

Building Inclusive, Green, Thriving Communities

Nova Scotia Alternative Budget 2017





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Introduction: Think Again

SINCE 2000, THE Nova Scotia office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has produced annual alternative budgets. Alternative budgets make a persuasive case for how we can raise and allocate public funds to create a community that is socially and economically just, as well as environmentally sustainable. This year's alternative budget provides an update on numbers and adjusted for any major changes, however it is not a full new budget. Readers are encouraged to consult the *Nova Scotia Alternative Budget 2016* for more detailed background and explanations for the policy recommendations.¹

Our alternative budgets are designed to show people how government budgeting works, that alternatives do exist, and they can help shape those alternatives.

Alternative Budgets are collaborative endeavours that involve stakeholders from many sectors of our province, including non-profit direct service organizations, advocacy organizations, as well as academics with a variety of expertise. Those who participate collectively develop a set of fiscal policy measures as part of a workable budgetary framework that takes into consideration the political and economic realities of the province.

When agreeing on spending priorities and revenue proposals, the working group considers the multiple roles of the alternative budget: to spark debate, to provide progressive organizations and individuals with tools to

advocate for short-term and long-term social, economic, and political alternatives, and to underline the implications of budget decisions for individuals, families and communities.

Our current government claims that it can make no new significant public expenditures because we are living beyond our means, and thus any investment must come at the cost of something else. This zero-sum argument is merely a tactic to avoid governing in the public interest, which would mean alienating the elites who have controlled the political agenda for far too long.

‘Living within our means’ suggests that no matter what the social and economic context, our government will not borrow money/run a deficit or add to the debt. This has meant that for the last 3 years the government has argued it can only cut expenditures and it must have a plan to pay down the debt. In contrast, the Alternative Budget holds the government to account for how well it helps us to live and thrive, which requires us to consider the means by which it does so within a fiscally sustainable framework. The government is only now spending a little in the run up to an election; this is not good enough.

Here is what we urge Nova Scotians to tell the government.

THINK AGAIN.

The government position on budgeting is short-sighted.

The alternative budget is framed to show choices that are the best ones for the public interest, those that benefit the many and not the few, in the short and long term, and to show that costs can be fairly shared through a progressive income tax system based on ability to pay.

Fiscal Choices, Economic Opportunities

NOVA SCOTIA'S ECONOMIC progress is stalled under the McNeil government; GDP growth has been dismal, averaging well less than one percent annually.² Despite large projects such as the Maritime Link, the Convention Centre, and the Halifax Shipyards (all initiated by the previous government), employment has fallen³ while wages struggle to keep up with inflation.⁴ These province-wide outcomes obscure significantly worse conditions for marginalized Nova Scotians such as Aboriginals, for whom the 2016 unemployment rate was a staggering 18.6%.⁵ The most recent data on the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia showed that it was almost twice as high as for persons without disabilities (16% vs 9%) and even higher for women with disabilities (19% vs 8%).⁶ Similar conditions exist for African Nova Scotians (14.5% vs 9.9% in 2011).⁷ It is important to also consider regional rates because outside Halifax, unemployment remained stubbornly high throughout 2016 at 14.7% in Cape Breton and 10.9% in Southern Nova Scotia⁸. Even in Halifax, youth in particular are struggling with an annual unemployment rate of 13.2% in 2016.⁹

Many factors contribute to this poor economic performance, but the government must accept some responsibility. Provincial government expenditures are only one quarter of Nova Scotia's GDP, and at a time when the economy could use a lift, the government imposes tight limits on spending in their misguided pursuit of a zero deficit.

The budget is now forecast to have no deficit, but at substantial cost and sacrifice. While over one in five Nova Scotian children lives in family poverty,¹⁰ welfare incomes remain thousands of dollars below the poverty line.¹¹ A shortage of affordable housing persists in Halifax and many rural Nova Scotians face severe challenges to maintain their homes.¹² Undergraduate university tuition, the second highest in the country (\$7,218 per year),¹³ has risen significantly (31% since 2011), saddling students with heavy debt loads. The average student debt owed at graduation is the highest in the country, with an average debt of \$39,600 when graduating from a bachelor's degree in 2010.¹⁴ There are few affordable child care options for families living in Nova Scotia.¹⁵ Labour contracts forced upon nurses, teachers, and other public servants contain substantial real wage cuts, while the dispute with the teachers has exposed the consequences of inadequate investment in our schools. The government takes credit for the zero deficit, but should take the blame for the real burden that is borne by the less-advantaged, families, and working Nova Scotians.

The government argues that such sacrifice is necessary to improve the province's fiscal health; however, Nova Scotia's finances are already healthy. At 37%, the debt-to-GDP ratio has fallen significantly since its peak of 47.2% in 1999, and is lower than in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario.¹⁶ With continuing low interest rates, Nova Scotia's debt servicing costs as a percentage of GDP have fallen dramatically from a high of over 5% in 1995 to just 2% today.¹⁷ Government debt is not a significant burden on Nova Scotia's economy. It will continue to decline as long as the growth rate of the debt is less than the GDP growth rate.

To that end, the Ivany target of 30% Debt to GDP (by 2024) is not justified by either theory or evidence; using this measure as one indicating a fiscally sustainable approach could be disastrous for the province. Here is why: There are two ways to bring down this ratio, one is to stimulate growth and the other is to cut the debt, both requiring running significant surpluses. Instead of trying to reach this goal, the government should opt to stabilize the current debt to GDP ratio, which would allow it to adjust all current expenditures for inflation as a baseline, as well as increase investments in public services by an additional \$400 million per year. This, however, would still mean our province is only muddling by and not investing as it should to respect short, medium and long term priorities.

THINK AGAIN.

The government's lack of significant investment is the problem not the Debt to GDP ratio.

The latest job vacancy data reveal that there are 8.6 unemployed people in Nova Scotia for every job vacancy (if we include discouraged workers, who have given up actively searching for employment, this figure would be even worse).¹⁸ This strongly suggests that the province's poor employment performance is chiefly the result of insufficient labour demand. Nova Scotians want to work, but instead of investing in programs to strengthen communities and create jobs, the government reduces real expenditure to pursue its austerity agenda.¹⁹

It is possible to maintain the province's fiscally sustainable approach and address some of the most pressing problems facing Nova Scotia, while creating good jobs.

The NSAB is committed to reducing inequality through a more progressive tax system and by fully taxing capital gains. This increased revenue will help fund programs to reduce poverty in our province, and along with a carbon tax, help the province transition to a greener economy. The NSAB's base case for spending includes inflationary increase for all public sector workers plus it boosts programme spending by \$795 million. This additional expenditure allows the province to make significant investments that benefit all Nova Scotians: strengthen education, expand primary health care, reduce poverty, build affordable housing and provide additional housing supports, as well as put us on a path to universal life-long learning beginning in early childhood. With interest rates at historic lows, the cost of making these important investments is minimal.

Our proposal forecasts minor short-term deficits over the next 3 years. Our debt-to-GDP ratio will increase marginally in the first year, before stabilizing at current levels. The changes proposed in the NSAB are fiscally and socially responsible and promote inclusive growth. Supporting local community enterprises such as co-operatives anchors economic development to local control and decision-making, revitalizing people's engagement in their communities.

The NSAB makes investments that, while directly improving the lives of Nova Scotians, will also provide a significant employment boost.

First, our proposals will remove crucial impediments to labour force participation. Investments in early childhood education enable women with children to enter the labour market and expand their hours of employment. Similarly, the enhancement to continuing care eases the burden to provide unpaid home care, increasing these caregivers' labour market possibilities (Nova Scotia has the second-highest rate of home care provision in the country²⁰). Furthermore, investments to remove barriers to persons with disabil-

TABLE 1 Nova Scotia Department of Finance Base Case (March 2016) (\$thousands)

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Revenue	\$10,191,399	\$10,373,500	\$10,617,400	\$10,814,900
Programme Spending	\$9,360,789	\$9,317,500	\$9,491,500	\$9,656,100
Debt Service	\$829,835	\$853,200	\$870,500	\$836,800
Budget Balance (Deficit)/Surplus	\$12,085	\$208,000	\$79,000	\$132,500
Debt to GDP	37.25%	36.20%	35.10%	34.10%
Real Growth Rate	1.30%			

TABLE 2 Nova Scotia Alternative Budget 2017 Base (\$thousands)

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Revenues Base	\$10,191,399		
Net APB Revenue Measures	\$482,930	\$497,997	\$515,427
Add Revenue due to Nominal Growth	\$274,532	\$746,882	\$1,447,840
Total	\$10,948,861	\$11,436,278	\$12,154,666
Expenditures			
Spending Base	\$10,190,624		
Inflationary Adjustment	\$197,698	\$596,930	\$1,207,958
Net APB Programme Measures	\$774,765	\$789,795	\$805,591
Total	\$11,163,087	\$11,577,349	\$12,204,173

ities, and others including African Nova Scotians and Aboriginal peoples, expands access to under-utilized sources of human skills. NSAB also enhances productivity by investing in training including to reskill workers in environmentally unsustainable sectors and train workers for green jobs, but also to assist in upgrading and adult education and make post-secondary education more affordable (or free).

Second, the NSAB's investments in labour-intensive, community-based occupations such as early-childhood education, health care, post-secondary education, and arts and culture all create significantly more jobs per dollar than industries such as construction and resource extraction which rely heavily on imported capital.²¹ The jobs stimulus from the NSAB's investment will result in the creation of thousands of jobs; the \$84 million investment in early learning and child care would create up to 3900 jobs alone.²² Based on Quebec's experience, the increased income taxes from the employment

TABLE 3 NSAB 2017 Summary

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Total Net Revenue	\$10,948,861	\$11,436,278	\$12,154,666
Total Net Expenditure	\$11,163,087	\$11,577,349	\$12,204,173
Budget Balance (Deficit)/Surplus	-\$214,226	-\$141,071	-\$49,507
Debt to GDP	37.19%	36.94%	36.34%
Real Growth Rate	1.22%	1.18%	1.50%
Inflation Rate	1.94%	1.94%	2.00%

generated for workers and parents could more than pay for the expenditure.²³ The NSAB invests to create good jobs in the public sector in order to provide services Nova Scotians need.

Furthermore, the NSAB's progressive taxation and redistribution measures direct more funds to people who spend a higher proportion of their incomes in their local communities, giving a boost to local businesses and employment.

Finally, the NSAB enhances the social safety net, including to decrease or eliminate student debt, and to encourage entrepreneurship and new business formation.²⁴

Overall, the NSAB's investments will significantly enhance employment in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia Alternative Budget Actions Summary: Inclusive and Green

A GOVERNMENT BUDGET is the starkest reflection of a government's vision of our obligations to each other, based on who benefits, and who pays the costs. The alternative budget's vision is a province of people who are willing to pool our resources to support our government's ability to act in the public interest.

This year's alternative budget invests to build strong connections within and across communities in our province, to create healthy, safe, thriving communities. The NSAB 2017 prioritizes economic opportunities that build economic security and protect the most vulnerable. It shows that we can prioritize reducing GHG emissions, build an inclusive labour market and address inequities, which will lay the foundation we need for a province where everyone not only survives, but also thrives. Addressing health, family, employment and income inequities that are felt most acutely by women, by people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, and racialized minorities (African Nova Scotians, visible minority, new immigrants) will fuel our economy and benefit our entire society.

We have plenty of tools at our disposal to ensure that all citizens of our province live well. If we invest in preventative care and use social and economic policy to address poverty and social exclusion, we can lift a significant portion of the financial burden imposed by high rates of chronic illness. Combining progressive social and economic policies with a move towards interdisciplinary community-based care provision will free up resources, allowing for a higher standard of health care across the board. Nova Scotians deserve a robust and reliable public health care system that does not penalize people for being sick by imposing fees, e.g. for pharmacare or an ambulance, that goes beyond medical curative care to include mental health, as well as oral health, and care across the lifespan including supporting our seniors to appropriate continuing care.

The NSAB 2017 takes social and economic realities into account in its spending and taxation decisions, while seeking to redress imbalances and create conditions for everyone to fully participate in the social, culture, economic life of our province. Applying a feminist intersectional lens²⁵ to spending and taxation reminds us that women benefit less from tax cuts and new tax credits because fewer women pay taxes, fewer women are in high income brackets, fewer women access non-refundable tax credits and tax deductions (RESPs, RRSP, union dues, CPP). We also know that cuts to public services disproportionately harm women because of the gender division of labour, women are relied on to fill in gaps especially in elder and child caregiving. In addition, because of their different realities related to health and family, women require disproportionately more of these services. The current government's attack on public sector workers through wage freezes and 'doing more with less' approach also affect women more than men because they dominate this sector. Conversely, significant investments in this sector would not only benefit women, but would create the foundation for a stronger, more inclusive, green society for everyone to enjoy.

TABLE 4 NSAB 2017 Actions Summary

(\$Millions)	Investment	Revenue
Active, Accessible and Sustainable Transportation		
Establish Nova Scotia Transportation Corporation	1	
Improve active transportation	6.5	
Improve transit and interregional transportation for smaller population centres	7	
Enhance transit in larger centres	10	
Extend and sustain door-to-door accessible transportation	4	
Adult Learning		
Fund Adult Learner's Week, implement regulations	3	
Expand existing programs	7	
Invest in diverse programs to meet learning needs	4	
Reduce financial barriers to attendees	6	
Agriculture and Food Security		
Preserve existing and develop new agricultural land	5	
Invest in Health Promoting Schools program	0.2	
Invest in local infrastructure for small and medium-size enterprises	2	
Invest in accessible community-based food infrastructure A53	1	
Support nutrition and food skills education	3.4	
Arts, Culture and Heritage		
Fund artist-run centres, new programs, and facilities	3	
Increase grants provided by Arts Nova Scotia	1.5	
Funding for festivals	2	
Commit to multi-year upstart funding	3	
Reinstate Film and Creative Nova Scotia, develop sectoral strategy	0.5	
Invest in libraries, heritage and cultural, facilities and programming	6	
Child Care		
Build a public early learning and child care system	84	
Community Social Infrastructure		
Develop a Women's Equality Action Plan	0.2	
Core-and seed funding for non-profits/advocacy organizations to address race, gender, LGBTQI inequities	6.5	
Justice for sex workers	1.2	
Invest community-based programs for Persons with Disabilities	22	
Implement Incentives, Enforce, Monitor Accessibility Legislation	7	

(\$Millions)	Investment	Revenue
Economic Development and Labour		
Create Cooperative Investment Corporation	14	
Invest in Community Economic Development Agency and Strategy	2	
Set up a Start-Up Nova Scotia Equity Fund for Youth and Youth Jobs Strategy	4.5	
Close Nova Scotia Business Inc.	-37.7	
Strengthen Labour Standards, Health and Safety Regulations	0.24	
Improve enforcement of pay equity	0.16	
Labour Market Support for African Nova Scotians	1.5	
Labour Market Support to support Aboriginal Organizations	1.5	
Support for Women's Employment Equity (including in apprenticeship)	3.2	
Address workplace sexual harassment	0.5	
Incentives to support workplace accommodations for persons with disabilities	5	
Environment, Energy and Climate Change		
Improve environmental protection, regulation	5	
Implement carbon tax of \$10/tonne		153.5
Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund	60	
Green Jobs Transition Fund	16.5	
Carbon Tax Benefit	77	
Fisheries and Forestry		
Support for post-harvest production	0.82	
Support for marketing and distribution within Nova Scotia	1.16	
Fund training opportunities under the Fish Harvester Organizations Support Act	2	
Fully implement Dolle-Lahey including increase regulatory capacity	2	
Invest in Sustainable Forestry	2.8	
Health Care		
Improve access to community-based primary care (nurse practitioners, midwives)	56.63	
Invest in continuing care	25.5	
Address gaps in mental health and addictions services	9.2	
Extend oral health care for children to age 18 and hire Chief Dental Officer	10.3	
Housing and Homelessness		
Expand Housing Support Worker Investment	1.25	
Second Stage Transitional Housing in Rural NS	0.3	
Non-profit Housing Providers Additional Funding	1.8	
Build Affordable, non-profit housing	30	
Other Housing Support Programs	3	
Co-Op Housing for artists and students	1.2	

(\$Millions)	Investment	Revenue
Rent supplements targeted to non-profit providers	2	
Housing First Teams	2.11	
Immigration		
Increase staff and resources of Nova Scotia Office of Immigration	3.7	
Enhance Settlement services	7.9	
Additional Support for Immigration Services (ISANS)	0.2	
Dedicate Funding for Education and Outreach	0.16	
Protect Temporary Foreign Workers	0.36	
Meet the needs of Refugees and Refugee Claimants	1.14	
Make Income Assistance available to claimants	0.6	
Invest in housing for claimants, offer access to shelter subsidies	0.86	
Invest in refugee health care	0.15	
Core Funding for the Halifax Refugee Clinic	0.25	
Expand legal aid to include immigration and refugee (see Justice)		
Justice and Crime Prevention		
Expand Drug Treatment Court to 3 other sites	1.5	
Invest in alternative and restorative justice programs	2.5	
Invest in community and prison-based offender reintegration initiatives	2	
Expand Family Violence Court to other sites	1.2	
Increase investment (by 20%) in Legal Aid Services (and expand to cover immigration)	5.05	
Expand Mental Health Court to other sites	1.2	
Low-Income Supports		
Increase income assistance rates/combine into household rate	20	
Decrease earnings claw-back for ESIA (Allowing recipients to keep \$500/month and the remaining 70%)	16	
Increase the Poverty Reduction Credit	32.5	
Enhance Nova Scotia Child Benefit	6	
Tackle energy poverty through Universal Service Program	35	
Employment Support Services (10% increase)	0.87	
Reduce Heating Assistance Rebate Program	-6	
Carbon Tax Benefit (see Environment Section)		
Post-Secondary Education		
Reduce university tuition fees by 10%	34.5	
Eliminate NSCC tuition fees	30	
Convert Nova Scotia Student Loans to grants	8.6	
Increase university funding for core expenditures on teaching and research by 3%	12.5	

(\$Millions)	Investment	Revenue
Provide health coverage to international students upon their arrival in NS	0.5	
Create a dedicated Sexual Assault Post-Secondary Support Resource Fund	2	
Public Education		
Hire 80 guidance counsellors	5.2	
Hire 40 additional speech language pathologists	3.12	
Hire 40 additional English language support	2.1	
Invest in classroom supplies (\$500 x9300 teachers)	4.6	
Hire 400 additional EPA	12.8	
Hire 500 additional teachers to cover class size caps jr & sr high classes)	28.00	
Invest in learning aids and expand learning centres	2.7	
Hire 200 additional admin support (photocopying, calling attendance, data entry, etc) \$35,000 starting	7	
Hire 80 additional school psychologists	4	
Taxation		
Increase tax rate for top two income brackets by 2% each		46.12
Fully tax capital gains		61.97
Shift federal tax deductions and credits to refundable provincial tax credits		221.34
Begin to Phase-Out of the Municipal Flow-Through (municipalities retain revenue)		-20
Cancel Your Energy Rebate Program		104.5
Phase-out Pharmacare Premiums, Fees, and Copayments		-62
Eliminate Ambulance Fees		-10
Cancel Post-Secondary Tuition & Education Tax Credit		8
Carbon Tax and Carbon Tax Benefit (see Environment Section)		
Water		
Consultation to establish a Water Act	0.285	
Establish a fund to increase and maintain public fountains	1.75	
NSAB Net Expenditure	795.265	
NSAB Net Revenue		503.43

Fair Taxation to Fund Universal Programs

“UNIVERSAL PROGRAMS CREATE stronger communities, shared connections and collective identities. They reduce inequality between classes, generations, family types, cultural groups, and regions.”²⁶

If we want to attract more people to live here or entice them to stay we need to offer a caring, inclusive, and prosperous, green communities across the province. The Nova Scotia Alternative Budget (NSAB) 2017 prioritizes investment in high quality, universal public services. Universal services are not one size fits all; Universal public services are most effective when they are funded to ensure everyone has access to equitable services, preserve human dignity, promote social and economic inclusion, all while ensuring self-determination including of our First Nations. Universal public services must be funded via progressive taxation to ensure equity; everyone pays their fair share of program costs based on their contribution to the tax base. Flat rate user fees or premiums penalize those least able to pay.

A just, healthy, and environmentally sustainable society has a price but it is worth the investment, and the time to invest is now. Bringing in the revenue to fund our future is a matter of sharpening the tools we already have. Nova Scotia’s tax system needs reform: a few simple changes can improve life in this province for everyone. The NSAB tax reforms would go a long way towards addressing inequality in the province, while providing the revenue

to improve the physical and social infrastructure that build our economic security, support our development, care for us and keep us connected.

In Nova Scotia, as in the rest of Canada, our taxes are a mix of progressive income taxes and regressive sales and property taxes and user fees. A longer term goal for reforming the tax system should create a simpler, more efficient system (fewer deductions and credits) and move away from regressive taxes (see for example our proposal for municipal income tax).²⁷ This year's alternative budget broadens the tax base by disallowing any exemption for capital gains. NSAB 2017 also increases taxes slightly on the top tax brackets. The most significant change is to remove the federal tax deductions from the provincial calculation of taxable income. The federal deductions can be added to the list of provincial tax credits, if useful. As it stands the non-refundable credits and deductions are of zero value to those who don't pay sufficient tax and provide great advantage to the richest. Our tax proposals will require the most fortunate among us to pay more, and while some may be concerned that this will push them to leave our province, research suggests that these increases pose minimal risk of "tax flight."²⁸ We also begin to address the most regressive user fees including premiums and copayments for pharmacare and ambulance fees. Our tax proposals include a small cut to the municipal flow-through of property tax revenue, thus enabling municipalities to keep this revenue for local priorities, as a first step to moving away from property tax revenue.

NSAB 2017 Taxation Actions

- Raise taxes on the top two income brackets (by 2% on income from \$93,000 to \$150,000 and by 2% on income above \$150 bringing rates to 19.5% and 23%) **(\$46.12 million)**
- Fully tax capital gains **(\$61.97 million)**
- Shift federal tax deductions to refundable tax credits at the provincial level **(\$221.34 million)**
- Begin to Phase-Out of the Municipal Flow-Through (property tax revenue from municipal governments for provincial services) **(-\$20 million)**
- Cancel and Redirect Your Energy Rebate Program **(\$104.5 million)**
- Phase-out Pharmacare Premiums, Fees, and Copayments **(-\$62 million)**

- Eliminate Ambulance Fees (**-\$10 million**)
- Cancel Post-Secondary Tuition & Education Tax Credit (**\$8 million**)
- Institute a Carbon Tax and a Carbon Tax Benefit (see Environment section)

Community Economic Development and an Inclusive Labour Market

A KEY STEP to achieve our goals of inclusive growth is to democratize the controls that the wealthiest Nova Scotians have over how our wealth is both generated and allocated. The NSAB 2017 invests to support the growth of alternative business models that have a proven track-record to create quality jobs, revitalize regional economies, and promote inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic development²⁹, including employee-owned and controlled businesses such as worker co-operatives. By shifting economic development away from investor-driven corporate business models, the NSAB prioritizes social enterprises, co-operatives and other community-based organizations that focus on creating economic opportunities that improve the social and environmental conditions of local communities.

Developing an economy is not just about prioritizing one kind of business model; it requires a co-ordinated strategy that brings together all stakeholders including government, organized labour, small, medium and large for-profit business, co-ops, social movements, non-profits, the unemployed, municipalities, and more. By focusing only on the for-profit traditional business model side of the equation, the provincial government has failed to create a multi-faceted approach.

The NSAB would eliminate the Department of Business and establish the Department of Community Economic Development and Labour. Through democratic economic planning, support for cooperatives, and social enterprise, building on the success of CEDIFs, the NSAB 2017 gives economic power to the people and allows all Nova Scotians to have a say in our economy.

NSAB 2017 invests to eliminate barriers for groups who face discrimination. In Nova Scotia, there is an Affirmative Action policy that applies to the public service to “achieve equitable representation of four designated, under-represented groups: Aboriginal People; Persons with Disabilities; African Nova Scotians and other racially visible people; and women in occupations or positions where they are under-represented.”³⁰ This policy needs to be strengthened within the public sector, but also extended beyond this sector. In 2011, the labour force participation rate for Nova Scotia was 74.9 per cent. However, the rate for visible minorities was 66.6 per cent (lower than 2006, the last time the data were collected). Those of Aboriginal identity and the Black population are 67.5% and 70.3% respectively. The lowest rate is for Aboriginals on reserves at 53%.³¹ While women’s participation rates rival that of men, women face additional barriers related to undervaluing of the work they do, occupational segregation and pay inequity (all of which is worse for those with intersecting barriers such as women with disabilities who are African Nova Scotian). Women in Nova Scotia fill only 32% of senior management positions;³² 2 out of 3 of all part time jobs; and a lower percentage of women are employed full time (75% compared to 88% of men).³³ Women fill 85% of positions in health occupations; 81% of administrative roles; 72% education jobs and government services; down to a low of 5% of trades, transport and equipment.³⁴ Youth also face high unemployment and thus we focus on developing a youth employment strategy, this and other actions and investments aim to decrease barriers to an inclusive, fair labour market, which helps improve productivity in our province.

NSAB 2017 Community Economic Development Actions

- Redirect funding away from corporate-driven to community economic development by eliminating NSBI (**-\$37.7 million**) and the Nova Scotia Jobs Fund (**-\$35.24 million**)
- Create Community Economic Development Agency and strategy (**\$2 million**) and invests **\$14 million** annually for the new Cooperative

Investment Corporation to expand the cooperative economy across Nova Scotia

- Strengthen the provincial procurement policy with specific targets for local sourcing, living wages, and develop an implementation plan to enable our public sector institutions to meet the targets
- Invest **\$2 million** to advance the implementation of the Social Enterprise Strategy
- Develop a Youth Employment Strategy and set up a Start-Up Nova Scotia Equity Fund for Youth (SUNSEFY) (**\$4.5 million**) to start-ups that advance rural economic development, especially those which target underemployed/unemployed groups and contribute to keeping youth in Nova Scotia.
- Invest in our social and physical infrastructure, including ELCC and affordable housing, creates jobs, invest in our people to improve productivity, and grow the economy (see other sections of the NSAB)

NSAB 2017 Inclusive Labour Market Actions

- Undertake a full review to overhaul the Labour Standards Code, and the Trade Union Act, to respond to changing workplaces and ensure protection of the most vulnerable workers, while investing (**\$240,000**) to hire additional Health and Safety inspectors
- Re-establish the Pay Equity Commission, extend pay equity to the private sector and hire more regulators to enforce it (**\$160,000**)
- Invest **\$1.5 million** in targeted labour market support, including additional funding to organizations such as the Black Business Initiative
- Invest **\$1.5 million** for labour market support for Aboriginal people
- Support for Women's Employment Equity (including in apprenticeship) (**\$3.2 million**)
- Address workplace sexual harassment with focus on traditional male-dominated workplaces (**\$500,000**)
- Invest to decrease barriers for persons with disabilities who require workplace accommodations (**\$5 million**)

Welcoming, Healthy, Safe Communities

TOGETHER WE CAN create the foundations for welcoming, healthy and safe communities. To do so requires investing in universal programs and services that build collective strength. In order to foster strong ties in our communities, NSAB 2017 invests to create a robust social safety net and ensures that we all have access to quality health care, and adequate housing. We also need to rethink our approaches to justice, immigration, and culture. The NSAB values the work and experiences of people on the ground, to improve access to justice and address the barriers that mean too many are unable to contribute fully to the health of our communities. The NSAB also strengthens the ties between us to share and preserve our diverse stories through investments in artistic expression and heritage work.

Community Social Infrastructure

At present, women's centres and other organizations which address inequities are stretched thin without core-funding to address the needs and realities of the diversity of those who face inequities and marginalization. The NSAB thus allocates funding to develop a Women's Equality Action plan and to strengthen the voices of women in public policy; provide additional resources for women's centres and organizations; create quality jobs and

educational opportunities; address violence against women; and otherwise to improve the status of women in Nova Scotia. The Women's Equality Action plan needs to focus on what we can do to reduce and eventually eliminate the barriers preventing women from fully participating in our society and our economy. The NSAB 2017 also invests in community-based initiatives to address the violence, unsafe working conditions and social stigma against sex workers.

Nova Scotia has long had a significantly higher rate of disability than other Canadian provinces³⁵ and should be a leader in promoting the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, this has not been the case; persons with disability in Nova Scotia face higher unemployment, lower labour market participation, and higher rates of poverty.³⁶ Since 2013, the Services for Persons with Disability program provides a range of residential and vocational supports but those have been inadequate (long waiting lists) and inappropriate (over-reliance on large institutions and sheltered day programs). More recently, the government introduced legislation on accessibility, which is still being revised to respond to the criticisms that it did not go far enough to remove barriers for people with disabilities.

The often intersecting barriers result in social and economic marginalization and exclusion because of gender, 'race', ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social locations and systems of inequality.³⁷ The marginalization is evident when considering the lower levels of participation in the labour market, higher levels of poverty and struggles to receive quality public services that respond to the diversity of needs, whether in the public education system, or health care or employment services.

NSAB 2017 Addressing Inequities, Building Community Social Infrastructure Actions

- Develop a Women's Equality Action Plan (**\$200,000**)
- Core-Funding for Non-profits Working to Address Race, Gender, LG-BTQI Inequities (**\$6.5 million**)
- Allocate resources (**\$1.2 million**) to protect the rights, and health and safety of sex workers including additional funding for programs and services to non-governmental support organizations across the province

- Invest **\$12 million** to support transformation of residential and vocational support programs
- Invest an additional **\$10 million** to reduce wait lists for SPD programs and services
- Implement incentives, and allocate funding to enforce and monitor Accessibility legislation (**\$7 million**)

Low-Income Supports

The support system of last resort in Nova Scotia is the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) program. It does not provide enough income support and the system itself is broken. It stigmatizes; it robs recipients of their dignity.³⁸ It is mired in bureaucracy and based on exclusion, on ensuring that those in need receive the minimal amount of support after producing mounds of evidence.³⁹ It forces people to rely on charities to help meet their basic needs.

NSAB 2017 ensures that, over several years of incremental increases, the basic welfare income support to a level at least equivalent to the Market Basket Measure threshold. The NSAB begins to move to a single assistance envelope based on income, adjusted for household size, and involves fewer bureaucratic hoops. The household rates will also be adjusted to provide additional support for persons with disabilities and chronic health issues, as well as for those trying to make a transition to viable employment. Beyond providing sufficient income support, the NSAB's vision is to extend and strengthen universal programs by removing more of the basic needs (child care, health care, adult learning, post-secondary education) from market-driven goods into public, quality affordable (if not free) and accessible services for everyone.

NSAB 2017 Low-Income Supports

- Invest **\$20 million** to increase income assistance and combine the “personal” and “shelter” allowances (providing maximum shelter allowance to all eligible households)
- Invest **\$16 million** to decrease the earnings claw-back allowing ESIA benefits to retain the first \$500/month of earnings plus 70% of the remainder (an increase from \$150 and 30% respectively). The high-

er exemption/retention rate helps those able to work to remain in or re-enter the work force. Also, the earnings exemption/retention is averaged over a longer period to account for temporary work, which is important for those who cannot sustain long-term employment (for example, persons with health or episodic disability issues). An additional **\$870,000** is invested in employment supports to aid this transition (along with investments in other sections in the budget including child care, pharmacare, post-secondary education, adult learning and public transit and transportation)

- Invest **\$32.5 million** to increase the Poverty Reduction Credit to immediately increase welfare incomes for those most in need – single recipients with no dependents
- Provide an additional **\$6 million** to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit to increase the benefit amount and lower the income eligibility threshold
- Tackle energy poverty by setting up a Universal Service Program⁴⁰ (**\$35 million**) designed to limit total home energy costs to 6% of income to cover heat and baseload electricity for low income households and ensure no Nova Scotian is denied heat or electricity due to inadequate income. This investment also reduces the need for the Heating Assistance Rebate Program by at least half (**-\$6 million**).

Housing and Homelessness

In Nova Scotia, thousands are without any place to call their own, living on the streets, couch surfing or staying in shelters. Others are in accommodations that they cannot afford, or are not safe nor adequate nor properly maintained.⁴¹ Other individuals and families who *are* housed spend an increasing proportion of their income on rent (including heat), leaving little for food. Data from the Halifax Census Metropolitan Area show that 25.4% of all households spend 30% or more of household income on housing and 11.8% (one in eight) spend 50% or more on housing costs.⁴²

Housing challenges differ depending on whether you live in Halifax or larger towns versus rural communities. There are more homeowners in rural Nova Scotia but many struggle to maintain their homes.⁴³ Homelessness is often less visible in these areas.⁴⁴ The lack of affordable housing options is exacerbated by the need for affordable transportation. But urban or rural,

housing insecurity leads to increased stress, morbidity, mortality, social exclusion, illness, and disease.⁴⁵

NSAB 2017 Housing and Homelessness Actions

The NSAB ensures that Nova Scotia receives all the federal funding it is entitled to under a recent budget announcement and commits to matching every dollar. Funding for all housing commitments must be approved by Housing Nova Scotia, which currently has no Board of Directors.

- Immediately appoints Housing Nova Scotia Board of Directors to provide strategic direction and due diligence, which must include full accounting reports outlining specific investments to fulfill its mandate tied to specific targets including to reduce housing poverty and eliminate homelessness. The Board of Directors must include representation from the non-profit (supportive) housing providers.
- Build affordable, non-profit housing (**\$30 million**)
- Secure the \$400,000 grant for the HRM Housing Support Workers and invests an additional \$50,000 to that initiative and an additional \$800,000 to support hiring 13 new housing support workers outside of HRM and in existing housing-related non-profit organizations (total of **\$1.25 million**). Some positions would be dedicated to supporting off-reserve Aboriginal people and African Nova Scotians.
- Invest **\$300,000** in a fund to retrofit housing units with enhanced security measures to serve as transitional housing in rural Nova Scotia.
- Funding of **\$1.8 million** to non-profit organizations operating transitional and permanent housing including supportive housing to ensure residents have appropriate supports that may include programming and/or staff.
- Increase funding by **\$3 million** to existing housing programs including Home Ownership and Repairs, and Public Housing Subsidies.
- Invest **\$1.2 million** for Co-Op Housing specifically targeted to artists and students.
- Invest **\$2 million** for rent supplements targeted to non-profit (supportive) housing providers allowing as many as 500 more units to be subsidized by up to \$300/month each.

- Provide core funding for the next five years to resources and support Housing First teams to function in Halifax and Cape Breton, with plans for expansion (**\$2.11 million**).

Immigration

The province has to do more than merely ask for immigrants to come, to create jobs, and to save the economy. It will have to invest in them too.⁴⁶ At the same time, greater attention must be paid to those currently in the province. The province must invest in immigration as a strategy of social justice, including to ensure that its policies are more gender-balanced as current economic stream tends to favour male applicants.⁴⁷ As an economic strategy, immigration is taking the best and brightest from poorer regions of the world to offset the lack of investment and training in Nova Scotians.

NSAB 2017 Immigrants, Refugees, Settlement and Retention Actions

- Increase the staff and resources of the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration including funding an independent evaluation of the new nominee program (**\$3.9 million**)
- Expand Settlement Services to all newcomers regardless of their status or where they live in the province — including to Temporary Foreign Workers, international students, and accompanying spouses — to include language proficiency, social integration, and labour market readiness (**\$7.9 million**)
- Invest in public outreach and education concerning the benefits of immigration and for employers to transition more workers to permanent status (**\$160,000**)
- Proactively investigate employers who are suspected, reported, or found to be in violation of the conditions for temporary migrant labour, including live-in caregivers and seasonal agricultural worker (**\$360,000** to hire five investigation officers)
- Better meet the needs of refugee claimants to support 100 refugee families who were under private sponsorship (**\$1.14 million**)

- Remove eligibility and waiting period barriers for claimants to receive income assistance (**\$600,000**)
- Invest **\$860,000** in housing for refugee claimants, providing safe shelter and offering access to a shelter allowance (similar to that received by other individuals who are able to work).
- Invest in Refugee Health Clinic to assist in expansion of services (**\$230,000**)
- Core funding to the Halifax Refugee Clinic for legal representation (**\$170,000**), as well as provide additional support for immigration related issues via Nova Scotia Legal Aid (see Justice section)

Arts, Culture and Heritage

NSAB 2017 invests in arts and culture by creating new programs and by enhancing existing programs to better meet the needs of communities. In addition NSAB invests in heritage programming, which covers libraries and museums, as well programs specifically designed to promote African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaq, and Acadian culture and history. Libraries, museums, and cultural interpretation centres in Nova Scotia serve as important gathering places in our communities. They help us reflect on our shared history, and to consider how our past continues to shape our present. The better our understanding of the particular challenges faced in Nova Scotia's marginalized communities, the better equipped we will be to develop policy to support community development.

NSAB 2017 Arts, Culture and Heritage Actions

- Establish new multi-year funding for start-up costs for new artist-run centres: **\$3 million**
- Fund new facilities and technology for artist-run centres: **\$3 million**
- Increase budget for arts and culture grants by **\$1.5 million**
- Develop multi-year funding for festivals: **\$2 million**
- Restore funding to Film and Creative Nova Scotia and begin consultation process on rebuilding the film industry: **\$500,000**

- Invest in heritage facilities and programming: **\$6 million**

Active, Accessible and Sustainable Transportation

Expenditures on transportation in Nova Scotia are mostly road-related. In 2002, the direct and indirect or invisible costs of car-dependent transportation in Nova Scotia were “more than \$6.4 billion annually”, more for transportation than for food or housing.⁴⁸ Indirect costs of cars include the time we spend buying, selling, and servicing them, insuring them and dealing with insurance claims; the cost of land for roads and parking; the costs of building and repairing roads, of policing them, and of keeping them clear of ice and snow. Car ownership is unequal across income groups and between generations, and about 30% of us don’t drive.⁴⁹ Finding a job is difficult without a car. Seniors, women, youth, and the disabled are the most likely to feel the inconvenience, even the danger, of being without a car.

Transportation accounts for 38% of our energy use⁵⁰ and 26% of our greenhouse gases (GHG).⁵¹ The provincial government’s 2013 sustainable transportation strategy avoided a serious response to the problem. Nor did it challenge plans for expanding costly road and related infrastructure, which reflect our transportation budget priorities. They lock us into unsustainable and inequitable transportation options for decades to come.⁵²

To address its transportation challenges, Nova Scotia needs two plans: a long-term multi-sectoral plan and a 10-year multi-modal transportation plan. The multi-sectoral plan should be grounded on our dispersed and highly valued settlement pattern, encouraging decentralization of economic activities and the re-development of villages, towns, and cities as more compact communities. The transportation plan should enable access to the centre of communities by foot or by bicycle; and for those living in more dispersed population areas, by fixed-route transit. Door-to-door accessible transportation should be available for those who need it. Nova Scotians should be able to travel between communities using a convenient and reliable inter-community public transit system, minimizing their dependence on private automobiles.

NSAB 2017 Active, Accessible and Sustainable Transportation Actions

- Invest **\$4 million** to develop a Nova Scotia Transportation Corporation (NSTC) responsible for: creating a 10-year provincial multi-modal sustainable transportation plan; participating in development of a provincial multi sectoral plan; marketing transit; professional training; (education to encourage a shift to public transit; professional) and support for appropriate transportation planning in small population centres.
- Invest **\$6.5 million** for active transportation – walking and biking for everyday transportation needs. This could, for example, help pedestrianize community cores, widen sidewalks, acquire right-of-ways and land for foot and bike paths, and build protected bike lanes.
- Invest **\$7 million** to move from grant-dependent programs for smaller population centres to predictable, criteria-based and systematic accessible transit and transportation (funding for fixed-route accessible transit where potential ridership can support a defined proportion of the cost, this proportion based on both population and geographic coverage.)
- For larger population centres, invest **\$10 million** in transit, including support for creating a Halifax urban transportation commission (HUTC), continued replacement of older buses with ALF buses, increasing geographic coverage, and needs analysis to determine service improvements to encourage a shift from cars to transit.
- Invest **\$4 million** for door-to-door accessible transportation throughout Nova Scotia for those with physical and cognitive handicaps that preclude their use of fixed-route accessible public transit.
- Reduce spending on new roads and highways to support sustainable and equitable transit and transportation. Cancelling the Bayer's Road widening could, for example, save at least \$16 million.

Health Care

While health care has taken a greater *percentage* of provincial budget spending in recent years, this comes as the result of lower growth in other non-

health care spending, and a decrease in the percentage of provincial health care expenses covered by the federal government, as well as sharp spikes in technological and other health care costs that had to be covered by the province. This trend will likely continue due to the Nova Scotia government's decision to negotiate a bilateral agreement with the federal government instead of standing together with the other provinces and territories for a new National Health Accord. The previous Health Accord included annual increases of 6%, but Nova Scotia accepted a deal that guarantees increases tied to GDP but guarantees an escalator clause of just 3% annually with some targeted funding for home care and mental health. This new funding formula locks the province into Canada Health Transfer increases which will fail to keep pace with what is needed to maintain current service levels.⁵³ The Nova Scotia government in particular should have held out for funding based on need rather than on a per capita basis. Nova Scotians disproportionately suffer from chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, arthritis, and mental illness. Chronic disease is the single largest cause for hospitalization and accounts for 75% of all deaths in the province.⁵⁴ This creates a lower quality of life, lower productivity, and results in higher health care costs. About 60% of our health care budget is consumed by chronic diseases, 40% of which are estimated to be preventable.⁵⁵ Negotiating a Health Accord which tied funding increases to population, demographics and need would help the Nova Scotia government address these issues.

NSAB 2017 Health Care Actions

Improve access to community-based Primary Care

- Hire and integrate 100 nurse practitioners into hospitals, health centres and long-term care facilities and increase funding for, and enrolment in, Nurse Practitioner Training programs: **\$15.3 million**
- Engage other Atlantic Provinces and the federal government to develop a plan for the creation of a midwifery training program in the region and invest **\$825,000** to hire 11 midwives to ensure regional coverage and sustainable practice numbers across the province.
- Eliminate ambulance fees: **(reduction in revenue \$10 million)**

- Provide core funding for Community Health Centres currently established in Nova Scotia represented by the Nova Scotia Federation of Community Health Centres by investing **\$500,000.00**.
- Create a five year plan to establish 10 new community-governed-not-for-profit community health centres and dedicate **\$40 million** in one-time infrastructure and start-up funding.

Expand universal, timely access to care

- Merge the four existing pharmacare plans into one plan and begin to harmonize the eligibility criteria and formularies, and remove fees and premiums (**Savings on administration, reduction in revenue \$62 million**)
- Create a provincial wait times strategy to optimize operating room use, correctly prioritize patients, and set performance targets: **\$100,000**
- Extend oral health care for children to age 18 (from 14) and expand coverage for all children, create focal point for future action in this area by hiring a Chief Dental Officer: **\$10.3 million**

Invest in Continuing Care

- Create a provincial fund to improve recruitment, retention and training to increase staffing levels for long term care facilities and home care: **\$15 million (and increase funding by \$10 million per year for 5 years)**
- Make family and resident councils mandatory and invest in them, requiring and supporting them in each licensed nursing home: **\$500,000**.
- Double funding for palliative care strategy: **\$1 million**
- Increase funding for respite Caregivers to fund 300 more caregivers and provide an addition \$50 per month per beneficiary: **\$2.8 million**
- Restore funding to long term care facilities cut in 2016 provincial budget: **\$5.7 million**

Address gaps in Mental Health and Addictions services

- Continue the provincial mental health and addictions strategy but double the initial funding: **\$5.2 million**

- Double the funding for peer support development: **\$1 million**
- Change community grants program to a core funding support program for community agencies: **\$2 million**
- Establish a fund to support workplace mental health programs to help implement the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety: **\$1 million**

Justice and Crime Prevention

A complete rethink in our approach to justice is necessary. Traditional approaches to justice have proven to be particularly ineffective for dealing with chronic offenders suffering from addictions and mental health issues or turning to crime for economic survival. The province is commended for opening alternative courts, such as the Domestic Violence Court in Sydney, and Mental Health Court in Halifax, as well as the Court Monitored drug treatment program. These court systems are modeled to promote health and healing and are recognized as being successful alternative approaches to the traditional court system for individuals who have complex issues. The alternative budget invests to sustain those programs and expand them to other sites in the province.

The NSAB values the work and experiences of people on the ground, to help improve access to justice and address the barriers that ensure that too many of us are unable to contribute fully to the health of our communities. The expansion of the current restorative justice programs as well as programs such as In My Own Voice, Leave Out Violence (LOVE) and Cease-Fire, would be an investment in non-profits that currently run successful but under-resourced community justice programs.

NSAB 2017 Justice System Actions

- Expands Drug Treatment Court to 3 additional sites (**\$1.5 million**)
- Invests **\$2.5 million** in alternative justice programs, allocated on evidence-based best practices for crime prevention initiatives, and governed by quality standards. This will contribute to the expansion of Restorative Justice for adult offenders across the province.

- Invests an additional **\$2 million** into community and prison-based offender reintegration initiatives and in particular those serving populations that are over-represented in the criminal justice system: African Nova Scotians and First Nations. Initiatives addressing employment, education and housing are critical as part of prevention and lowering recidivism.
- Expands Family Violence Court to two additional sites (**\$1.2 million**)
- Invest in Nova Scotia Legal Aid services to expand, including to cover immigration matters (**\$5.05 million**)
- Expands Mental Health court to additional sites (**\$1.2 million**)
- Investments in other sections of the NSAB for affordable housing, poverty reduction and life-long learning and child care, also have implications for crime prevention.

Life-Long Learning

TO PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONAL equity, our spending priorities are responsive to the needs of citizens across the life cycle. Significant investments in health care support elderly access to the care they need in their home, or as close to home as possible. The NSAB 2017 also ensures that children in our province receive the care they deserve in their early years, have access to quality, publicly funded education as they grow, and can take advantage of opportunities to continue learning and developing as adults.

Early Learning and Child Care

Learning is a lifelong process that occurs in school, in the home, at work and within the community. Early investments in children are critical to creating a foundation for learning. Building a universal, public Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system helps further the education and development that parents are providing at home. It requires shifting away from the current market-based, patchwork approach, which results in high fees, scarcity of spaces, and undervalued Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), most of whom are women.⁵⁶ A coordinated *system* of ELCC creates jobs; fosters labour market participation and a skilled workforce; increases productivity, GDP and tax revenue; reduces poverty and income inequality; supports child early childhood development and social inclusion; advances women's equality; and addresses population decline.⁵⁷ It can meet the diverse needs of chil-

dren, and support parents, especially women, who are in the paid labour force, studying or participating in community life.

The NSAB 2017 begins incremental investments to build an ELCC system adequately funded to ensure that it pays living wages to its educators, ensures quality, and caps parent fees, where in parents contribute no more than 20% of the costs, and it is free for families with net incomes below \$30,000.

NSAB 2017 Early Learning and Child Care Actions

- In recognition that ELCC is a social service, not a business, the NSAB ends existing subsidies to for-profit operators and re-invests these resources in the developing public system. This will eventually phase out for-profit providers, particularly the growing for-profit child care chains.
- In close consultation with the child care community (ECEs, child care advocacy organizations, feminist organizations, labour unions, human rights groups, aboriginal communities and researchers), the NSAB an ELCC Action Plan that identifies clear goals, targets, and timelines for developing a system.
- Children with disabilities should have access to the same programs and services to which all children are entitled. **\$1 million** is dedicated to funding supports for inclusion of children with diverse needs in early learning and care settings. This can be invested in staff training, equipment and space modifications, and additional staff.
- By international standards, the minimum target for annual expenditure on ELCC should be 1% of GDP. Nova Scotia currently spends only about 0.37%. Under a planned investment approach, the NSAB begins with an increase of \$84 million on ELCC for 2017–18. Incremental increases follow in subsequent years as the ELCC Action Plan is completed and implemented in stages.

Public Education: Primary to Grade 12

Nova Scotian families deserve a strong public education system. To ensure that our students are treated equitably, and that they all receive the same kinds of opportunities to learn and grow, students from all backgrounds and from all areas of the province need access to reasonably equal educational

opportunities. Rural areas should have access to educational options comparable to those in urban areas; students from poor and marginalized communities also require extra support to succeed in school. The past year put the inequities and challenges of this system into sharper view. We need to invest in the education of our children and in the professionals whose experience and expertise continues to be under-valued and under-supported. The NSAB 2017 bolsters the team of professionals and resources required to ensure quality educational opportunities at every grade level for all students.

NSAB 2017 Public Education Actions

- As public sector employees, teachers' salaries are adjusted for inflation.
- Invests **\$28 million** to hire at least 500 additional teachers to cover class size caps for junior and senior high school
- Invests **\$7 million** for additional administrative support for teachers to enable them to spend more time teaching and less time photocopying, recording attendance and doing other data entry
- Additional mental health supports with an investment of **\$5.2 million** to hire as many as 80 more guidance counsellors, and **\$4 million** to hire 80 school psychologists
- To ensure all children receive the additional support they need, invests in speech language pathologists (**\$3.12 million**), as well as **\$12.8 million** for 400 additional EPAs, plus **\$2.1 million** for 40 additional English language support
- Invests **\$2.7 million** to equip all schools with learning aids and expanding learning centres
- All teachers receive support for classroom supplies (\$500 each, **\$4.6 million**)

Post-Secondary Education

The positive social, cultural and economic impacts of post-secondary education are clearly documented. The economics alone are compelling; median income for a Nova Scotian with a high school diploma is \$19,050. This figure jumps to \$32,004 for Nova Scotians with post-secondary education

below a Bachelor's degree and to \$47,351 for people with a Bachelor's degree or higher form of post-secondary education.⁵⁸ Unfortunately rising tuition fees erode the accessibility of post-secondary education, narrowing the benefits to the already privileged. The NSAB 2017 invests with a goal to ensure that students can go no matter their family's current income, not based on their willingness and ability to incur debt. By funding the upfront costs of post-secondary education, the province can expect to reap the long-term benefits of a healthier tax base and a reduced reliance on public services which come with a more educated population. These benefits will create a more sustainable funding model for education by fairly distributing the cost through the income tax system.

NSAB 2017 Post-Secondary Education Actions

- Reduce university tuition fees by 10%: **\$34.5 million** includes re-directing funding from the cancellation of the Tuition and Education Tax Credit
- Eliminate Nova Scotia Community College tuition fees (invest **\$30 million**)
- Convert student loans to grants and redirect spending from the Student Loan Forgiveness and Interest Free Student Loan programs (cost of **\$8.6 million**)
- Increase university funding by 3% (**\$12.5 million**) to support core teaching and research activities
- Create a dedicated Sexual Assault Support Resource Fund, which would be available to students, campus groups, universities, and Nova Scotia Community Colleges (**cost \$2 million**)
- Invest **\$500,000** to provide MSI to international students upon their arrival in Nova Scotia

Adult Learning

Nova Scotia has a rich history of community development focused on adult learning beyond a narrow conception of understanding skills needed to engage in our economy. Adult learning in the Antigonish movement took place in study clubs, or workers' organizations, encouraging critical reading

and inspiring broad community participation. With literacy as a goal, and strong communities as the outcome, adult learning is an important investment. Learning initiatives include opportunities for adults whose literacy skills may be limited, who may have gaps in their employability skills, who may lack technical skills for specific technical jobs, or who have limited credentials despite possessing considerable skills. Nova Scotia offers many excellent adult learning programs, but they must be extended and improved, promoted, accessible, and affordable.

NSAB 2017 Adult Learning Actions

- Invest **\$3 million** to foster a learning culture in Nova Scotia – provide funds for Adult Learners’ Week and put into practice the NS-SAL regulations.
- Allocate **\$7 million** to promote and expand existing programs.
- Invest **\$4 million** to offer diverse programs to meet learning needs
- Eliminate barriers to adult learning – invest **\$6 million** to ensure that learners have a living wage with a learning bonus to reduce financial barriers and to create incentives to attend programs.

Environmental Protection, Energy and Climate Change

RATHER THAN CONTINUING to exploit our land and water for short-term, private gain, the NSAB lays out a plan for our natural resources that is both economically and environmentally sustainable. We are increasingly confronted with the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, the increased frequency and severity of storms, more extreme episodes of rainfall and flooding, and erratic seasonal weather. Our heavy reliance on polluting coal, largely imported, to provide 60 percent of our energy needs, and oil and gas for an additional 15 percent,⁵⁹ leaves Nova Scotians further vulnerable to volatile commodity prices and the health risks associated with fossil fuel dependency, while placing our per capita greenhouse gas emissions above the national average.⁶⁰ Combined, the ‘social costs of carbon’ related to the adverse impacts of fossil fuel use on human health, agricultural productivity, infrastructure, and property, amongst others, is immense and far-reaching in our province.

NSAB 2017 Environmental Protection Actions

The NSAPB allocates funding to cover inflationary costs for all Departments, and also increases the Department of the Environment's budget by an additional 20%. This **\$5 million** will go to:

- Support enhanced compliance and enforcement that crosses all environmental areas, e.g., air, water
- Develop and enforce regulations focused on protecting coastal environments (e.g., Coastal Act, fracking)
- Increased support and protection of wilderness areas to meet the 13% target of protected wilderness areas and promotion of new areas
- Completion and implementation of the Greener Economy Strategy
- Meeting of Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity, including local food/seafood purchasing goals.

Agriculture and Food Security

A vibrant food and agriculture sector can greatly improve food security and health, in addition to economic well-being and social inclusion of all Nova Scotians. “Food security exists when everyone has access to safe, nutritious food of the variety and amount that they need and want, in a way that maintains their dignity. Food security also exists when people are able to earn a living wage by growing, producing, processing, handling, selling, and serving food, as well as when our planet is protected for future generations.”⁶¹ Nova Scotia continues to have some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country. In 2014, 15.4% of Nova Scotians experienced food insecurity and 22% of children in Nova Scotia live in food insecure households.⁶² We also know that food insecurity tends to be higher in rural communities; almost one in five households surveyed in Antigonish, Guysborough, and the Strait experienced food insecurity.⁶³ The NSAB 2017 prioritizes a community development approach to food and agriculture with a focus on small and medium-size enterprises.

The NSAB supports a strong and resilient local food and agriculture sector to preserve existing and develops new agricultural land.

- Implement the recommendations of the 2010 Agricultural Land Review Committee to better protect agricultural land and support agri-

cultural land conservation easements and community land trusts⁶⁴
(\$5 million)

- Makes targeted investments (**\$2 million**) prioritized for local infrastructure development for small and medium-size enterprises to reduce barriers and enhance economic viability; also to facilitate new entrants (e.g., small one-time infrastructure grants, micro-loans); and more business training and mentoring for farmers and processors.
- Community Economic Development strategy will focus on development community benefit agreements, and include specific resources dedicated to increasing the food budgets of publicly funded institutions that commit to increasing local food procurement;
- Improve local distribution by facilitating increased co-operation among producers by the development of distribution and storage infrastructure, such as food hubs, (priority investment of the new Cooperative Investment Corporation, see Community Economic Development);
- Prepare for the effects of CETA on supply management by developing succession and exit strategies for dairy farmers, and egg and poultry producers—e.g., a quota bank like the license bank for fisheries;
- Commit funds to ensure all Nova Scotians have access to and can afford healthy foods through the continued development and implementation of anti-poverty programs (see low-income supports section), and also invests **\$1 million** in community food infrastructure and programs, buying co-ops, community food centres, mobile markets.
- Support nutrition and food skills education from grades primary through 12, **\$2 million** in the development of a universal school nutrition program
- Improve food skills and nutrition education by investing **\$400,000** to support linking agriculture in the classroom to hands-on experiences (e.g., school and community gardens, etc.)
- Increase support for the Health Promoting Schools program (**\$200,000**)

Fisheries and Forests

Healthy, prosperous fishing communities are vital to the economic, cultural and environmental resilience of Nova Scotia. Fishing activities are still the backbone of Nova Scotia's coastal communities, despite years of ecosystem and societal changes that put this sector under threat. Community fishermen struggle to make a livelihood while Nova Scotians find it difficult to access local fish. The NSAB 2017 prioritizes the removal of barriers for small-scale fishers in Nova Scotia and support for local consumption of local fish.

Similar to the fisheries, the forestry sector provides thousands of jobs and income to small woodlot owners across the province. The sector's decline means losing a traditional form of jobs and income for rural communities. The NSAB invests to support community-run, co-operative businesses embracing sustainable forestry techniques.

NSAB 2017 Fisheries and Forests Actions

- Support for establishment of overarching provincial organization representing fish harvesters: **\$200,000**
- Additional support for post-harvest production: **\$820,000**
- Support for marketing and distribution within Nova Scotia **\$1.16 million**
- Funding for training opportunities under the Fish Harvester Organizations Support Act: **\$2 million**
- Implement the Dolle-Lahey recommendations in full: **\$2 million**
- Develop a plan for community-run sustainable forestry models including on the former Bowater forest lands: **\$2 million**

Water

The state of freshwater and aquatic ecosystem health in Nova Scotia is declining. Algae blooms in southwest Nova Scotia are occurring in the summer season, urban lakes are increasingly eutrophic, and agriculture in the Annapolis Valley leaves watersheds out of balance. Indigenous communities like Potlotek and Pictou Landing have had ongoing water issues for far too long. Clearly more concrete and significant steps are needed to imple-

ment the government's own water strategy⁶⁵ to address these pressing concerns. Based on the UN resolutions recognizing the human right to water and sanitation, all levels of government are obligated to take concrete action to implement this right.

NSAB 2017 Water Actions

- Incorporate the UN recognized human right to water and sanitation as well as commons and public trust principles in all water-related legislation
- Protect waterways in the province
- Exclude water from all trade agreements
- Ensure access to potable water and sanitation in all Nova Scotian communities, and legislate access to public water via taps (and sanitation via public, 24-hour washrooms) in larger urban centres with appropriate levels of funding to implement the legislation, including an investment of **\$1.75 million** to increase and maintain more public fountains
- Embark on a province-wide consultation (**\$285,000**) on how to prioritize water use to establish a Water Act by the end of 2018 that: contains measurable targets for water use efficiency and for water conservation (with a timeline to phase-out bottled water takings); includes transparent and accountable governance arrangements, the ability to impose licensing conditions for water use and discharge, and mechanisms for the effective designation of priority areas where additional management and restoration will be required; as well as to establishes standards for water use for industrial purposes and agriculture.
- Maintain funding to ensure robust public water and wastewater infrastructure

Energy and Climate Change

In Paris in 2015 the world made a historic commitment to reduce GHG emissions. In 2016 Canada and countries worldwide ratified the Paris Agreement⁶⁶, to hold the increase in the global average temperature to “well below 2°C

above pre-industrial levels and [commit to] pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C".⁶⁷

Canada's emissions reduction target, 30% below 2005 levels by 2030, is inadequate for a 2°C future. Canada's target remains the weakest in the G7. Canada is also the world's 3rd highest per capita GHG emitter.⁶⁸ Canada, and the world, will not meet their Paris commitments unless we do much more than currently planned.⁶⁹ Nova Scotia has been a clear leader in GHG emission reductions in Canada. However, in the last year, amidst major national emissions reductions, Nova Scotia has stepped back from its leadership role. The NSAB demonstrates how Nova Scotia can continue to lead GHG reductions while ensuring energy is accessible to all Nova Scotians, regardless of income, through fair taxation and smart investment decisions.

By connecting the dots — emission reductions, improved health, job creation, and poverty reduction — a carbon price becomes a powerful tool that makes us stronger together. While insufficient on its own, carbon pricing represents an important policy tool through which environmentally destructive and carbon-intensive activities become increasingly expensive, helping to foster a transition in production and consumption behaviour. This year's NSAB puts a tax or levy on carbon instead of using a cap-and-trade approach which the current government has announced. The NSAB proposal is able to use the additional revenue to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality, while simultaneously lowering our emissions. The NSAB thus ensures that we transition as rapidly as possible to renewable energy sources, while cutting our energy consumption through conservation and efficiency measures, and ensures that those approaches are available and affordable to Nova Scotians of all income levels. If the provincial government remains committed to using a Cap and Trade approach, as they indicated in November 2016 and in the recent March 2017 Discussion Paper, we recommend ensuring an effective, equitable system that auctions allowances and allocates the revenues generated as proposed in this budget.

NSAB 2017 Energy and Climate Change Actions

- Implement a Carbon Tax with an initial rate of \$10 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) emitted, increasing in \$10 increments per year, to reach \$50 per tCO₂e by the 2021/22 fiscal year, which raises **\$153.5 million** in revenue in the first year

- Establish a Carbon Tax Benefit (at a cost of **\$77 million**) to offset cancelling the energy rebate and to ensure that on average, no net carbon tax is paid by the province's most vulnerable and marginalized citizens or by many middle-income families (Families earning up to \$75,000/year would receive the full rebate (about \$350/year depending on family composition) and single people earning up to about \$40,000/year would receive the full rebate (\$200/year), with additional compensation for rural households)
- Invest half of the carbon tax revenue to assist Nova Scotia's low-carbon transition through renewables, energy efficiency, by prioritizing investments that leverage co-benefits related to reducing overall levels of poverty and inequality in the province, including energy efficiency and renewables installation for low-income households, improved public transit in disadvantaged communities (GHG Reduction Fund of **\$60 million**), and jobs training programs for low-income citizens in the renewable energy sector, as well as re-skilling of affected workers (Green Jobs Investment Fund of **\$16.5 million**)
- Cancelling the Your Energy Rebate (**-\$104.5 million**) provides revenue to tackle energy poverty; A more targeted focus on energy poverty allows for investments to increase low-income supports (see Low-Income Supports section)

Conclusion

THIS YEAR'S ALTERNATIVE budget prioritizes investments that build inclusive, green and thriving communities across our province. This year's alternative budget is an update on the detailed budget released in 2016 that emphasized our collective strength, as well as our 2014 alternative budget, which focused on income inequality.⁷⁰

It is not only possible, it is economically efficient, better for the environment and for a thriving democracy, to build an economy in the interests of the people, not corporations and the wealthy. There is now a mountain of evidence that neoliberalism broadly and intensifying income inequality itself is good only for a very small minority.⁷¹ In fact, even the International Monetary Fund, which has arguably acted as one of the architects of the current situation, has recently warned that income inequality leads to slower or less sustainable forms of economic growth.⁷²

A society mired by income inequality is one where few will take risks. Without risk there is little change and little innovation. Risk-taking is unlikely when people are worried about meeting their daily needs or are only a few pay cheques away from living on the streets. A safety net that helps people take risks is one designed to make sure that no one falls too far when things go awry and they hit hard times. Likewise, no one should face greater risks just because of their race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, or the fact that they have a disability. Indeed, the risks associated with our social locations need to be eliminated entirely.

At the same time, and in the same way, we do not want to reduce risk-taking to a simplistic calculus around money. Choosing a career in art, becoming a farmer, opening your own business, taking leave to take care of young children or elderly parents, going back to school to retrain or further your education, these are all things that contribute to our quality of life. And, in our society, these are all economic risks of such severity that we are pressed to avoid them.

This year's alternative budget invests to do more than just ensure that people do not fall through the cracks, but extends and enhances quality, universal programs and services that help create stronger communities, shared connections and collective identities. The NSAB invests to reduce inequality between generations, family types, cultural groups, and regions in our province.

Smart public investments in a fiscally sustainable framework, using a progressive income tax base can address inequality and insecurity. These investments also provide more opportunities for economic growth, and employment opportunities. Public services help level the proverbial playing field, and thereby make it possible for more people to realize their full potential and participate in their communities.

Reducing poverty and ensuring everybody has energy and food security, are priorities in this year's alternative budget. The NSAB invests in quality public services including early learning and child care, affordable housing, improving primary health care, and accessible, and active transportation. The imperatives of global warming require us to focus on solutions that create a truly sustainable society. Developing green energy, fostering sustainable agriculture, and forestry practices, and democratizing policy decisions, will all help address the fallout from a society allowing runaway wealth at the top, while the rest struggle against the erosion of their share. Building inclusive, green and thriving communities benefits us all.

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