

Shaping the Future: Policing in Nova Scotia

Comprehensive Policing Review 2025



Message from the Attorney General and Minister of Justice

The events of April 18th and 19th 2020 forever changed our province, our country, and the lives of impacted family members and communities. The Mass Casualty Commission called on all of us to reflect deeply and take action. One of its clear recommendations was that Nova Scotia undertake a comprehensive review of the structure of policing, with a mandate to chart a better path forward.

In September 2023, government responded by launching a province-wide review. From the outset, we made it clear that we are committed to meaningful change. We know that policing and the people who do this critical work are essential to the safety and wellbeing of our communities. We also know there are gaps and challenges that must be addressed. In 2024 we retained Deloitte Canada to undertake an in depth analysis of the current state of policing in Nova Scotia, review best practices in Canada and across the world, consider options, and make recommendations for change.

Shaping the Future: Policing in Nova Scotia reflects the voices of thousands of Nova Scotians, including community members, police officers and leaders, municipalities, academics, and justice system partners. I want to thank everyone who shared their experiences, ideas, and hopes for the future. Your input is invaluable.

This work matters and it is only just beginning. These are complex issues with lasting impacts. Getting this right requires thoughtful, inclusive, evidence-based decision-making. I am confident that by listening to one another, and working together, our new policing framework will reflect the values of our province and provide police services that support public safety and works for all Nova Scotians today, and for generations to come.

Thank you for being part of this important journey.

A white handwritten signature on a dark blue background. The signature is fluid and cursive, starting with a large 'B' and ending with a long, sweeping horizontal line.

The Honourable Becky Druhan

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Government's public reporting on the review of policing in Nova Scotia is presented through two complementary documents, each offering distinct but essential insight. Shaping the Future captures what we heard from Nova Scotians, their concerns, expectations, and aspirations for the future of policing. The methodology of public engagement was developed by the Independent Police Review Engagement Advisory Committee, and was facilitated by trusted community partners. Deloitte has used the insights from the public engagement, a detailed analysis of the province's current policing model and a jurisdictional scan, to develop recommendations for change. That analysis is set out in the separate Deloitte Report, which is also being released publicly. Together, these two documents provide a clear and accountable record of both public input and technical advice, reflecting government's commitment to transparency and to making informed, evidence-based decisions on the vital issue of public safety.

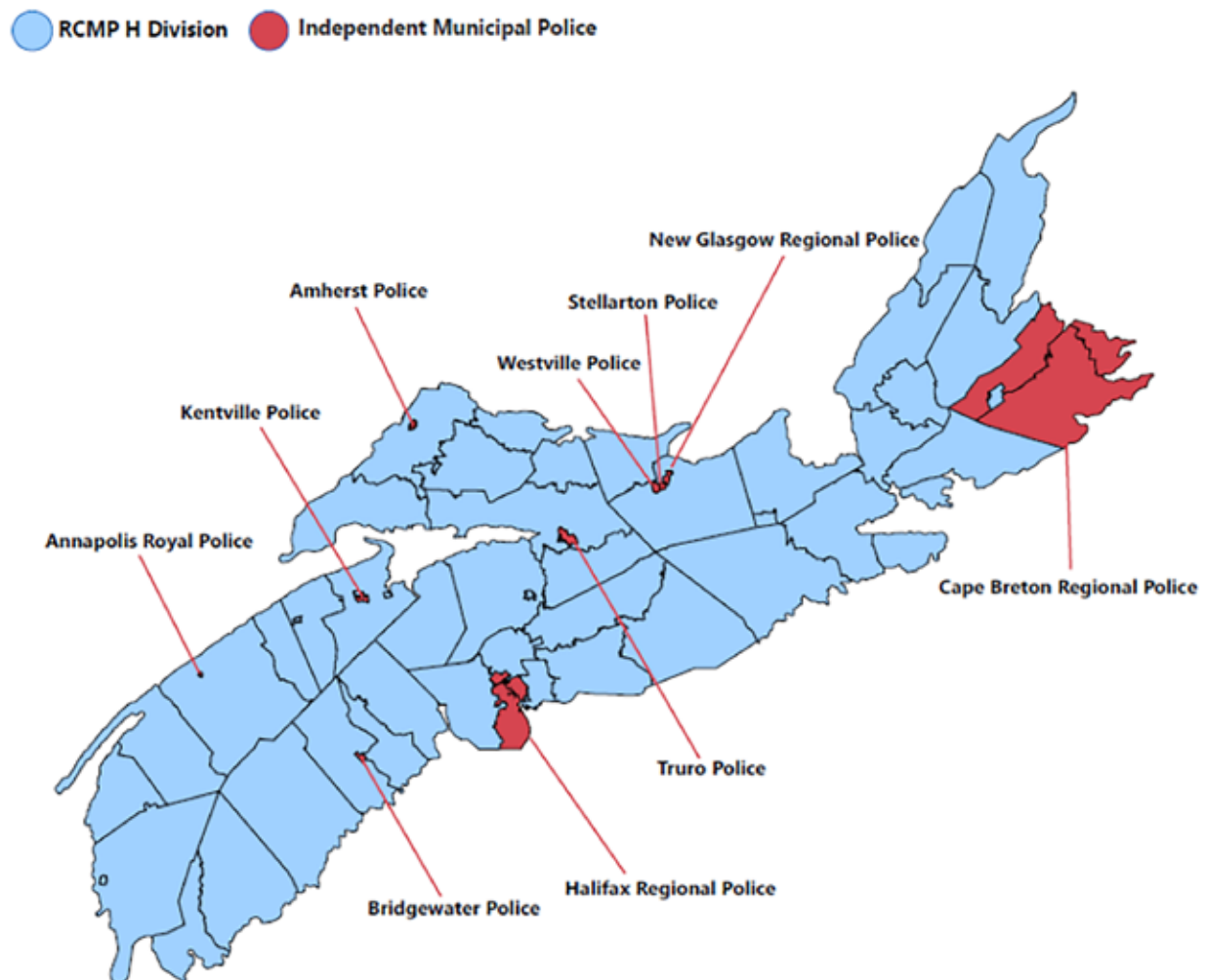
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Policing in Nova Scotia - The Current Context

Nova Scotians care deeply about policing. They expect and deserve to feel safe, respected, and supported in their communities no matter where they live. Policing in Nova Scotia involves many partners and levels of government with various responsibilities, and different channels of governance and engagement.

In Nova Scotia, communities are served by ten distinct municipal police services and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The RCMP, as the Provincial Police, provide direct policing services across the province. They also regularly assist the ten municipal police agencies by providing specialized police services.

Nova Scotia Police Agencies Boundaries



Policing Arrangements

In Nova Scotia, the *Police Act* enables delivery of police services to all the province's communities through several arrangements.

Provincial Police Service Agreement

Nova Scotia has an agreement with Public Safety Canada called the Provincial Police Service Agreement (PPSA). Under the PPSA, the RCMP functions as the Nova Scotia Provincial Police and provides policing services to 34 municipalities, districts, counties and towns. In addition, five municipalities contract directly with the Government of Canada for RCMP policing services through Municipal Police Service Agreements (MPSA).

Municipal Police Agencies

Ten municipalities have chosen to establish municipal police departments to provide crime prevention, law enforcement, assistance to victims of crime, emergency and enhanced services, and public order maintenance.

These ten distinct agencies are: Amherst, Annapolis Royal, Bridgewater, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Halifax Regional Municipality, Kentville, New Glasgow, Stellarton, Truro and Westville.

First Nations and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP)

Nova Scotia is a participant in the federal First Nations and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP) which was designed by Public Safety Canada and provides First Nations communities across Canada access to policing services that are professional, dedicated and culturally appropriate. Policing services for Nova Scotia's thirteen First Nation communities are provided through the PPSA, Community Tripartite Agreements or Community Quadripartite Agreements.

Federal Policing Program (FPP)

In addition to policing under the PPSA, MPSA, and FNIPP, the RCMP delivers the Federal Policing Program (FPP), which protects Canadians against serious domestic and international criminal threats. This includes national security risks, international organized crime, cybercrime, and border integrity. The FPP also addresses large-scale economic and financial crimes, international policing, and sensitive investigations.

Comparison of personnel and sworn officers, population served, and geographic coverage by policing services in Nova Scotia.

(Collected as part of the Nova Scotia Policing Review and validated by law enforcement and justice partners.)

Policing Services	Number of Personnel*	Number of sworn officers (full-time Equivalent)	Number of sworn officers per thousand citizens	Population Served**	Geographic Area (square km)
Amherst Police Department	47	27	2.78	9,700	12
Annapolis Royal Police Service	11	4.5	8.49	530	2
Bridgewater Police Service	41	24	2.73	8,800	14
Cape Breton Regional Police Service	268	200	1.90	105,000	2,500
Halifax Regional Police Service	779	565	2.73	206,753	274
Kentville Police Service	22	19	2.87	6,630	17
New Glasgow Regional Police Service	46	33	2.64	12,500	10
Stellarton Police Service	16	15	3.75	4,000	9
Truro Police Service	51	35	2.69	13,000	38
Westville Police Service	9	6	1.69	3,540	14
RCMP "H" Division	1,447	960	1.44	665,253	52,394
Total	2,737	1,888.5	----	----***	----

*Note: Personnel numbers include sworn officers, civilian staff, and administrative staff.

**Note: All population Statistics were sourced from data from the 2021 Census of Canada and validated with law enforcement agencies.

***Note: Due to some overlapping jurisdictions, the sum of the population served would exceed the population of Nova Scotia in 2021.

Review Timeline

For several decades, municipal, provincial and federal justice stakeholders have called for change to policing in Nova Scotia. Beginning in the late 1990s, following municipal amalgamation in several regions of the province, Nova Scotia saw numerous major reports and reviews conducted, and key decisions made regarding policing models and public safety in the province. Following the 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia, the Mass Casualty Commission provided recommendations to help keep communities safer. Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission was released and included 130 recommendations, 75 of which related directly to policing in Nova Scotia and Canada. Recommendation P67 called for a review of the structure of policing in Nova Scotia.

MARCH 2023

Mass Casualty Commission Final Report: Turning the Tide Together is released – Recommendation P.67 calls for a review of policing in Nova Scotia.

SEPTEMBER 2023

Department of Justice announces that it will conduct the Nova Scotia Policing Review. A Request for Proposals is issued for an external consultant.

MARCH 2024

Deloitte Canada is named as the successful external consultant to conduct the Nova Scotia Policing Review. Engagement Advisory Committee is announced for the engagement portion of the Review.

APRIL 2024

Nova Scotia Policing Review begins.

MAY TO JULY 2024

Engagement with justice partners is conducted, site visits and data and document review is completed.



JULY 2024

Public survey is released to the public and is open for three weeks.

SEPTEMBER 2024

Community conversations are conducted across Nova Scotia.

Directive issued to all police agencies to comply with 39 updated standards.

MARCH 2025

Data collection phase of the Nova Scotia Policing Review is completed.

JUNE 2025

Deloitte's Comprehensive Nova Scotia Policing Review Report, that includes recommendations for change, is shared with Nova Scotians.

NEXT STEPS

- Implementation of foundational improvements to make policing more effective.
- Meetings with municipalities.
- Provincial audits of the Nova Scotia Provincial Policing Standards begin.

Review Methodology

Engagement

The Review methodology allowed for engagement in meaningful discussions and encouraged a broad range of feedback. The Review Engagement Advisory Committee was instrumental in developing an engagement strategy that supported meaningful dialogue with Nova Scotians. Engagement channels included a public survey, community sessions with equity groups, including African Nova Scotians, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQIA+, newcomers, people with disabilities, religious organizations, conversations with justice partners including other government departments, and workshops with police leaders and front-line officers.



Jurisdictional Scan

The Review included an extensive jurisdictional scan that engaged police and justice officials in other provinces and internationally, to identify current best practices and emerging trends. This included analysis of policing arrangements in other Canadian cities, as well as in the United Kingdom, Finland, Ireland, and Australia. A review of technical police data and documentation was also completed.

The jurisdictional scan showed that across Canada and the world, policing is shifting to include more robust information sharing and management, better community integration into police response through layered approaches, and a more equitable approach to service delivery.

Policing Across Canada: Different Models in Every Province

While policing in Canada is governed by national laws and standards, each province or territory has developed its own model to meet local needs. These differences reflect geography, population size, crime trends, and community priorities. Here's what that looks like across the country:

Province/Territory	Model
British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island	RCMP as provincial police; First Nations policing services; municipal police services
Ontario	OPP is a standalone provincial service; cities like Toronto and Ottawa have fully independent municipal forces.
Quebec	Sûreté du Québec serves rural/small municipalities; larger cities like Montreal and Quebec City maintain their own forces.
Newfoundland and Labrador	RCMP as provincial police; The Royal Newfoundland Constabulary as provincial police.
Territories (YT, NT, NU)	RCMP is the sole service provider, working with communities to address unique social and geographic challenges.

What We Heard: Engagement Method and Themes

Public Survey

The Police Review survey was available in English and French, and technical support was made available for those with accessibility needs. The survey was promoted through a public announcement by the Government of Nova Scotia and through social media.

Over 6,700 Nova Scotians completed the survey in full and shared their unique perspectives and ideas. Respondents included:

Age	
Youth (Ages under 18)	7
Ages 18-24	345
Ages 25-34	1,083
Ages 35-44	1,355
Ages 45-54	1,268
Ages 55-64	1,323
Seniors (Ages 65 and above)	1,363
No Answer	42

Ancestry	
European Descent / White / White European Descent	1,873
Mi'kmaw/Indigenous/ Aboriginal/First Nations/Inuit	77
Identified as a member of multiple racial groups	65
Black/African Descent	62
Asian	41
Middle Eastern	16
Latin/Latina/Latino	9
Identified as a member of another racial group	9
Prefer not to disclose	4,634

Gender	
Female	3,388
Male	2,768
Prefer Not to Answer/Other	366
Transgender/Non-Binary	264

Region	
Central Zone	3,339
Northern Zone	1,447
Western Zone	1,312
Eastern Zone	599
Prefer not to disclose	89

Conversations with Justice System Partners

From May to July 2024, more than 150 individuals from justice organizations in Nova Scotia participated in engagement activities. These individuals represented:

- *Police leadership and frontline officers*
- *Police officers who identify as racialized people*
- *Police dispatch and other first responders*
- *Staff from Government of Nova Scotia departments*
- *Chief Administrative Officers from municipalities and towns*
- *Members of police advisory boards and boards of police commissioners*

Engagements included one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, and in-person site visits. These conversations offered insights into the varied challenges, opportunities, and priorities for policing in Nova Scotia from the perspective of those working within or alongside the system.

Community Engagement Sessions

In August and September of 2024, 35 community engagement sessions were held across Nova Scotia. These sessions were led by trusted community organizations and were held virtually and in person. Over 240 Nova Scotians shared their experiences and perspectives on policing. These conversations were conducted in environments that prioritized cultural safety, accessibility, and trust.

Participants reflected the diversity of Nova Scotia and included:

- *African Nova Scotian communities*
- *Indigenous communities*
- *Faith-based communities*
- *2SLGBTQIA+ and gender diverse communities*
- *Newcomer and immigrant communities*
- *Persons with disabilities*
- *Women and families*
- *Individuals connected to transition houses and related services*

The engagements offered critical insight into how policing is experienced across the province, and what meaningful change would look like from the perspective of those most impacted.

Feedback Themes

1. Visibility and Trust

What We Heard:

Participants consistently emphasized the need for more visible policing in their communities, as well as the importance of building stronger relationships between police and the communities they serve.

We also heard from participants who described experiences of discrimination or stereotyping in their interactions with police, often based on race, age, mental health, or socioeconomic status. These experiences contribute to distrust of law enforcement.

Overall, participants supported community policing approaches focused on proactive engagement and relationship-building, particularly in rural and First Nations communities. Justice partners echoed the need for relationship-based policing and a stronger community presence beyond enforcement roles.

There was also widespread support for shifting responsibility or including trained community-based professionals in responses related to mental health and substance use.

Key Feedback:

- More officers are needed from diverse backgrounds, including women, visible minorities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Through increased staffing, police visibility should include more regular community presence and participation in local events.
- Bias, stereotyping, and assumptions of criminality should be confronted and addressed.
- There should be a focus on proactive engagement outside of crisis situations to build trust and familiarity.
- Two-way communication between police and the public should be strengthened.
- Increased public awareness about the role and responsibilities of police services is required.
- Police must prioritize sustained, respectful relationship-building with communities including First Nations and rural communities.
- Response times for serious crimes should be improved.

2. Service Delivery

What We Heard:

Concerns were raised about unequal access to police services across the province, particularly between rural and urban areas. Participants highlighted inconsistent response times and service levels, often dependent on, or perceived to be dependent on, agency capacity or officer discretion. Justice system partners also identified growing strain on municipal budgets and the need for modern tools to support effective service delivery.

Key Feedback:

- More equitable police service delivery across all regions, especially in rural communities is needed.
- Inconsistent service and response standards across agencies needs to be addressed.
- Ensure adequate resources are allocated to priority issues like traffic enforcement, drug-related crime, and theft.
- The financial pressures on municipalities when planning and funding public safety services needs to be considered.
- More investment in modern policing tools, such as body-worn cameras and real-time officer tracking is needed.

3. Oversight and Accountability

What We Heard:

Many participants called for greater transparency, stronger civilian oversight, and improved governance of police services. There was a particular desire for independent mechanisms to oversee police conduct, budget decisions, and internal investigations. Actual and perceived barriers to reporting negative experiences (such as fear of retaliation) were also noted.

Justice system partners emphasized the importance of governance structures, like police advisory boards, in supporting accountability and building public trust.

Key Feedback:

- Transparency around use of force and internal investigations should be improved.
- Civilian oversight to ensure public involvement in budget decisions should be expanded.

- Police complaints processes need to be stronger and barriers to reporting misconduct should be reduced or removed.
- Police boards and commissioners must be empowered to play a meaningful role in oversight.

4. Recruitment and Training

What We Heard:

Ongoing, relevant training was identified as a priority, particularly in areas such as mental health, intimate partner violence, trauma-informed practices, cultural competency, and de-escalation. Participants and partners emphasized the need for culturally competent services and stronger internal supports for a more inclusive workforce.

Challenges with recruitment and retention were also raised, especially in rural and remote areas, along with the need for more diverse representation within police forces.

Justice partners noted that many smaller agencies face barriers in accessing high-quality training due to cost or staffing limitations.

Key Feedback:

- Standardized, province-wide training on topics like de-escalation, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed practices should be provided.
- More training is needed in mental health response, intimate partner violence, and homelessness.
- Recruitment of officers from underrepresented and underserved communities should be strengthened.
- Provide support for long-term officer placements in communities to foster trust and local knowledge.
- Access to training for small or rural services should be expanded.

5. Police Collaboration

What We Heard:

Justice and public safety partners expressed concerns about fragmented systems, limited communication, and unclear roles across agencies. Participants also highlighted confusion during crisis responses, particularly at the intersection of health, policing, and social services. There was broad support for improved information-sharing and more formal collaboration mechanisms.

Key Feedback:

- Collaboration between agencies at all levels, from front-line coordination to strategic agreements should be improved.
- The reluctance to share information across organizations must be addressed.
- A single, provincial records management system should be developed.
- Roles and responsibilities between police, health, and social services during crisis responses should be clarified.
- Enforcement gaps related to mid-level organized crime should be filled.



Deloitte's Report

Deloitte's Report reflects the voices of Nova Scotians and their expectations for a more responsive, community-focused approach. The Report offers an in-depth analysis of the current policing landscape, including structure, resourcing, governance and service delivery. It presents detailed findings, options and puts forward clear recommendations for change that aim to improve accountability, enhance public safety and ensure police services are better aligned with the needs and values of communities across the province.

Significant research has informed Deloitte's Report. In addition to the community and police stakeholder outreach conducted by the Engagement Advisory Committee, Deloitte completed a data and document review to examine detailed information related to calls for service, operating expenses, police board reports, organizational structure, personnel and sworn officers, and matters of professional conduct and complaints. They also conducted an in depth jurisdictional scan that included best practices from across Canada and around the world.

Analysis of these materials provided important insights into policing operations across the province. Notably, the findings from the data and document review closely mirrored the feedback themes and key insights gathered through the community and stakeholder engagements. The feedback reinforced the consistency and validity of the perspectives shared throughout the process.

Key Insights

➤ **Service levels are different depending on where you live**

Nova Scotia has a mix of urban and rural populations, with 58.9% of Nova Scotians living in cities and towns and 41.1% of the population living in rural areas. The review undertaken by Deloitte found that many Nova Scotians who live in rural communities do not receive the same level of service and face barriers such as longer response times and extended travel to access policing services due, in part, to understaffing.

➤ **The cost of policing is increasing**

The cost of policing services is increasing. In Nova Scotia, municipalities policed by the RCMP share the cost between the province, the municipality and the federal government. In municipalities with their own police agencies, the cost is primarily the responsibility of the municipality. The current framework through which policing is paid for in Nova Scotia requires modernization so that all communities can afford to have access to effective policing services.

➤ **Systems don't enable information sharing between police agencies**

There are currently three different records management systems in use by police services in Nova Scotia. These systems create barriers to information sharing. Other variations in technology and data capabilities among police services across the Province (such as dispatch systems, radios, and specialized services including forensics) pose additional barriers.

➤ **The nature of crime is evolving**

Street-level crime is having a significant impact on communities. Community members are also being affected by other types of crime such as fraud and cyber-crime.

➤ **Police are often called for non-police matters**

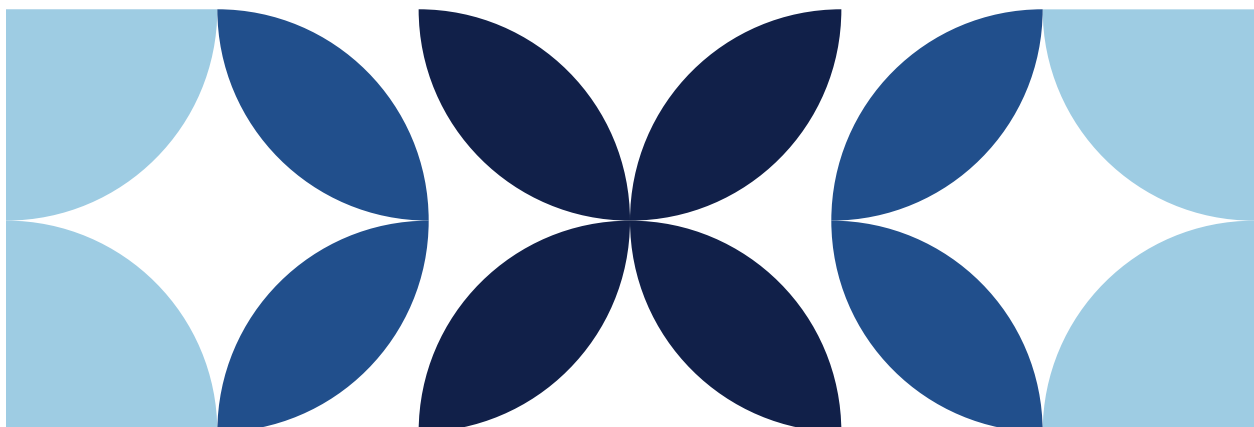
There has been an increase in the volume of non-criminal calls for service, such as those related to wellness checks, mental health, addictions, homelessness, and hospital transfers. This creates an additional strain on a system that is already taxed. In response, several police services in Nova Scotia have created new dedicated community-based units and positions.

➤ **High turnover presents a challenge for police governance bodies**

Police boards and commissions identified challenges, such as long-term member vacancies and high turnover rates. Deloitte's Report also identified opportunities to improve clarity about the role of police boards and commissions and training for new members.

➤ **The police complaints process lacks clarity**

The reporting process for police complaints and the process for resolving them lacks clarity. Data analysis found that public complaints processes are complex and may involve submitting complaints to multiple agencies and departments.



Government's Response

Nova Scotians have been clear. They want policing that is consistent, responsive, community-focused and equipped to meet the evolving needs of their communities. Deloitte's Report, informed by broad engagement and careful analysis by Deloitte, confirms that significant change is needed to meet those expectations and deliver safer communities.

We thank the more than 6,900 Nova Scotians who participated directly, as well as the hundreds of police officers, municipal leaders, and system partners who generously contributed their time, insights, and lived experiences.

The result of the Deloitte's comprehensive policing review is clear and compelling: the status quo is not an option. For too long the provincial structure and municipal decisions have resulted in under resourcing and inconsistent policing levels across the Province. Deloitte has recommended foundational changes and the expansion of the provincial police service.

We are adopting six foundational changes that will serve as the cornerstone of a renewed policing model in Nova Scotia. These changes include a new records management system, enhanced police resources, layered policing, community safety boards for civilian oversight, augmented policing standards, and a new billing system. These actions will help improve services and build a more effective and responsive approach to policing in Nova Scotia.

While Deloitte has recommended a provincial police service model, we recognize and deeply respect the proud history and contributions of municipal police services across Nova Scotia. These agencies have long played a vital role in safeguarding our communities. In recognition of this, we are offering municipalities choices that will ensure public safety is paramount as we implement this new model together. Municipalities with their own agencies may continue with those agencies if they can meet existing and augmented standards, contract with the provincial police at their own cost to receive services their agency cannot provide, or transition to the provincial police.

This vision of policing in Nova Scotia requires both provincial and municipal action. We are committed to working collaboratively with municipalities to build a stronger system of public safety where every Nova Scotian—regardless of where they live—has access to high-quality, modern policing services.

Foundational Changes

1. **Unified Records Management System:** A single, province-wide records management system for all police agencies to improve data sharing, coordination, and oversight, and support evidence-based decision-making.
2. **Enhanced Police Resourcing:** Ensuring that police services across the province are adequately resourced to increase visibility, responsiveness, and meaningful engagement with the communities they serve.
3. **Layered Policing Model:** Introducing the deployment of Community Safety Officers and Special Constables allowing for more effective responses to a range of public safety needs, while enabling sworn officers to focus on core policing duties.
4. **Establishment of Community Safety Boards:** Providing civilian oversight and governance across the full spectrum of public safety services, including law enforcement, Community Safety Officers, and Special Constables, enhancing transparency, accountability, and community trust.
5. **New Provincial Policing Standards:** Augmenting existing standards to be more prescriptive, and introducing new ones to ensure consistent, high-quality service delivery across Nova Scotia. New standards will also include training requirements for all officers in cultural sensitivity, community-specific information, and the experiences of vulnerable populations
6. **A New Billing Framework:** We will implement a revised billing framework for municipalities served by the RCMP. The new framework will promote financial sustainability, transparency, and enable reinvestment into local, community-driven safety initiatives.

These foundational actions mark the beginning of a transformation in how policing is delivered in Nova Scotia. The work ahead will take time, thoughtful planning, and strong partnerships, but the direction is clear. Our goal is a modern, accountable, community-focused policing system that reflects the values and needs of all Nova Scotians.

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest thanks to the officers and policing staff who work to keep our Province safe every single day. Their dedication, professionalism, and courage are the foundation of public safety in Nova Scotia. We value their efforts, their commitment to service, and the personal sacrifices they make in the line of duty. A key outcome of this Review will be ensuring that they have the resources, supports, and systems they need to carry out these challenging roles successfully and safely.

We are also sincerely grateful to the thousands of Nova Scotians who took the time to share their perspectives through the online survey and community engagement sessions. Their voices have helped shape this important conversation and will continue to guide the work ahead.

Thanks are also extended to the members of the Engagement Advisory Committee, which helped to shape the breadth, scope and areas of focus for the Review:

Lindell Smith, Halifax

Hayley Crichton, North Grand Pre

Anise McKay, Halifax

Roz Penfound, Halifax

Wayn Hamilton, Halifax

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Rob Morris, Halifax

Shelly Martin, Millbrook First Nation

Juanita Spencer, Halifax

Colleen Belle, Halifax

Chief Dave MacNeil, Town of Truro

Wayne Talbott, Town of Truro

RCMP Superintendent Dan Morrow,
Southwest Nova Scotia

Sheri Taylor, Port Hawkesbury

Finally, we thank the policing leaders and justice system partners whose input, ideas, and insights have been instrumental throughout this process. Their experience and knowledge added depth and value to the Review, and their ongoing engagement will be vital as we chart our path forward.