

## 2019 Budget Consultations

Each year, the provincial budget sets out government's priorities for the coming year. The budget sets anticipated spending, expected revenues and provides an update on the provincial economy.

At the beginning of the budget process, the Department of Finance engages with people and organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to help identify government spending priorities, and how to strike a balance between the province's financial situation and the need to deliver programs and services.

The following is a summary of written submissions received through the 2019 budget process. These submissions were provided by both individuals and groups/organizations and in some cases suggestions covered more than one theme and are included at the end of the summary.

### **Economic Development**

- Advocates for a small business loan guarantee program modeled after such a program in Nova Scotia
- Good jobs for all (investment in public services, build labour market through immigration, eliminating financial barriers to education, moving to a \$15 minimum wage)
- Increase innovation and entrepreneurship (e.g., using local entrepreneurs as mentors, tap into non-profit/community based sector for job creation and social enterprise, especially Stella's Circle)
- Industry-led product development initiatives
- Set up aquaponic farms in communities across the province (cites food security, health benefits, longer shelf life, and available expertise at the Marine Institute as supporting factors)

### **Education and Post Secondary Education**

- Calls for more student assistant hours for schools/one-to-one assistant to student ratio as opposed to one-to-two
- Provide special supports to enable students with special needs and mental health issues to access the same opportunities as their peers
- Reduce class sizes
- Reinstate the full needs-based grants program (improves financial assistance while reducing the burden of debt on the most vulnerable)
- Reinstate the tuition fee freeze (with the goal of progressively reducing tuition fees to the point of elimination for domestic and international students at all NL post-secondary institutions)
- Restore core funding for MUN and CONA to 2013/2014 levels (ensures all programs maintain high levels of performance with necessary accreditation and research capacity)
- Set standards for class composition (to support all students to maximize their potential in safe and caring learning environments)

### **Environment and Climate Change**

- Support investment in mitigating climate change (and work with the life and health insurance industry on the issue)
- Work with RCC and take a leadership role with municipalities on environmental issues

### **Healthcare**

- Adopt biosimilar medications in place of original biologic treatments for several conditions (high level of care with cost efficiencies and drug budget predictability)
- Advocates moving the site of the new mental health facility from the Health Sciences Complex to the existing site of the Waterford Hospital on Waterford Bridge Road (arguments supporting the proposal include parking and safety issues as a result to increased capacity at HSC, more pleasant surroundings of a facility overlooking Bowering Park, and adjacency to downtown where submitter asserts most people with mental health issues gravitate)
- Continue plan to replace the Waterford Hospital
- Enhance access to nutrition services provided by dietitians (enhance access for continuing care incl. long term care and home care; enhance access in primary health care settings incl. mental health and addictions; ongoing funding and support for the NL Dial-a-Dietitian Program; the addition of dietitian services to GNL's Group Insurance Plan)
- Ensure sufficient financial resources to maintain target levels of vaccination against HPV caused cancers
- Ensure the people of NL have access to affordable prescription drugs (by supporting, protecting and enhancing existing benefit plans, providing drug coverage for everyone and ensuring affordability by coordinating with the industry to bring down costs through bulk buying and enhancing access to high cost medicines when needed)
- Ensure those with type 2 diabetes continue to benefit from innovative oral treatments to gain early control of the disease (a further step should be the development of an overall diabetes strategy)
- Health care service delivery (improved access to primary health care services that include evenings and weekends, incorporate social determinants of health into any health care reform, advance primary health care initiatives that integrate interdisciplinary teams incl social work)
- Indicates displeasure at further cuts to mental health, namely 30% reduction in beds
- Invest in the development of a provincial diabetes strategy (strategy could include investments in diabetes research, increased support for self-management, enhanced access to medications, devices and supplies, etc.)
- Mental health (integration of social workers in the K-12 education system, enhance services to those with addictions and problematic substance abuse, increase access to mental health services in correctional facilities)
- New long term care facility for Labrador City/Labrador West (stand alone or as addition to current hospital)
- Old hospital dismantled and ownership transferred to Labrador City Council
- Proactively plan health care investments in response to the needs of an aging population (work with the federal government to increase the annual growth rate of the Canada Health Transfer from 3% to at least 5.2%)
- Support diabetes 360: A nationwide strategy to prevent and manage diabetes
- Support the development of a national pharmacare program

**Justice and Public Safety**

- Continue public education efforts about the safe use of cannabis (keeps impaired drivers off the roads and ensures public safety)
- Examine the province's illegal tobacco enforcement efforts (compare to the successful model in Quebec)
- Increase resources to provide law enforcement officers with the training and tools to detect cannabis impairment
- Intervene with the federal government to ensure the legal supply of cigarettes is not disrupted (due to proposed change to plain and standardized tobacco packaging and other regulations)

**Legislative/Regulation Change**

- Allow online insurance companies to offer automobile insurance in NL
- Bring legislative amendments to the House of Assembly Spring 2019 session related to recommendations from the Credit Union Act review.
- Change the rate regulation process so it's more adaptive and less costly (removes unnecessary costs and encourages new insurers to enter the province)
- Embrace advancements in technology while ensuring consumer protection by: (working to approve the use of Electronic Proof of Automobile Insurance and engaging with stakeholders to proactively addressing emerging issues such as autonomous vehicles)
- Enhance accident benefits (make accident benefits mandatory and double the benefit limit)
- Ensure consumer protection/experience and improve outcomes by: (adopting a combination of Direct Compensation for Physical Damage coverage, mandatory Section B/accident benefits with minor injury protocols and increased benefits and a cap for minor injuries)
- File-and-Use approach to auto rate setting process (the market regulates itself and as a result, competition is increased)
- Implement a minor injury general damages cap (\$5,000 with annual inflation adjustments, only applicable to injuries that resolve within days, weeks or months)
- Implement Pooled Registered Pension Plans (PRPPs) (to vastly improve access to pension plans for NL workers, especially those within smaller businesses and the self-employed)
- Legislate that changes to minimum wage be based on the change in the Consumer Price Index
- Make it easier to repair or replace damaged vehicles (use a model where the customer deals with only their insurance company regardless of who is at fault)
- Order of NL Reform (allow posthumous nominations and equal treatment for athletes regardless of competition level)

**Social Supports**

- All land on Booth Avenue allocated for seniors cottages with ownership by Labrador City Council
- Children and families (eliminate claw back of child support payments from income assistance, increased access to child care, ensure issues in the delivery of child protection and in care services remain a priority e.g., capped caseloads, supervision ratios, etc.)
- Continue efforts to increase immigration
- Continue income based supports to those with low incomes (e.g., rent supplement program)
- Create a policy to allocate 1% of budgets for any provincial capital works projects to commission public artworks (e.g., new building construction, additions to existing buildings, bridges, etc.)
- Ensure appropriate access to health food for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians (government policies, programs and initiatives which consider the impact on food security; policies, programs and initiatives that support a healthy eating environment in schools, homes and the community; exploring the options for a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages)
- Equality and fairness (measures to reduce poverty and inequality, investments in social programs, fair and progressive tax system, universal child care, pharmacare, pay equity)
- Governmental support for initiative aimed at men for the purposes of stopping violence against women in the province
- Poverty reduction (annual increase in minimum wage indexed to inflation or provincial average wage increase, monitor and increase income support rates, investments in social programming and housing for those with complex mental health needs, investment in programs and services to address poverty, ensure integration of poverty reduction and health care reform, continued support for community organizations working with those in poverty, investment to address economic gap between rich and poor)
- Provide adequate funding to Arts NL Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council (project grant applications increase annually and in 2018, only 37% of the funds requested were able to be disbursed)
- Provide adequate funding to the gallery of The Rooms (recent funding levels have resulted in the art gallery being forced to shoulder a disproportionate amount of fiscal burden)
- Using Cannabis and other NLC revenue to address Muskrat Falls debt/rate mitigation

### **Taxation**

- Commitment to lower HST once the budget is balanced
- Create a separate and distinct category for tobacco heating products (THPs) (taxation should be on a per stick basis at a lower rate than cigarettes)
- Do not impose additional taxes on vapour products (other than those already in place, e.g., HST)
- Eliminate the payroll tax
- Eliminate the tax on insurance
- Maintain provincial tobacco taxes at the current level (to allow the market to adjust to tax increases in recent years and adjust to the impending change to plain and standardized packaging)
- Need for corporate tax relief/WCB premium relief once the budget is balanced
- Provide retailers with tax credits, targeted de-regulation and greater harmonization between provinces to reduce red tape
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate taxes on life, health and disability insurance premiums
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate the premium and sales tax rates on life and health insurance premiums
- Remove the minimum 7.5% excise tax and the HST on medical cannabis products (submission argues that the taxes place an unfair burden on medical cannabis users, many of whom are seniors and veterans, would provide a further incentive to obtain cannabis from legal means as opposed illegal ones, and would decrease opioid use and opioid mortality)

### **Tourism**

- Annual increase in provincial marketing investment
- Financial support for the NL Tourism Board
- Promote province as a safe and welcoming place to travel
- Timely access to relevant tourism research
- Support for tourism industry workforce development

### **Transportation**

- Address high cost of running provincial ferries (e.g., discuss payment alternatives)
- Asks that government consider providing funding for the repair of Route 70
- Comprehensive, multi-modal transportation system (that can meet the evolving needs of users and industries)
- Improve highway safety by: (focusing on measures to reduce distracted driving and including funds dedicated to highway infrastructure and road safety in 2019 budget)
- Infrastructure investment (leverage the industry's investment capacity to accelerate and expand infrastructure projects to modernize infrastructure and therefore maximize economic growth)

### Multiple Theme

- Advocates using a shuttle service as opposed to taxis to transport methadone patients to and from clinics (believes system is being abused by those from outside St. John's who hire taxis to come into the city for medical reasons but use the opportunity to go shopping)
- Amalgamate or close some health care sites and college campuses (too many nursing schools, too many CONA campuses)
- Ask the federal government to reconsider its proposed pharmaceutical pricing reform
- Continue the move towards electric or hybrid vehicles for the government fleet where practical (reduces operational costs and down time related to service)
- Creation and implementation of enforceable legislation for fair accommodation regulation (fosters a level playing field for all tourism operators)
- Do more to decrease barriers to employment (affordable housing, childcare and transportation are areas to target)
- Increase efforts to keep international students/make newcomers feel welcome (e.g., improve childcare services, provide support for children who miss school, help them cope with winter, partner with the Association for New Canadians)
- Installation of recharge points for electric vehicles throughout the province, especially on the TLH (increases demand for electric vehicles, increases tourism and increases demand for Muskrat Falls power)
- Revisit the application of the carbon tax to gasoline and diesel fuels (current structure is so small it does little to reduce demand for fossil fuels)
- Run a pilot trial using electric school buses (save in operating costs and less frequent replacement of vehicles)
- Seniors (increase housing options for seniors with complex mental health needs, greater access to more affordable assisted living for seniors, increase in the number of accessible home support hours for seniors, policy initiatives to assist seniors who are living/at risk of living in poverty e.g., transportation, enhanced dental and vision care, etc., increase long term care allowance for seniors, continue to increase capacity for portable subsidies for personal care homes)
- Sustainable communities and environment (support of local employment, local business, value-added products, procurement, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants, green jobs strategy)
- Use the carbon tax to eliminate the sales tax on electric/hybrid vehicles (helps generate demand for the vehicles and the installation and operation of service locations)
- Change government messaging from one of despair to one of hope
- Save money (address local service districts/unincorporated areas, review travel claims and per diems of public servants, give municipalities authority to address crown lands requests within their jurisdiction, establish TW crown corporation, establish alternatives to satellite dialysis units e.g., home first approach, complete a review of the entire health care system, establish an inter-departmental committee for residential/commercial development)
- Take steps to address unsustainable spending (e.g., turning over vacant buildings/land to municipalities, consolidation of engineering services, reduce red tape, continued regional government initiatives incl. measures to deal with local service districts and unincorporated areas, choosing land-based aquaculture pens over sea-based, better coordination with respect to the municipal, provincial and federal involvement in road repairs)