

Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission

Business Plan 2022-2023



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Message from the Director and CEO

The protection and advancement of human rights in Nova Scotia is central to the creation and support of diverse, vibrant, and inclusive communities. Perhaps never has this work been so important.

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a light on the stark inequities impacting Nova Scotians from equity seeking communities. The Black Lives Matter movement, strife over Mi'kmaq fisheries, a mental health crisis fueled by isolation and uncertainty, access to safe, affordable housing, and a health-care system struggling to meet demands on its over-taxed workforce; all of this has raised awareness of the disproportionate effects of our short-comings as a society in meeting the spectrum of complex needs facing Nova Scotians today.

Amidst all the challenges of the past year there have also been opportunities; opportunities to connect with the public and community partners in new ways. The chance to step back and consider how the work of the Commission must evolve to remain relevant and meaningful and ensure every aspect of what we do is informed by the lived experiences of the people we serve.

The Commission will continue to build and strengthen relationships with community organizations and government partners in fiscal 2022-23 to advance work to address anti-Black racism and other forms of discrimination creating barriers to employment, education, and access to services.

We will continue to prioritize building the Commission's capacity to ensure our services are trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and restorative, and that our processes are accessible, clear, and responsive.

Staff and management at the Commission have stepped up to meet the challenges of recent years. We have grown, adapted, and innovated to ensure we are tuned into the calls for change. We are committed to continuous improvement and accountability to the public we serve. While we look forward to greater normalcy in our daily lives, we are united by our desire to effect meaningful and lasting change to improve the lives of all Nova Scotians.

Sincerely,

Joseph Fraser
Director & CEO

Mandate

The Commission has a unique role within Nova Scotia. It is an independent government agency charged with administering the Nova Scotia *Human Rights Act*, a provincial statute created in 1969, with the most recent amendments in December 2012. The Commission is mandated by the *Human Rights Act* to help build inclusive communities and protect human rights in Nova Scotia.

The specific duties of the Commission are set out in the Act. The Commission has the responsibility of administering and enforcing the provisions of the Act. In addition, it develops public information and education programs in the field of human rights to advance the principle that every person is free and equal in dignity and rights without regard to age, race, colour, religion, creed, ethnic, national or Aboriginal origin, sex (including pregnancy and pay equity), sexual orientation, physical disability, mental disability, family status, marital status, source of income, harassment (including sexual harassment), irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease, association with protected groups or individuals, political belief, affiliation or activity, gender identity or gender expression.

The Commission is further mandated to conduct and encourage research by universities and other bodies in the general field of human rights, and also works with government by advising and assisting its departments and agencies in regard to human rights.

The Commission reports, as required, to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice on its business and activities, and also considers, investigates or administers any matter or activity referred by the Governor in Council or the Minister of Justice.

Managing the Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic's inequitable impact on equity-seeking communities has highlighted and exacerbated human rights concerns, adding even greater urgency and complexity to the Human Rights Commission's work.

The pandemic has brought unique challenges to the Commission's service delivery. The Commission has faced challenges related to lockdowns and work from home directives, altering communications to meet the needs of individuals while following public health directives. Commission staff continue to be flexible and work within the changing pandemic constraints in efforts to meet the human rights needs of all Nova Scotians.

Since the pandemic lockdowns began in March 2020, the Commission has faced new and increasingly complex inquiries from the public related to the pandemic including questions related to masking requirements and COVID-19 vaccinations. The Commission will continue its work to ensure responsiveness to issues as the pandemic evolves.

In the coming year, the Commission will continue using modified approaches to engaging partners and the public including virtual engagement as necessary to ensure safety of the public and staff.

Core Responsibilities and Services for 2022-2023

#1

Outcome: Communities within Nova Scotia are more inclusive

Goal: Advance priority human rights concerns

Actions:

1. The Commission will focus on addressing longstanding issues of systemic racism related people of African descent.
2. The Commission will enhance its capacity for evidence-based decision making through advancements in data management.
3. The Commission will continue to contribute to the legislative and policy framework supporting human rights in Nova Scotia.

Inputs:

The Commission will proactively engage African Nova Scotian communities on human rights topics. Data management improvements will be explored to enhance the Commission's ability to identify and respond to emerging issues. The Commission will contribute to legislative and policy developments and advancements.

Performance Measures:

- The Commission is more responsive to the human rights concerns of African Nova Scotians and people of African descent.
- Through improvements to data collection, analysis, and reporting, the Commission will begin to strengthen its ability to identify and respond to emerging issues and trends.
- The Commission will support and contribute to the work of the Accessibility Directorate, Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives, and other government partners in legislative and policy responses to human rights issues.

#2

Outcome: The Commission's capacity is strengthened.

Goal: Modernize and strengthen the Human Rights Commission

Actions:

1. The Commission will enhance its communication strategy by expanding its use of digital media platforms and community relations to promote human rights.
2. The Commission will strengthen its accountability and service delivery to the public through clear, consistent, and responsive processes.
3. The Commission will strengthen its capacity through learning and development for all staff.

Input:

The Commission will implement internal and external communications frameworks to ensure meaningful ongoing communication. Through enhanced monitoring functions, the Commission will continuously review and improve processes and services. The Commission will implement an all-staff learning and development plan focused on core competencies.

Performance Measures:

- The Commission will have meaningful ongoing communication with partners and the public through a variety of forums.
- Public trust and confidence in the Human Rights Commission will increase through accountability and transparency in processes and reporting.
- Commission staff will demonstrate enhanced competency to provide accessible, responsive, and efficient services to Nova Scotia's diverse population.

#3

Outcome: Leadership and innovation in the advancement of human rights

Goal: Advance dialogue and human rights practices

Actions:

1. The Commission will encourage the adoption of best human rights practices through ongoing research, networking, partnerships, and public engagement.
2. The Commission will enhance mechanisms to amplify voices of L'nu and African Nova Scotian communities as well as other equity seeking communities, on human rights issues.
3. The Commission will highlight and build upon advancements in human rights work.

Inputs:

The Commission will provide tools, resources, and supports to advance education on human rights topics. The Commission will convene, facilitate, and participate in discussions with members of L'nu and African Nova Scotian communities as well as other equity seeking communities on human rights experiences. The Commission will actively contribute to the national conversation surrounding human rights issues and will contribute to stronger national partnerships among human rights commissions and organizations involved in human rights work.

Performance Measures:

- The promotion of human rights will be reinforced by strengthening connections with partners such as professionals, volunteers, communities, businesses, and organizations involved in human rights work.
- Increased opportunities for underrepresented voices to be heard and valued.
- National trends will be better identified and applied to human rights concerns raised through inquiries and complaints.

Budgetary Context

Departmental Expenses Summary (\$ thousands)			
<u>Programs and Services</u>	<u>2021-2022</u> <u>Estimate</u>	<u>2021-2022</u> <u>Forecast</u>	<u>2022-2023</u> <u>Estimate</u>
Gross Program Expenses	2,857	2,857	2,880
Ordinary Recoveries	8	8	8
<u>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</u> Department Funded Staff	25.5	21.5	25.5