

Newfoundland & Labrador Association of  
**Social Workers**

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Pre-Budget Submission

January 13, 2012

Presented to: Honorable Tom Marshall

Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

## **Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW)**

NLASW is the regulatory body and professional association for over 1400 professional social workers in this province. The vision of the NLASW is excellence in social work.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the profession of social work is diverse. Social workers practice within hospitals, community care, long term care homes, adult and youth corrections, child welfare, addictions, mental health, community based centres, government departments and universities. Social workers are also self-employed in private practice and consulting businesses. As a profession, social work is committed to improving the well-being of individuals, families and communities through intervention and counselling, social policy analysis, collaboration, research, health promotion and community capacity building.

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of social work regulation in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in the pursuit of excellence in social work the NLASW is actively engaged in social policy analysis. In this submission, it is our intention to provide input and recommendations for the 2012 provincial budget.

### **Profession of Social Work Priorities for Funding**

While it is recognized that government has a fiscal and social responsibility to the people of NL, finding the balance between debt reduction, economic growth, and social development is essential to moving forward to creating a province where people want to live and work.

As a profession, social workers support the social policy directions taken by government over the past several years. These policy initiatives have included the development of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy, Long Term Care and Community*

*Supports Services Strategy, Early Childhood Learning Strategy, and the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.* Most recently, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services engaged the public in consultations to inform the *10 Year Child Care Strategy*. Collectively, these strategies address important and significant issues across the life span.

The NLASW participated in the public consultation processes for the above noted provincial strategies and comprehensive written submissions have been put forward to the respective government departments. The NLASW recommends that government move forward on all of the recommendations outlined in these written documents to ensure that policies, programs and services meet the needs of children, individuals, families and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and that the financial and human resources are put in place. Horizontal policy analysis is also necessary. It is important that these strategies support and intersect with one another to ensure effective and timely service delivery across the continuum.

For purposes of this pre-budget submission, key recommendations from the above noted strategy submissions are captured in the budgetary priorities for 2012. This brief addresses the following areas:

- 1. Canadian Social Transfer**
- 2. Poverty Reduction**
- 3. Long Term Care and Community Support Services**
- 4. Early Childhood Learning and Child Care**
- 5. Early Intervention and Prevention for Children**

## **Canadian Social Transfer**

Social workers bring a unique perspective and understanding to the issues that impact on the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. Referred

to as the social determinants of health, these areas include education, early years, employment security, income and distribution, food security, housing, and the social safety net to name a few.

In recent months, emphasis has been placed on the renewal of the Canadian Health Transfer (CHT). While it is crucial that our universal health care system be sustained and enhanced to ensure that all Canadians have access to timely, efficient, and appropriate health care services, it is also important and critical that premiers continue to work on the renewal of the Canadian Social Transfer (CST) which will expire in 2014. The NLASW joins the Canadian Association of Social Workers in their concern of the lack of public dialogue and discourse on the renewal of the CST.

Research demonstrates that investments in social programming and early intervention and prevention initiatives significantly impacts on the health and well being of individuals and reduces overall direct health care costs. The NLASW joins the Canadian Association of Social Workers in calling on the Council of the Federation to identify key principles and values that would govern a new agreement with the federal government of which the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador can take a lead role. It is crucial that Canada maintain its commitment to social development and that social service delivery throughout the country be maintained and enhanced through the renewal of the CST.

## Poverty Reduction

The NLASW has been actively engaged in each phase of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* and commends Government on actions taken to reduce poverty in this province. Poverty is not only a social issue. Poverty is a health issue as well. Research demonstrates that individuals who live in poverty experience more health problems than those who don't live in or experience poverty. In fact, a 2011 report from the National Council of Welfare demonstrates that "about 20% of health care spending in Canada can be attributed to socio-economic factors such as income-related

disparities.” This is concerning given that the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen.

A 2011 report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development found that in OECD countries, “the average income of the richest 10% is now about nine times that of the poorest 10%”. In Canada, the average income of the top earners in Canada is 10 times higher than the lowest income earners. It is recommended that government continue to focus on this economic gap within the poverty reduction strategy over the next few years. Is the economic gap widening in Newfoundland and Labrador? What policies, including tax policies, need to be changed or put in place to ensure that this gap doesn’t continue to widen? Are there areas or regions in the province where this gap is more pronounced? These questions warrant consideration as we move forward with the strategy.

While the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is on the right track to reducing, alleviating and preventing poverty in this province, the social work profession encourages government to focus on several areas over the next year:

- Continue to evaluate and index the minimum wage to ensure that individuals receive an appropriate and competitive living wage
- Increase investments in social housing to ensure that low income seniors and individuals with complex needs throughout NL have access to safe and affordable housing
- Enhance access to social programming and supports through continued investments (e.g., raising income level thresholds for accessing services and supports)
- Continue to work with industry partners to ensure a strong and vibrant workforce

### **Long Term Care and Community Support Services**

Social workers continue to support the implementation of a *Long Term Care and*

*Community Support Services Strategy.* In 2010, the NLASW provided input and recommendations into the development of this strategy based on the expertise and knowledge of the social work profession. As we move into 2012, it is recommended that government consider the following key priority areas:

- Increase the ceiling threshold on funding for individuals who require home care services
- Expand the number of portable subsidies for personal care homes
- Expand the number of respite programs and protective care residencies throughout the province and ensure that convalescence services are available for seniors
- Increase access to more affordable assisted living
- Heightened focus on health promotion, early intervention and prevention and primary health care
- Review of medication coverage policies in long term care to ensure consistency and access
- Funding for additional social work positions to address the increasing complexity of client needs

### **Early Childhood Learning and Child Care**

Currently, access to affordable, high quality child care is limited for many children and families, provincially and nationally. A report from Campaign 2000 (2010) indicates that only 20% of children between 0-5 years of age in Canada have access to regulated child care spaces, of which the quality is not always optimal. This lack of affordable, accessible, and high quality regulated child care, is concerning to social workers. While the number of regulated child care spaces has increased in this province, the supply is not meeting the demand.

According to the World Health Organization (2008), “investments in the early

years, provides one of the greatest potentials to reduce health inequities within a generation.” Access to affordable, high quality child care is also a factor that directly impacts on a parent’s ability to return and/or remain in the workforce. It is therefore important that government continue to enhance and expand access to regulated child care through the 10 year CYFS Child Care Strategy that will meet the needs of children and families now and into the future. Recommendations to consider include:

- Advance the regulation of wages for early child care educators
- Increase the number of regulated child care spaces to meet the needs of children, families and communities throughout the province
- Integration of child care with the kindergarten year
- Lower access fees for child care programming
- Increase in child care subsidies and thresholds

### **Early Intervention and Prevention for Children**

Over the last year, government has moved forward with a commitment to build two youth treatment centres for the province. These are important and vital investments in meeting the complex needs of youth experiencing addictions and/or mental health issues.

In addition to funding for mental health and addictions services, investments and enhancements in early intervention and prevention services for children and families are needed (i.e., children’s mental health, family services, community based programming). As one option, the NLASW recommends that government explore the benefits of having social workers in the primary, elementary, junior and high school systems. It is also recommended that government renew its’ commitment to primary health care to ensure that children and their families have access to the right services, at the right time, and in the right place.

## Summary

The NLASW is encouraged by policy directions taken by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador over the past few years in the areas of poverty reduction, mental health and addictions, long-term care, and early learning and child care. It is by building on our strong foundation that we will continue on the path to a prosperous and healthy province. As a profession, social workers look forward to continuing to work with government in informing policy and program development in meeting the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

## References

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