



Office of the  
**SENIORS' ADVOCATE**  
Newfoundland and Labrador

# Status Report on Recommendations 2022-2023



September 2023



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# MESSAGE FROM THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE



As Seniors' Advocate an important aspect of my mandate is to examine systemic issues impacting seniors and Section 21 of the **Seniors' Advocate Act** outlines my authority to publish reports relating to the exercise and performance of my duties.

When we released the 2021-22 Status Report on Recommendations we committed to annual public reporting on the status of all outstanding Office of the Seniors' Advocate recommendations. The release of this current report continues to deliver on this commitment to the seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I am pleased to note that there has been substantial improvement in the response to our recommendations. The percentage of implemented recommendations has increased from 44% last year to 64% this reporting period.

Further, while there are seven recommendations that continue to be in progress (partially implemented) year over year, we have seen progress in a number of these, with announcements that the review of the Personal Care Homes and Long Term Care Homes has commenced and the Dementia Care Action Plan has been released and implementation is ongoing.

Last year 12% of recommendations had no progress (not implemented) compared to 8% in this reporting period. This represents a reduction from three recommendations with no progress to two. The recommendation that was implemented is that effective April 1, 2023, driver's medicals can now be paid for through MCP. This was well received by many seniors and certainly supports continued independence and community access. However, there continues to be two recommendations that have no measurable advancement and limited explanation.

I, like many, am always concerned when efforts to develop reports and make recommendations result in documents that "sit on shelves" with little or no action. I am pleased to say that the reports and recommendations of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate have not collected dust. I recognize the improved efforts of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and thank the many employees for their efforts which have assisted seniors. I encourage the increased momentum in 2022-2023 to continue until all recommendations are met. The seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador deserve no less.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Susan Walsh, MSW RSW  
Seniors' Advocate NL

# MONITORING PROCEDURE

## AUTHORITY

The **Seniors' Advocate Act** provides the Office of the Seniors' Advocate with legislative authority to make recommendations to improve any seniors' services that are related to health care, personal care, housing, transportation or finances. Further, by the authority provided under Section 16 of the **Seniors' Advocate Act**, the Seniors' Advocate can request information under the Act and must be provided with that information.

## PROCESS

Recommendations are made with the intention of encouraging improvements in seniors' services. All recommendations are made after carefully considering input from seniors and families and analysis of the issue and potential solution.

Every recommendation made by the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will be monitored. The Seniors' Advocate requests annual written updates on the progress made in implementing recommendations and publishes the responses in the Status Report.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate assesses the progress made on each of the recommendations and assigns one of the following four categories: implemented, implemented ongoing, partially implemented, or not implemented. If a recommendation falls under the jurisdiction of more than one entity, the recommendation will remain in the partially completed category until all elements of the recommendation are implemented.

Updates on each recommendation are requested annually until the Seniors' Advocate is satisfied that the recommendation has been addressed. The results are reported publicly and can be found at:

<https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/StatusReports.aspx>

# DEFINITIONS

The status of each recommendation falls under one of four categories:

**IMPLEMENTED**

The recommendation has been completed.

**IMPLEMENTED –  
ONGOING**

The recommendation has been completed and the initiative is expected to grow and continue to be enhanced.

**PARTIALLY  
IMPLEMENTED**

There has been some progress but there are still outstanding issues to be addressed to satisfy the recommendation.

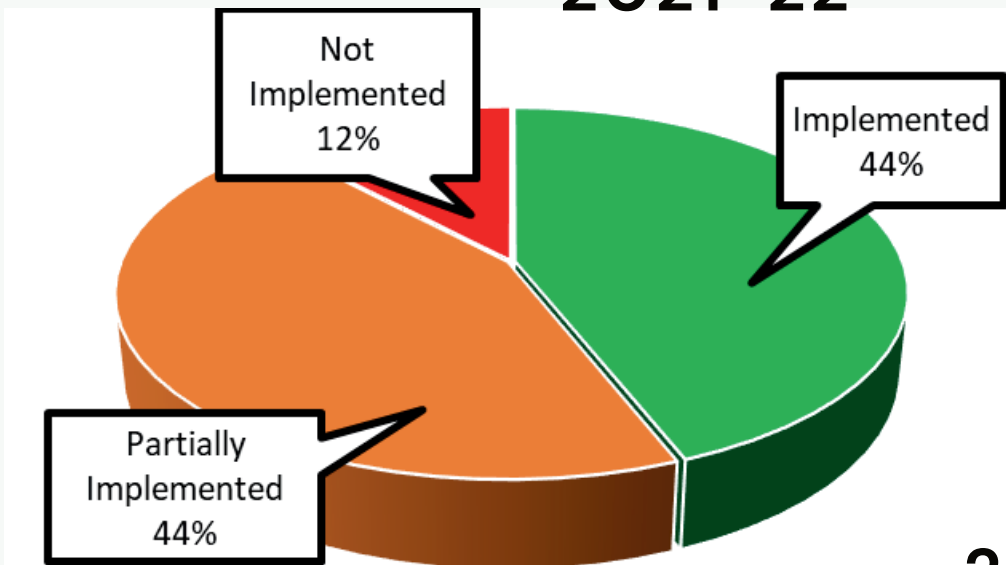
**NOT IMPLEMENTED**

There has been no substantive progress made at this point on the recommendation.

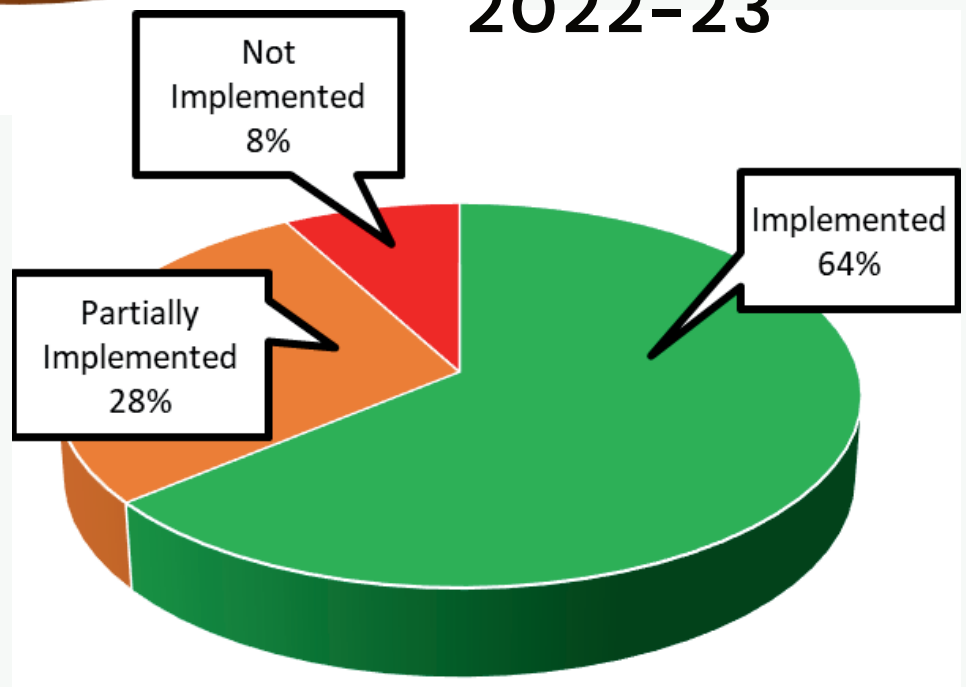
# OVERALL STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2019 this Office has made 25 formal recommendations. As of March 31, 2023, 64 per cent of those 25 actions have been implemented; 28 per cent are underway; and 8 per cent have not been implemented.








## 2021-22



## 2022-23










# STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Implemented	Implemented - Ongoing	Partially Implemented	Not Implemented
Integrate accessibility principles into building codes for all private and public buildings.				
Expand and enhance the Provincial Home Repair Program.				
Closely monitor the implementation of the Provincial Home First Initiative as well as the recommendations from the Provincial Home Support Program Review.				
Review how to best support vulnerable seniors' and others who have capacity to understand and appreciate risk however are being abused and/or neglected.				
Raise awareness and provide affordable opportunities for seniors to access Advance Health Care Directives, Enduring Powers of Attorney, and Wills.				
Integrate the cost of driving medicals for those age 75 years and older into the Medical Care Plan (MCP).				
Review the province's personal care homes and long term care homes.				



# STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Implemented	Implemented - Ongoing	Partially Implemented	Not Implemented
Increase the number of health care professionals with gerontology expertise (specifically, geriatric specialists) and community-based occupational therapists and physiotherapists.				
Offer the shingles vaccine free of charge to low income seniors and others with compromised immune systems.				
Monitoring the development and implementation of a Provincial Dementia Care Plan.				
Include dental, hearing and vision care as part of overall health care and chronic disease strategies.				
Explore how dental, hearing and vision care needs of low income seniors be included under the <b>Canada Health Act</b> .				
Expedite the transfer of funding responsibilities for the hearing aid and vision care programs (that is, moved from the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills to the Department of Health and Community Services).				
Review the Medical Transportation Program.				

# ACTIONS **PARTIALLY** IMPLEMENTED

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**The Advocate supports an expanded and enhanced Provincial Home Repair Program.**

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## **RESPONSE FROM NL HOUSING**

The Home Repair Program continues to be an important tool of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) to help more seniors stay in their home longer. The 2022-23 fiscal year saw 1,181 home repair projects funded (representing 1,420 homeowners). Of the 1,420, 76 per cent were 65 plus years of age, with the average homeowner accessing the program being 71 years of age. Under the National Housing Strategy, NLHC expanded its budget for home repair from \$5.5 million to \$8.78 million in Budget 2019.

The NLHC offers a Home Energy Savings Program (HESP). The program provides grants for low income homeowners to make energy efficient upgrades to their homes to make their homes more comfortable and to lower their overall heating cost. In 2022-23, 880 projects were funded (representing 1,201 homeowners). Of the 1,201, 77 per cent were 65 plus years of age with the average homeowner that accessed the program being 71 years of age.

Budget 2023 included a \$70 million investment for a new, three-year, Affordable Rental Housing Program. The program will provide one-time capital funding in the form of a forgivable loan to support the development of more than 850 new affordable rental homes throughout the province. These new homes will be developed through partnerships with the private and community housing sectors. The program will focus on supporting seniors, as well as other vulnerable populations, including young adults, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, newcomers, women and children fleeing violence and people experiencing homelessness.

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**The Advocate is closely monitoring the implementation of the Provincial Home First Initiative as well as the recommendations from the Provincial Home Support Program Review.**

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## **RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

HCS, in collaboration with the Provincial Health Authority (PHA) continues to lead implementation of a Home First philosophy. Home First Integrated Networks have been established in all Zones, and additional resources have been provided to the PHA to support implementation. For fiscal year 2022-23, over 2,600 individuals, the vast majority of which are seniors, availed of supports available through Home First.

In addition, the Home Dementia Care Program provides support to people with moderate to advanced dementia who live at home. For fiscal year 2022-23, 166 individuals in the Eastern Zone and 99 individuals in the Central Zone availed of the program. Implementation has begun in the Western Zone.

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**The Advocate encourages raising awareness and providing affordable opportunities for seniors to access Advance Health Care Directives, Enduring Powers of Attorney, and Wills.**

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## **RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

On May 25, 2023 the **Alternate Witnessing of Documents Amendment Act** received Royal Assent in the House of Assembly. This new legislation amends the **Commissioners for Oaths Act**, the **Notaries Public Act**, the **Registration of Deeds Act, 2009** and the **Wills Act** to allow lawyers in good standing with the Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador to witness documents identified in those Acts using audio-visual technology. This may increase access to legal services and improve affordability for seniors.

The Department of Justice and Public Safety continues to support the Public Legal Information Association NL (PLIAN), which has a section on its website to provide information to seniors regarding financial and estate planning, as well as separation or divorce. This can be viewed at the following link: <https://publiclegalinfo.com/seniors-and-the-law/>.

The Dementia Care Action Plan has a related action to work with the Provincial Health Authority to implement an awareness campaign on advanced care planning including development of updated written material.

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**The Advocate recommends a significant review of the province’s personal care homes and long term care homes.**

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**RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

HCS is updating the draft Provincial Long Term Care Operational Standards to ensure alignment with the newly released Long Term Care Standards from Health Standards Organization and Canadian Standards Association. A final draft of the Personal Care Home Operational Standards is under review.

A comprehensive review of the Long Term Care and Personal Care Home Programs is underway. The goal of this review is to identify opportunities to improve resident quality of care and quality of life, as well as improve quality of work-life for staff.

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**The Advocate will be closely monitoring the development and implementation of a Provincial Dementia Care Plan.**

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**RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

HCS released the Dementia Care Action Plan on March 30, 2023. This three year plan has 36 actions in four focus areas that aim to improve awareness of dementia, improve supports and services and support staff professional development and training. The Dementia Action Council, formed to inform development of the plan will remain in place to support implementation.

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**The Advocate recommends that the transfer of funding responsibilities for the hearing aid and vision care programs be expedited (that is, moved from the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills to the Department of Health and Community Services).**

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## **RESPONSES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, SENIORS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Although the Department of Health and Community Services (HCS) has responsibility for funding and delivering the hearing aid program, Income Support continues to complete financial eligibility assessments from the general public on behalf of that department. Unlike other HCS financial assistance programs, Income Support considers an applicant's liquid assets, which may impact eligibility for the hearing aid program. It would be a decision of HCS to assume responsibility for the financial eligibility assessment for the Hearing Aid Program. Vision Care for people in receipt of supportive services moved to Health and Community Services in 2019.

On November 1, 2019, the legacy regional health authorities assumed service delivery responsibility for clients in receipt of long-term care and community support services (LTC CSS). Clients who are in receipt of income support and LTC CSS continue to access vision care services through the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD).

CSSD currently completes financial assessment for clients and refers them to the Provincial Hearing Aid Program at Eastern Health.

HCS has established a working group to review the Provincial Hearing Aid Program, including the financial eligibility component, to develop a streamlined and more efficient process for clients and staff.

The Medical Services Division of HCS will provide appropriate assistance upon request to the Seniors' Advocate during these reviews. In 2021, HCS began covering out of hospital cataract surgery in designated facilities to improve patient access to this procedure and to reduce wait times. The majority of these patients are over the age of 65.

The Adult Dental Program provides 'Basic Services' as listed in the Dental Health Plan Payment Schedule, including a denture component. Coverage is limited to clients enrolled under the Foundation Plan of the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP). The Foundation Plan includes persons and families in receipt of income support benefits through CSSD. Coverage under the Foundation Plan ends at age 65. Seniors may also qualify for the Foundation Plan following a needs assessment by the PHA. These clients are typically subsidized within long-term care, personal care home, or through home support services.

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**The Advocate recommends that a review of the Medical Transportation Program be completed.**

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#### **RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF LABRADOR AFFAIRS**

**(Responsibility for this program was transferred from the Department of Health and Community Services to the Department of Labrador Affairs)**

Budget 2023 included an additional \$1 million for medical transportation policy enhancements that will benefit program users, including low income seniors. Since MTAP moved to Labrador Affairs, we have been completing an assessment of its policy, procedures, applications and related forms to help make the program more responsive and benefit the Province's residents in accessing medical care.

# ACTIONS **NOT** IMPLEMENTED

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**The Advocate recommends that the shingles vaccine be offered free of charge to low income seniors and others with compromised immune systems.**

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## **RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

HCS continues to work with the National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommendations.

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**The Advocate encourages policy-makers to include dental, hearing and vision care as part of overall health care and chronic disease strategies.**

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## **RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

None provided.



# CONCLUSION

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate takes our systemic advocacy role very seriously. In Newfoundland and Labrador 23.6% of people are age 65 and older, which is the highest proportion in Canada, and they are counting on us to address the issues negatively impacting their lives. Further with the median age in this province at 47.8, well above the national median age of 41 years, the population of older adults in Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to grow for many years. Therefore, addressing the needs of seniors in this province must be a priority to ensure seniors age well, with the dignity and respect they deserve. We can and must ensure that the well-being of older adults in this province is at the forefront of all policy, program and legislative decisions.

As a consequence, we strongly assert our role and strictly adhere to being accountable and transparent. This report ensures that the public is aware of the status of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Office of the Seniors' Advocate.

As previously noted, there have been substantial efforts to advance our recommendations in 2022-2023 which has resulted in 64% being implemented. We acknowledge this increased momentum and strongly advocate for it to continue in 2023-2024.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate will continue to monitor all recommendations (past and future) and annually report on progress until all have been implemented. The seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve no less!





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