

February 14, 2023

The Honourable Tim Houston, Premier of Nova Scotia  
The Honourable Michelle Thompson, Minister of Health and Wellness

Email: [Premier@novascotia.ca](mailto:Premier@novascotia.ca), [Health.Minister@novascotia.ca](mailto:Health.Minister@novascotia.ca)

Dear Premier Houston and Minister Thompson,

**Re: Responding to Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health in Nova Scotia**

February 13-17 is Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week in Canada. As community partners championing positive Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health (GSRH) across the life course for all in Nova Scotia, we are calling on the provincial government, in collaboration with community partners, to develop a comprehensive and equity-based strategy on GSRH in the province.

Below, we have outlined recommended actions for advancing GSRH for all in Nova Scotia:

- 1. Develop a comprehensive and equity-based provincial GSRH strategy, in collaboration with community partners:**
  - a. Community representation at internal provincial working group on gender, sexual and reproductive health
  - b. Funding to develop a GSRH strategy with a dedicated staff member
    - i. Review of previous consultations with community partners
    - ii. Look to other jurisdictions for models of best practice
    - iii. Complete a cost analysis
    - iv. Timeline and plan of action to implement provincial strategy
  - c. Some key topics to be addressed by a strategy
    - i. Sexual health education curriculum
    - ii. Access to sexual health testing, treatment, and prevention
    - iii. Universal access to contraceptives, PrEP, and other GSRH medications
    - iv. Rural access to clinical services
    - v. Culturally competent clinical services for people of diverse genders and sexualities, newcomers, and Black, Indigenous, and people of colour
- 2. Increase equitable access to clinical and other GSRH services:**
  - a. Increased clinical hours throughout the province
  - b. Improved funding for sexual health centres to provide more sexual health education, counseling, systems navigation, programming, and outreach
  - c. Examining the distribution of care among Public Health, NSHA, and nonprofits
  - d. Equitable compensation for healthcare and service providers doing GSRH work

### 3. Increased coordination with GSRH service providers:

- a. Increased transparency and timely updates for community-based organizations under the GSRH files, including regular scheduled meetings for consultation
- b. Government organizational chart to improve clarity, efficiency, and access for community-based organizations
- c. Funding that is sustainable, strategic, and timely to support GSRH service organizations to promote the health of Nova Scotians
- d. Increased promotion of provincial GSRH services
- e. A dedicated GSRH collective communication hub modeled on Engage4Health

Over a decade ago, the WHO called for broad sexual health promotion programming as not only an important health initiative in its own right, but as a fundamental aspect of human rights ([WHO, 2010](#)). The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has leading authoritative commentary that, under international law, sexual and reproductive health is a human rights issue ([The United Nations, 2016](#)). Many other national (e.g. [Action Canada](#), [SIECCAN](#), [Government of Canada](#)) organizations have come to the same conclusion. It's time we finally heed that call. In particular, investing in preventive 'upstream' healthcare ensures that limited resources can be allocated efficiently, so that our strained emergency services are not overburdened.

With the province entering a period of health care recovery and renewal with the *Action for Health* strategic plan, now is a critical time to begin working on developing a provincial GSRH strategy, and we are open to genuine and meaningful collaboration to make this happen. **We respectfully request a meeting with you in the very near future.** Thank you for considering these recommended actions, and we look forward to working with you to advance and strengthen Nova Scotia's response to gender, sexual and reproductive health.

Sincerely yours,

Stella Samuels, MA  
Executive Director, Sexual Health Nova Scotia

Davy Rose  
Intensive Case Manager, Stepping Stone Association

Julie Thomas  
Executive Director, Healing Our Nations

Chris Aucoin, MEd  
Executive Director, AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

Shane Pope, BSW, SWC  
Health & Wellness Coordinator for 2SGBQ+ Men's Programs, AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

Matthew Numer, PhD  
Professor, Health Promotion  
Director, Sexual Health and Gender Lab

Val Webber, PhD, MPH  
Postdoctoral Fellow, Sexual Health and Gender Lab

Zachariah Crawford  
Research Associate, Sexual Health and Gender Lab

Richard Elliott, LLM, LLB  
Health and human rights lawyer

Julie Veinot, BAH, MA, BEd  
Executive Director, South Shore Sexual Health

Abbey Ferguson  
Executive Director, Halifax Sexual Health Centre

cc: Honourable Allan MacMaster, Deputy Premier of Nova Scotia  
Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. Shelley Deeks, Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health, Province of Nova Scotia  
Honourable Zach Churchill, Leader, Liberal Party of Nova Scotia  
Honourable Claudia Chender, Leader, Nova Scotia New Democratic Party

**Media contacts:**

Stella Samuels  
Email: [executivedirector@shns.ca](mailto:executivedirector@shns.ca)

Davy Rose  
Email: [case.manager.steppingstonens@gmail.com](mailto:case.manager.steppingstonens@gmail.com)