



**Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers**

**Pre-Budget Submission**

**January 2009**

**Presented to: Honourable Jerome Kennedy,  
Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board**

## **Pre-Budget Consultation 2009**

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

*NLASW is the professional association and regulatory body for over 1200 professional social workers in this province. The mandate is to ensure excellence in social work. 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.*

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

The designation of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2008 as a “Have Province” is an historical achievement for our province. While it is recognized that we have achieved this status in a time of economic turmoil, we have a responsibility as a province to continue to address the needs of the citizens of our population who require additional support and to invest in social programs and policies.

The 2008 budget made significant investments to poverty reduction, education, and youth programming. As a profession, social workers recommend that government continue to make investments in social policy at the same level of importance as economic planning and development in Budget 2009.

The following are priority issues identified by the NLASW Board of Directors.

- 1) Long Term Care and Community Support Services**
- 2) Child, Youth and Family Services & Human Resource Planning**
- 3) Poverty Reduction**

## **1) Long Term Care and Community Support Services:**

Newfoundland and Labrador has a growing senior's population. There are several challenges that need to be addressed to meet the needs of seniors and families in this province. These challenges include, but are not limited to a) lack of appropriate and affordable home support services; and b) lack of appropriate long term care services.

It is recognized that there is a lack of appropriate community/home support services for seniors in this province. In some instances, this often means that seniors are prematurely admitted to long term care facilities away from their families and supportive networks. Seniors wanting to remain independent and to live in their own homes have few options available to them. Issues impacting on the delivery of home support services include lack of available trained workers, pay inequity of workers, and financial eligibility for services.

There is also concern about the structure of, and services within, many of the long term care facilities. Many of these facilities have 4 bedroom wards that leave individuals with limited privacy. It has also been recognized by social workers, that long term care facilities are seeing an increase in complex, challenging, and psychiatric issues that cannot be managed appropriately without the necessary supports. Having these residents share rooms with other cognitively well residents can have a negative impact. There are also limited protective care services in the province. Often individuals needing protective care have to move outside of their communities to access this service. This can leave individuals with fragmented family supports. Social workers also are concerned that the \$125 comfort allowance provided to seniors in long term care is not sufficient to meet the needs of these seniors.

To address these concerns, the NLASW recommends that government:

- Enhance funding for home support services for seniors and re-evaluate the eligibility criteria. It is imperative that seniors wanting to remain in their own

homes are given the necessary supports within a healthy aging framework. Investments are needed to ensure that those providing home support services are paid appropriately and that individuals with the knowledge and skill are recruited and retained. It is also recommended that government provide longer grace periods to have financial assessments for long term care completed. This would give seniors more flexibility in moving back to the community without financial hardship.

- Enhance funding for long term care facilities to ensure that the structure of these facilities are appropriate, that essential services are provided, and that the necessary equipment is available. There also is a need for heightened mental health and rehabilitation services for seniors in long term care.
- Increase the comfort allowance for individuals residing in long term care facilities.
- Support innovative programming at the community level (e.g. adult day program at St. Lukes). It is important that government invest in the expansion of these programs and community planning.

*The implementation of these recommendations will help our province ensure that seniors have access to the best and most appropriate services at the appropriate time and place. This is also in keeping with primary health care and a population health approach.*

## **2) Child, Youth and Family Services & Human Resources Planning**

Social work recruitment and retention; particularly in the area of Child, Youth and Family Services, continues to be an issue in this province. In many regions of the province, the vacancy rates are quite alarming. Yet, the demand for services continues to increase. In addition, social workers are seeing more complex cases that require dedicated investments and support.

The recruitment and retention of social workers requires comprehensive human resource strategies to ensure that social workers receive sufficient compensation, have access to ongoing professional development and training, and are provided with enhanced support services ranging from clinical supervision, social work assistants and administrative support. It is important that government continue to enhance investments in the implementation of these strategies. The Memorial University School of Social Work is also responding to the demand for more social workers by increasing the number of students enrolled into the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Program from 45 – 60 in 2009.

It also is crucial that government continue to make investments in CYFS that focus on prevention and early intervention components of the program. This will allow social workers to respond effectively to the needs of families along the “continuum of services ranging from prevention to crisis intervention” (Minister’s Advisory Committee, 2005, p. 29). This should also include enhanced community awareness of the CYFS program. Protecting children is everyone’s responsibility.

### **3) Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Poverty continues to impact on the lives of children, families and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. According to Campaign 2000 (2007), NL still has a child poverty rate of 10.8%. The reality is that children continue to live in poverty when families are impoverished.

According to the Canadian Council for Policy Alternatives (2006), 49% of Canadians agree that they are always just a missed pay cheque or two away from being poor. The economic gap between the rich and poor continues to increase. According to the Canadian Public Health Association (2008), this gap in Canada, a country viewed for its’ prosperity and wealth, has grown by 37% from 1980 – 2005. The World Health Organization identifies this economic gap as a significant health concern.

The NLASW recognizes and commends government on actions taken through the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy to reduce poverty in this province, however additional and on-going investments are necessary to prevent, reduce, and eliminate poverty. The NLASW recommends that government:

- Maintain a strong commitment to the development of social policies and programs with the same level of importance as economic development.
- Continue to address the “economic gap” – why is this happening and what policies are needed to address this widening gap.
- Increase and enhance funding for literacy, early childhood learning and quality, affordable, accessible childcare, and social housing.
- Maintain and enhance commitment to primary health care. A poverty reduction strategy can only be successful if all of the social determinants of health are addressed.
- Increase investments in northern and rural communities.
- Enhance and increase investments in early intervention and prevention programming. People need to feel included and supported by their communities.

It is important that government continue to review tax policy from a poverty reduction lens; as tax policy is social policy. Research shows that lower personal income taxes benefit those with high incomes more than those individuals within a low income tax bracket. Broad reductions in taxes leave less funding for social programming. We have already witnessed this at the Federal level with reductions in the GST. Research also shows that countries with higher taxes experience less poverty.

Community based research is also a crucial component of a poverty reduction strategy. While quantitative data is important (i.e., the number of people who leave income support), the qualitative piece needs to be there as well. It is important that government explore how people’s lives have improved through the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, what barriers might still exist, and how these barriers can be addressed. People often make reference to doing a “social audit” and this is an important part of the evaluation process that needs to be captured. This evaluation piece is key to moving the strategy forward

## Summary:

The NLASW is encouraged by many of the directions taken by government in the development of social policies (poverty reduction strategy, youth retention and attraction strategy, healthy aging strategy, etc). It is important to highlight that these policies, initiatives and programs are crucial to building vibrant communities and in recruiting and retaining our workforce to stay in NL. Therefore significant funding to address poverty, to strengthen the Child, Youth and Family Services program and engage in comprehensive human resource planning for social workers, and to enhance funding for long term care and community support services must be priorities for the 2009 provincial budget in paving the way to a vibrant and healthy province.

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