, through additional funding.
- Supported NECHC to provide services through MOSH and Out of the Cold.
  - MOSH provides primary health care services to people who are experiencing housing issues in the community. MOSH currently serves the Halifax Regionality Municipality through the North End Community Centre.
  - Out of the Cold is a community association running a low barrier-supported housing community in Halifax, operating 24-7. The organization had also seen an increase in demand with the growing housing crisis and have many clients with complex mental

health and addictions issues, challenging primary health care needs and require support in a nontraditional setting, such as onsite at the Out of the Cold locations.

### Build in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion into OAMH supported Programs and Services

The Department of Health and Wellness released a Health Equity Framework in July 2023. This Framework provides concrete, measurable, and attainable actions for Nova Scotia's health system to deliver care that is equitable for all people living in Nova Scotia. OAMH is a partner in this effort and its implementation, which includes data collection to understand how to better address racism and discrimination throughout the health system. To enhance data collection to better understand the health of our communities, and to guide policy and investment decisions, OAMH has developed a standardized approach for Universal Mental Health and Addictions Care monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Partners (IWK, NSHA, and OAMH) are currently working on applying it to Universal Mental Health and Addictions Care initiatives.

OAMH has also integrated the Health Equity Framework through initiatives such as establishing the Lived Experience Advisory Group, which comprises community-based organizations and individuals that provide diverse perspectives, input, and advice on Universal Mental Health and Addictions Care service planning.

OAMH strives to provide accessible, equitable and accountable mental health care and addictions support for the people of Nova Scotia.

- OAMH provided \$226,000 to the People's Counselling Clinic to address mental health and addictions related concerns. This community-based mental health clinic provides direct services and public education focused on issues of trauma, race, sex and gender. Services are provided to the public for free.
- OAMH, in partnership with IWK, provided \$441,000 in funding for an Afrocentric clinic, staffed by a core five-person team, to provide mental health and addictions services for youth and caregivers. The team is integrated into IWK mental health and addictions programs to better respond to the needs of African Nova Scotians, using a model designed by the African Nova Scotian community. The clinic will provide both virtual and in-person services in harder to fill areas in the province. Initial communities served by the team are the Preston Township, Beechville, Hammonds Plains, and Lucasville. Services are scheduled to open by July 2024.
- Tajikeyimik has been working closely with Mi'kmaw communities and key partners to understand needs and priorities. This engagement will inform the development of the Mi'kmaw Mental Wellness and Healing Strategy which was supported through earlier funding from OAMH and will be delivered in Summer 2024.
- In 2023-24, OAMH increased its annual investment to \$1.6M for clinicians to serve children and adults in the 13 Mi'kmaw communities. This includes funding to:
  - Eskasoni Mental Health Services (EMHS) to hire five clinicians.
  - Millbrook to hire one clinician.
  - NSHA to employ seven mental health clinicians to serve the remaining 11 First Nation communities.
- OAMH is working with EMHS, NSHA, and the IWK to identify service pathways between their organizations to improve access to care for Eskasoni residents. A quality improvement process

was completed, and partners are prioritizing and acting on findings and recommendations, including improving ongoing data collection for health outcomes of members of Mi'kmaw communities.

### [New Models of Care and Expansion of Services](#)

OAMH worked closely with NSHA to procure a community-based organization to establish a grief and bereavement hub and spoke model. A contract was signed between OAMH and the successful organization, the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association, and work was undertaken to develop a grant process and establish a governance model to oversee the work.

OAMH has undertaken work to expand access to wellness, crisis and mental health and addiction support services. A working group between OAMH, IWK, NSHA, Department of Justice and policing partners was established to collaboratively co-design a community-led crisis response pilot. A Request for Proposal to identify a vendor to host the pilot was launched in January 2024 and currently is in the contract negotiations stage of the process.

[Integrated Youth Services \(IYS\)](#) is an evidence-based model that offers low-barrier access to community-based services for youth aged 12 to 25 and their caregivers experiencing challenges with their mental health or substance use. In the summer of 2023, the IWK launched a procurement process to identify the locations for the eight IYS sites to be developed in Nova Scotia. The work to identify the sites occurred in 2023/24. In April 2024 seven of the eight locations were announced and included: Amherst, Bridgewater, New Glasgow, North-End Halifax, West End Halifax, Sydney and Eskasoni, which will serve youth in six First Nation Communities. Further information on launching the first sites will be available in 2024/25. Work is underway to identify an additional site in the Western Zone.

NSHA is implementing twelve Recovery Support Centres (RSCs) across Nova Scotia. RSCs are welcoming spaces that provide education, recovery, and harm reduction support (including outpatient withdrawal management), and one-on-one support and group treatment for people struggling with substance use and/or gambling concerns. Services can be accessed by appointment or through drop-in. Seven RSCs have opened fully implemented, providing assessment, provincial group-based recovery support, and outpatient withdrawal management.

As one way to address gaps in access to services and provide the opportunity to test service codes, compensation models, and the feasibility and efficacy of building new pathways for clinical services under a universal system, OAMH launched two pilots:

- The Clinical Psychology Services pilot was launched in November 2023 to address the need for autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnostic assessments by offering families waiting for services the ability to receive these services by providers contracted by OAMH. From November 2023 to March 31, 2024, 74 clients completed assessments.
- OAMH committed \$4.5M over three years to Dalhousie University to launch the Dalhousie Centre for Psychological Health. Fully operational in September 2023, the Centre provides increased access to psychological services by providing evidence-based services to people facing significant barriers to access. The Centre also provides opportunities for clinical psychology



PhD students to gain critical skills, and better preparing the future workforce to meet population needs. Since its launch, there have been 896 appointments attended and 266 active clients.

In November 2023, amendments to the *Health Services and Insurance Act* (HSIA) were passed and then proclaimed in April 2024, which enable the Minister of Addictions and Mental Health to create new insured mental health and addiction service programs and establish compensation rates and structures for service providers delivering these programs. HSIA is a key lever in addressing the Minister's Mandate of developing a universal system where individuals have improved access to mental health and addiction services and supports.

## Financial Summary and Variance Explanation

### Departmental Expenses Summary (\$ thousands)

<b>Programs and Services</b>	<b>2023-2024 Estimate</b>	<b>2023-2024 Actuals</b>	<b>2023-2024 Variance</b>
General Administration	186	310	124
Strategic Direction and Accountability	2,894	2,334	(560)
Early Intervention Services	28,696	26,627	(2,069)
Addiction Services	52,957	56,891	3,934
Mental Health Services	222,122	229,497	7,375
<b>Total - Departmental Expenses</b>	<b>306,855</b>	<b>315,659</b>	<b>8,804</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>			
Ordinary Revenues	16,536	28,033	11,497
Fees and Other Charges	529	440	(89)
Ordinary Recoveries	5,778	5,829	51
<b>Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries</b>	<b>22,843</b>	<b>34,302</b>	<b>11,459</b>
TCA Purchase Requirements	---	---	---
<b>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</b>			
<b>Department Funded Staff</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>(1.7)</b>

#### **Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:**

The Office of Addictions and Mental Health expenses were \$8.8 million or 2.9 percent higher than estimate primarily due to \$13.0 million for healthcare wage claims and retention incentives and \$8.7 million increase for NSH operational pressures. These increases were partially offset by a \$12.9 million decrease due to implementation and hiring delays.

#### **Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:**

Ordinary Revenue was \$11.5 million over budget primarily due to Working to Improve Healthcare for Canadians Funding Agreement.

Fees and Other Charges were \$89 thousand under budget due to a reduced number of course participants.

Ordinary Recoveries were \$51 thousand over budget primarily due to federal funding received for work related to the Mass Casualty Commission.

#### **TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:**

N/A

#### **Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:**

OAMH is reporting a variance of 1.7 FTEs under budget due to temporary vacancies.

## Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011.

The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations;
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets;
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment; or,
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing.

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Office of Addictions and Mental Health:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2023-2024
The number of disclosures received	None
The number of findings of wrongdoing	None
Details of each wrongdoing (Insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	N/A
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing. (Insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	N/A