

Gathering Ripples: An Internal Environmental Scan on Healthy Workplace Initiatives in the Nova Scotia Government

This is the first snapshot of healthy workplace activity across the Nova Scotia public service and it demonstrates that in two years much progress has been made toward the statement in the corporate Healthy Workplace Policy that “the Government of Nova Scotia is committed to providing a healthy, safe and supportive workplace which will enhance employee health and job satisfaction, and enable employees to contribute most effectively in their roles of delivering high-quality public service.” Given below is the executive summary of the Scan.

Executive Summary

The Government of Nova Scotia’s Corporate Human Resource Plan 2005–2010 and the Government Business Plan for 2006–2007 identified providing a healthy, safe and supportive work environment for its employees as a priority. In February 2007, the Public Service Commission (PSC) finalized the Corporate Healthy Workplace Policy.

The Healthy Workplace Corporate Unit of the Nova Scotia government’s Public Service Commission is dedicated to developing and maintaining policies, programs, and services that promote and support a healthy workplace for all government employees. The Government of Nova Scotia has adopted a Healthy Workplace[®] Model developed by the National Quality Institute (NQI), which consists of three elements: Health and Lifestyle Practices, Workplace Culture and Supportive Environment, and Physical Environment and Occupational Health and Safety.

The PSC has played a role in helping move the Corporate Human Resource Plan forward by ensuring that government as a whole reached the goal of achieving the NQI’s Healthy Workplace[®] Progressive Excellence Program[®] Level I Certification. This was awarded in March 2007. The Government of Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to achieve this. As part of Level I certification, government is responsible for showing its commitment to healthy workplace. A strong example of this is the mention of healthy workplace in almost all 2008 departmental business plans. There is however, varying degrees of commitment among departments, reinforcing the view that there is always room for improvement of the health of a workplace and its employees.

Progress in the area of healthy workplace by government continues, with 48 per cent of departments or agencies interviewed stating that they are aiming or intending to aim for NQI Level II certification. This certification will be achieved on an individual departmental basis. The PSC will continue to provide support for departments striving to reach this goal.

As an environmental scan of healthy workplace activity for the Government of Nova Scotia has never been conducted, this study will provide a baseline. It will also determine what departments are doing to promote a healthy workplace. This will help assess what stage departments are currently in, where they intend to go in the future and identify any perceived barriers to achieving and maintaining a healthy workplace. This is done with

the overall goal of improving support needed by departments. The report is intended to be used as a tool to facilitate the sharing of information and help streamline the process of reporting information about healthy workplace initiatives, which is in line with the corporate Healthy Workplace Policy (see Appendix 4).

The methodological tool of ethnography was used for this study. This design uses an interview process to gain detailed qualitative information from selected informants to help determine what Nova Scotia government departments are doing to promote a healthy workplace. Interviews were conducted in person or through telephone conference calls, with 19 departments and/or agencies. Subjects were selected based on membership on the Healthy Workplace Advisory Committee and/or having the role of departmental or agency healthy workplace committee chair or co-chair (See Appendix 1 for a list of participants). Questions covered the topics of needs assessment, evaluation, and planning, healthy workplace activities/initiatives, resources, guidance, communication and incentives, the use of PSC resources, interest in further supports, the NQI program and perceived challenges on a number of issues.

It is important to note that any workplace is an environment that goes through phases of both stability and transition. Many departments are currently undergoing a period of transition as they are being restructured. Healthy workplace committees and their initiatives are not immune to the impact of these changes. Staff may be reassigned or their duties changed. Department priorities often change during these times as well, which can have an impact on the programs and initiatives of the healthy workplace committee. On a positive note, change also has the ability to provide new ideas and opportunities and, with strong leadership and dedication, can help to move healthy workplace initiatives forward.

The interviews determined that change has been occurring within the Government of Nova Scotia since the beginning of the initiative in 2005. The biggest change, which is a success across government, is the existence of a healthy workplace committee in every department and agency that was interviewed. This is a 100 per cent increase from the start of the program. Understanding the meaning of healthy workplace from a holistic viewpoint has grown, along with recognition of the importance of having a healthy workplace. The culture has therefore started to change, and employees and management alike are taking notice and action. They are also beginning to recognize the broad range of benefits that come from having a healthy workplace and are conscious of the need to create and maintain a healthy workplace.

In this study, it was evident that most of the departments/agencies interviewed have conducted some form of needs assessment, have a written healthy workplace plan, and have done at least some evaluation of their healthy workplace initiatives. However, few have departmental healthy workplace policies, and about half identified following the corporate policy that is in place.

This study was also able to help identify factors that healthy workplace committees have in common with respect to their initiatives, resources and goals as well as their perceived challenges in some healthy workplace areas.

This information will help departments know what others are doing and provide information about which direction they may need to move toward. It will also provide insight to assist the PSC in allocating resources and supports.