



# Thrive!

A plan for a healthier Nova Scotia

2014 Report



# Thrive!

A plan for a healthier Nova Scotia

A policy and environmental approach  
to healthy eating and physical activity

**September 2014**

© Crown copyright, Province of Nova Scotia, 2014

Published through Communications Nova Scotia  
for the Department of Health and Wellness.

ISBN: 978-1-55457-486-5

# Table of Contents

Minister’s message..... 1

Message from the *Thrive!* Scientific Advisory Panel..... 2

Introduction..... 5

Four directions..... 6

Working across government..... 8

Working across communities..... 9

Progress highlights..... 11

Evaluation..... 19



# Minister's message

Two years ago, Nova Scotia took a bold step to tackle the complex problem of rising rates of obesity and preventable chronic disease in this province.

The launch of *Thrive!* A plan for a healthier Nova Scotia marked the beginning of a deliberate, collaborative approach to change the environments where we live, work, learn, play, and commute, making them more supportive of healthy eating and physical activity.

The plan recognizes that while we all have a role to play as individual Nova Scotians to improve our health, there is a broader set of issues to address through social policy decisions.

We currently live in communities and with social conditions that are not always conducive to healthy living. This must change. And it will change over the long term as the actions outlined in *Thrive!* are implemented.

This report outlines a great deal of work underway during the first two years of *Thrive!* While the results will take years to come to fruition, we have made progress that is worth celebrating.

I thank all our partners for their important contributions, including provincial and federal departments, municipalities, health care professionals, educators, researchers, and sport and recreation leaders.

Government will continue to lead this change, and we call on all our partners across the province to stay the course to make important changes in our communities now, and for future generations.

**Leo Glavine**

Minister of Health and Wellness

# Message from the *Thrive!* Scientific Advisory Panel

The *Thrive!* Scientific Advisory Panel is pleased to see the first report on *Thrive!* We recognize the important progress made so far in implementing the strategy across the province. It continues to be a leading example in Canada of an upstream, whole-of-government, population approach to chronic disease prevention.

We commend everyone who is working to bring the strategy to life, and applaud government's continued support. We encourage full and sustained support for implementation, including resources for monitoring to ensure that we understand what is working and what needs to be changed as *Thrive!* progresses.

Of course, we know that the work of *Thrive!* is essential to the health of Nova Scotians, and it is also strongly linked to our economic prosperity. The recently published *Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy* clearly highlights the system-level action needed across sectors and settings to produce a more prosperous population in the province. Just as healthy children learn better, so do healthy children, youth and adults contribute to a strong economy.

Unfortunately, our modern environment, lifestyles, culture, and growing social inequities make it difficult to adopt healthier attitudes and behaviours. *Thrive!* serves as a mechanism for a culture shift toward healthier communities through a collective and unifying vision for a healthy, prosperous Nova Scotia. The strategy's upstream approach for prevention of chronic disease and promotion of physical and mental well-being will have lasting benefits for us all.

We urge the government to situate "health in all policies" to ensure that connections are made between provincial departments. For example, we encourage government to view the current education review as an opportunity for enhancing collaborative work on the inherent connections between health, learning, and our economy.

We also urge government to continue to recognize the physical, mental, social, and economic challenges that Nova Scotians experience in making healthier choices. While the province has some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country, we also have a growing food movement of experts and advocates that *Thrive!* can harness. The same is true of the province's expertise in active transportation and other aspects of physical activity.

Through all this work on policies and environments, we are confident in *Thrive!*'s ability to help Nova Scotians of all ages lead healthier lives.

**Jill L. Grant, FCIP, LPP**

Professor, School of Planning, Dalhousie University

**Sara F. L. Kirk, Ph.D.**

Canada Research Chair in Health Services Research, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University

**Angela (Angie) M. Kolen, Ph.D.**

3M National Teaching Fellow and Associate Professor, Human Kinetics, St. Francis Xavier University

**Catherine O'Brien, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor, Education Department School of Professional Studies, Cape Breton University

**Patricia Williams, Ph.D., PDt**

Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Policy Change, Department of Applied Human Nutrition, Mount Saint Vincent University



# Introduction

*Thrive!* A plan for a healthier Nova Scotia is about taking action together to make ourselves and our province healthier. This plan addresses preventable chronic disease through actions focused on healthy eating and physical activity, and ensuring that policies are in place that support our health where we live, learn, work, commute, and play.

Government identified fighting obesity, preventing chronic disease, and making Nova Scotia an easier place to be healthy as priorities. In June 2012, government launched *Thrive!* and committed \$2.04 million for implementation. Increased funding was provided for 2013–14 to continue work on the strategy's actions.

This review of our first two years is an opportunity to share the work that has been taking place within government, as defined and funded by *Thrive!* It also gives us a chance to celebrate work at a community level that supports *Thrive!*—part of this broad plan for a healthier Nova Scotia.

## Vision

Nova Scotia is a national leader in supporting healthy eating and physical activity and is the easiest place in Canada for children to grow up healthy.

## Guiding principles

### Healthy Public Policy

Focus on government policy to change the environment in ways that support individuals to lead healthier lives.

### Best and Promising Practices

Apply evidence-informed approaches that are grounded in research, expert consensus, and community and cultural knowledge and experience.

### Shared Responsibility and Partnership

Work together across government and with partners to enable everyone to contribute to solutions.

### Comprehensiveness and Equity

Consider the broader factors that influence the health and wellness of all Nova Scotians; recognize and celebrate diversity; and increase equity for groups at higher risk.

# Four directions

For some, this strategy is a new way of thinking. Actions cut across government departments and rely on community partners, as the issues are complex and interwoven.

Health starts long before we need health care. It starts at home, at work, in school, and within communities. An estimated 75 per cent of the factors that determine our health lie outside the healthcare system. Not all Nova Scotians have the same opportunity to be healthy, often because of circumstances that are beyond their control.

The focus of this strategy is to reduce those differences. While no single change, program, or policy will meet everyone's needs, four areas have been identified for particular attention based on evidence:

## **Direction 1: Support a Healthy Start for Children and Families**

*Thrive!* works to ensure that not only parents but also health care providers have the resources and tools to give children the best start, reducing the risks of chronic disease later in life. Creating an environment that encourages and supports breastfeeding is an important part of this direction.

## **Direction 2: Equip People with Skills and Knowledge for Lifelong Health**

This work focuses on “health literacy”—ensuring that people can access and understand health information and recognize misinformation. It includes “food literacy” so that they can make informed food choices and have the skills to prepare food even on a limited budget. It also includes “physical literacy,” the ABCs of movement. If people become skilled movers, they are more likely to be active and remain active for life.

## **Direction 3: Create More Opportunities to Eat Well and Be Active**

Even with skills and knowledge, many Nova Scotians experience barriers to healthy eating and physical activity due to lack of money and access. This work focuses on removing barriers, mostly through strengthening and establishing policies.

## **Direction 4: Plan and Build Healthier Communities**

The way our communities are designed affects our health. This direction focuses on how we can make changes for people of all ages to be healthy in their communities.



## Foundation: Social policy

Strong social policy is the foundation of all prevention strategies, including *Thrive!* Governments at all levels need to continue to implement and expand policies that provide a living wage, affordable housing, access to quality child care, income and employment supports and transition programs, employment standards and arrangements (including parental leave), and affordable transportation. We must also continue to improve our public education system so as to prepare every child for success, and create good jobs and a strong economy to support families and sustain quality public services.

# Working across government

Building strong connections across departments is key to the success of *Thrive!* Part of the work is to align with existing strategies and initiatives that support children, youth, families, and communities. Here are some examples of collaboration:

- The departments of Health and Wellness and Education and Early Childhood Development are working to ensure that every child in Nova Scotia is screened at 18 months, to pick up any delays or developmental concerns so that they can be addressed early. Currently demonstration sites are being established in some primary care practices to implement the screening process and build connections among practices and community resources for children and families.
- *Choose How You Move: Sustainable Transportation Strategy* and its companion document *Exploring Sustainable Transportation in Nova Scotia* involved Energy, Environment, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.
- The Provincial Active Transportation Task Team focused on developing transportation solutions that support the health of Nova Scotians, including walking, biking, community transit, and community design.
- There is ongoing support and collaboration on the *Food and Nutrition Standards in Regulated Child Care Settings* and the *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools*.
- To help facilitate new connections, an interdepartmental committee is providing leadership at the senior level across government departments to ensure the full implementation of *Thrive!* It includes representation from Agriculture, Community Services, Communications Nova Scotia, Education and Early Childhood Development, Energy, Environment, Health and Wellness, Justice, Labour and Advanced Education, Natural Resources, the Office of Planning and Priorities, Municipal Affairs, and Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

# Working across communities

Changing the way we live and the places where we live to be healthier is going to take time. And everyone has a role to play.

Through *Thrive!*, government has taken the lead by framing the issue and helping to coordinate action. Part of that role is to collaborate with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement provincial policies and programming that are based on evidence.

*Thrive!* encompasses many initiatives to create healthy public policy and horizontal government action. The plan is about changing the “landscape” to make healthy choices the easy choices. Public engagement has supported individual and community action and societal change.

Organizations such as the Ecology Action Centre are helping people develop the knowledge and skills they need to shape environments and communities so people can lead healthy lives. For instance, the organization’s Making Tracks program provides safety and skills training to children and youth related to walking, cycling, in-line skating, and skateboarding.

The Ecology Action Centre also facilitates workshops and events to help municipal staff, active transportation groups, and others to create Active Transportation (AT) friendly communities, using their toolkits *Active Transportation 101: Bringing AT to Your Community*; *Developing an AT Plan*; *School Travel Planning*; and *Tiny Travel Planning*.

The group’s *Our Food* project aims to create positive food environments—by hosting local food cooking classes and sessions on canning, root cellars, gardens, compost piles, and greenhouses—and increase community engagement in food policy issues.

Doctors Nova Scotia and the Health Charities Network are examples of other organizations that have been engaged. Besides the fact that they have helped increase understanding about *Thrive!* through their networks, they run their own health-promoting programs that contribute to the necessary change in our social environments.

Now in its 11th year, the Doctors Nova Scotia Kids’ Run program is building a culture that supports regular physical activity for children, which will hopefully continue throughout their lives. More than half the schools in the province participate, giving 17,500 young Nova Scotians opportunities to be active. It includes a “girls only” component that runs at no cost at the junior and senior high level, providing an important social network for continued activity at a time when activity levels often decline.

One member of the Health Charities network is the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Its Walkabout initiative is making strides to create a walking culture in Nova Scotia. It supports community, workplace, and school initiatives, shares routes, and recognizes steps taken to improve walkability. It's a comprehensive approach that aims to help people enjoy the physical and mental benefits of walking within their communities.



# Progress highlights

## Direction 1:

### Support a Healthy Start for Children and Families

- Inclusion of the World Health Organization (WHO) growth charts for Canada in the provincial electronic medical records is allowing primary care practitioners easy access to important information for the healthy development of infants and children. These new growth charts include the 2006 WHO Child Growth Standards (birth to 5 years) and the 2007 WHO Growth Reference for children and adolescents (5 to 19 years).
- *Loving Care* is now more accessible and more widely used. This public health resource was developed to give parents and families information to protect, promote, or improve their health, and to prevent illness, injury, or disability. It is now easier to access specific information found in this resource online through the use of hyperlinks. In addition, *Loving Care* is used and promoted by HealthLink 811 nurses as a trusted source of information and support.
- The Provincial Breastfeeding Steering Committee continues to work toward the implementation of the Nova Scotia Provincial Breastfeeding Policy.
- Approximately \$470,000 went out to local breastfeeding coalitions/committees to promote, protect, and support breastfeeding.
- The Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority was recognized for taking the first step towards earning the WHO Baby-Friendly Initiative designation.

## Direction 2:

### Equip People with Skills and Knowledge for Lifelong Health

- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development continues to work to ensure that the curriculum in schools develops food knowledge and skills and physical literacy skills. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education has worked to incorporate healthy living components into its Adult Learning Program curriculum, provide health literacy resources, and support community programs that develop skills, for example healthy eating on a restricted budget.

- The Standards for Early Childhood Education Training Programs are currently being reviewed and updated with revisions that will enhance physical literacy outcomes. Early childhood development consultants continue to work with the Department of Health and Wellness and public health nutritionists to provide workshops on the standards as well as healthy eating, nutrition, and menu planning for young children.
- Work is underway with non-governmental organizations to develop opportunities for all children to learn to swim and bike. For example, the Lifesaving Society of Nova Scotia has been able to expand its Swim to Survive program for grade 3 students. It teaches children to swim for safety, promotes enjoyment of the province's pools, beaches, lakes, and rivers, and helps build physical literacy skills for a lifetime of fun in and out of the water. Options are being explored for a bicycle program.
- Funding support allowed the Annapolis Valley District Health Authority to develop new recipes for *Strive for Five at School!* materials and to adapt them for other settings, such as child care centres, and for families. These resources promote skill development with an emphasis on local seasonal fruits and vegetables.
- The opportunity to develop practical food preparation skills and knowledge is particularly important for children and youth. Through the Health Promotion Youth Corps, these opportunities are being provided. One example is the Oxford School cooking club, which provides students not only with the chance to cook but also a bond among students and a safe space—important for student well-being. The supportive environment has allowed students to develop relationships with adult mentors and talk about a range of health and life issues, including healthy eating and physical activity.
- A literature review and environmental scan to inform a Nova Scotia food literacy plan is now complete. This plan will consider awareness, knowledge, and skills related to food “from field to fork.”
- The Department of Community Services facilitated a dialogue and discussion with faculty and professional development coordinators of early childhood education training programs on the implications for curricula and professional development related to *Thrive!*, physical literacy, and healthy eating.

- The Daily Quality Physical Education Needs Assessment is underway. It's the first step to understanding what's required for 30 minutes of quality daily physical education for grades primary to 9.



## Success Story: Policy Evolution

Day cares, schools, recreation facilities, and other organizations within the South Shore Health region are developing and implementing healthy eating policies that promote and provide healthy food.

To be a credible partner in changing the landscape around healthy eating, South Shore Health needed to “walk the talk” and model an evidence-based healthy eating policy.

In June 2012, the board of directors endorsed a food policy to help change the culture of food. It addresses sponsorship, marketing, fundraising, and food sold and served.

A *Thrive!* grant provided an opportunity to investigate and understand specific barriers and the supports needed to make changes to food for patients, staff, and the public. The funding allowed the health authority to do a product review, menu changes, training and support for food service staff, feasibility studies, testing and tasting, evaluations, and a new three-week, district-wide patient menu to replace the current regular, diabetic, and cardiac menus.

### **Direction 3:** **Create More Opportunities to Eat Well and Be Active**

A major thrust of the work under this direction is related to food policies in publicly funded institutions. By ensuring that food policies are in place, it makes healthy options more readily available.

- Collaboration between the departments of Health and Wellness and Community Services provided grants, totaling \$280,000, to all regulated child care settings in Nova Scotia, to support further implementation of the *Food and Nutrition Standards in Regulated Child Care Settings*.
- The *Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools* is being reviewed and updated based on the most current evidence.
- A new registered charitable organization called Nourish Nova Scotia has been established by stakeholders to support the Provincial Breakfast Program. Nourish Nova Scotia hopes to generate additional funding sources and partnerships to support growth, expansion, and sustainability of nourishment programs for Nova Scotia's children and youth. The Department of Health and Wellness provides \$750,000 annually in grants to support breakfast programs.
- Building on the healthy eating policy in public schools and regulated child care, other publicly funded institutions are emerging as leaders in healthy eating policy development. This includes the district health authorities and the IWK Health Centre, post-secondary institutions including universities and the Nova Scotia Community College, provincial government departments, and municipalities. For sport and recreation settings, a provincial advisory committee has developed guidelines to help them change their food environments to better support healthy eating.
- Healthy Eating Policy Grants for Publicly Funded Institutions, totaling nearly \$386,000, went out to support 23 sites in January 2013.
- A total of \$360,000 was distributed to the Recreation Facilities Association of Nova Scotia to help sport and recreation facilities buy or replace equipment so they can prepare food and beverages that are in line with new healthy eating guidelines for these settings.



## Success Story: Plan in Action

Schools have been taking the lead for many years to engage communities to create healthier environments. In 2012–13, the Tri-County Health Promoting Schools used the *Thrive!* strategy to identify priorities and help frame their work.

An example is the Kids in Motion after school program, which Tri-County built in partnership with municipal recreation departments. The program provides students in the elementary grades with positive and safe physical activity programming after school. Programs provide up to two hours of physical activity and a healthy snack, at no cost to participants and facilitated by recreation staff.

Tri-County also worked with the Lifesaving Society of Nova Scotia and private and municipal pools so that five elementary schools could participate in the Swim to Survive program. Many of the communities in the Tri-County Regional School Board are coastal; water safety skills are necessary for students to live healthy active lifestyles.

Tri-County Health Promoting Schools also formed a Nutrition Ad Hoc Committee to support schools as they work within guidelines of the Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools. All the school boards underwent food service assessments that will direct the focus for food service workshops. For schools concerned about fundraising due to the policy, the committee devised a Healthy Fundraiser Incentive program where schools that participate in exclusively healthy ventures will be eligible for monetary prizes.



### **Success Story: Active Collaboration**

Afterschool Adventures in Mountain Biking and Videography: Dirt Divas is an active and creative After School Program for girls in grades 7 and 8. The program is a collaboration among recreation departments in Canning, New Minas, and Wolfville, and Trips For Kids (Annapolis Valley Mountain Bike Association). It is led by certified cycling coach Michelle Marcinkiewicz of TrailFlow and professional videographer Kim Smith of Movie Games. Funding through *Thrive!* made it accessible for participants.

Dirt Divas involves cycling skills, videography, photo journalism, and outdoor adventure, with a focus on healthy lifestyles. It provides good bikes, helmets, cameras, and transportation, so there are no costs for participants.

The after-school time period is an important window of opportunity to increase physical activity and provide a healthy alternative to high-risk behaviours. Government departments are supporting several complementary programs:

- \$500,000 is going to school boards through the community-use-of-schools grants program.
- SchoolsPlus offers various after school, March Break, and summer activities in collaboration with community partners. Some examples include Open Gym for families on Saturdays, after school Zumba, Active Healthy Eating Camps, the Art of Yoga, skateboarding, and cooking.

- The Lighthouse Program at the Department of Justice provides grants to community organizations to help connect youth to their communities. The after-school programming helps youth make choices that will avoid crime.
- A new community-based program called After the Bell aims to address barriers in rural and remote areas so as to engage more junior high students, particularly girls. Communities across the province have received funds to help with programs.

## **Direction 4:** **Plan and Build Healthier Communities**

- A working group of staff from Municipal Affairs, Health and Wellness, and Energy is guiding the creation of a “Healthy Vibrant Communities” Statement of Provincial Interest following the completion of a literature review and best practice scan. The statement will identify the province’s interest in community design and land use planning decisions that help create supportive environments for healthy eating, physical activity, reduction of alcohol-related harm, and multi-modal forms of active transportation.
- A Provincial Active Transportation Committee is now reviewing the evidence on issues and policy interventions and will develop a formal active transportation policy/plan. The group has representation from Health and Wellness, Energy, Environment, Municipal Affairs, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, Natural Resources, Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, Justice, Seniors, and Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is taking the lead on developing the Blue Route, part of a cycling network connecting communities around the province. The department is working with Bicycle Nova Scotia, municipalities, and active transportation groups to determine the best route.
- Work is also underway on a mapping project involving Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and Bicycle Nova Scotia, part of developing assessment criteria for active transportation on road projects. The department is working on guidelines and a policy on paved shoulder widths for active transportation.

- As part of the Sustainable Transportation Strategy, a new funding program was launched—Nova Scotia Moves. It aims to support collaborative, innovative, local solutions to sustainable transportation challenges in communities across Nova Scotia.
- The Municipal Physical Activity Leaders (MPAL) program continues to expand. There are 43 municipalities involved. Three strategic priorities for the plans are women across the lifespan, junior and senior high youth, especially girls, and walking and biking as part of daily life.
- The first memorandum of understanding for a Physical Activity Leadership Program with Mi'kmaw communities was signed in February 2013 at Membertou. The new partnership mirrors the MPAL program. Since then, agreements have been signed and staff hired by Acadia, Waycobah, Paq'tnkek, Annapolis Valley/Glooscap, and Eskasoni to develop plans that meet the needs of their communities.
- Partnerships with sport and recreation facilities are improving access to unstructured physical activity opportunities for children, youth and families. Over \$385,000 has been allocated to a variety of community-based approaches aimed at eliminating the cost barrier to being physically active.
- A committee is coordinating trails activity with representatives from Natural Resources, Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, Environment, Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, Municipal Affairs, and Energy.
- Following public consultation, the plan for parks and protected areas has been released. The plan supports increased opportunities for nature-based, year-round access for physical activity.
- The purchase of land from Bowater and the trail refresh at Port L'Hebert are examples of improvements to provincial parks that increase opportunities for families to be physically active in rural communities.

# Evaluation

With the breadth and scope of *Thrive!*, surveillance, monitoring, and evaluation are complex. A working group has developed a logic model that describes strategy activities and intended outcomes. An evaluation framework is underway to guide long-term evaluation. This framework will measure the collective impact of the plan's objectives and document incremental changes over time and across a broad set of outcomes. Some of these changes may take root quickly; others may require sustained, long-term effort before change or outcomes can be measured. The evaluation of *Thrive!* will assess both of these and report on progress as the strategy unfolds.

## Taking action together

A healthier population will not happen overnight. The focus of our health-care system needs to shift from illness to wellness. Our conversations and policies about where and how we live, learn, work, commute, and play need to shift from weight to health.

*Thrive!* focuses on one part of the solution—creating environments that help increase healthy eating and physical activity, and reduce unhealthy eating and sedentary time, particularly through the use of policy.

We ask you to please join us in being part of that solution.

As we forge our way ahead, it is important to stay focused and continue to invest in and build on good work underway. We must connect so that we can increase understanding and celebrate changes as they happen, and so that Nova Scotia continues to be a leader in promoting healthy communities.

It's also important to celebrate our successes. This report shows the progress we are making in this long-term plan for healthier Nova Scotians. We are changing the way we live through these actions and through everyone working together.

For that, we thank our many partners—for doing your part to make this province a place where children, families and all Nova Scotians can *Thrive!*

