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Good Intentions, Grave Concerns: PHANS Responds to Nova Scotia's 2026–27 Budget

Public health advocates welcome targeted care investments but warn that deep cuts to social programs risk long-term harm to Nova Scotians' health

HALIFAX, NS — The Public Health Association of Nova Scotia (PHANS) today released its response to the 2026–27 provincial budget, acknowledging meaningful gains in seniors' and community care while sounding the alarm about cuts that could deepen health inequities across the province.

The budget includes several welcome investments: \$25.9 million for seniors' pharmacare, \$10.2 million to expand home care, \$12.3 million in seniors' attendant care, and \$59.1 million to transition adults with disabilities into community living. Additional funding for digital health navigation tools, the 811 health information service, public housing, and supports for survivors of gender-based violence also reflect progress on the social conditions that shape health.

“These targeted investments show the government understands that health happens outside the hospital walls,” said Andrea, Hilchie-Pye President of PHANS. “Supporting people to age at home, access mental health care, and find stable housing are exactly the kinds of upstream investments that improve lives and reduce long-term costs to the healthcare system.”

However, PHANS is raising serious concerns about other aspects of the budget, with over 250 million in cuts to jobs and government programs. Significant reductions to select programs including heritage, culture and tourism and numerous public sector job losses threaten community stability — particularly in rural and lower-income regions. This is a sector that already has precarious employment as well as arts are known to support community health and well-being.

“When we cut programs that address the root causes of poor health, we don't save money — we simply shift costs downstream into emergency rooms and crisis services,” Hilchie-Pye warned. “Nova Scotia cannot afford to be penny-wise and pound-foolish when it comes to prevention.”

The association also highlighted longer-term fiscal risks. Nova Scotia is projecting a deficit of approximately \$1.2 billion — the largest since 2013–14 — and net debt is expected to exceed the province's 40% of GDP guardrail. Debt servicing costs, currently around 5% of the provincial budget, are forecast to rise to 7.6% of revenues by

2029–30. PHANS cautions that as interest payments grow, the province’s ability to invest in prevention and social programs will shrink.

While Health and Wellness spending is growing to approximately \$6.7 billion, PHANS notes that much of this increase reflects rising costs from staffing, facilities, and service demand — not new investments in population health or prevention.

“Spending more on healthcare is not the same as investing in health,” said Hilchie-Pye. “Evidence consistently shows that the strongest predictors of a healthy population are stable housing, income security, quality education, and strong mental health supports. We urge the province to protect and grow these investments, even in fiscally challenging times.”

Sustainable population health requires both adequate healthcare investment and robust social infrastructure. Public health advocates, frontline physicians, social workers, and Indigenous leaders are calling on the Nova Scotia government to align its fiscal recovery plan with a Health in All Policies approach — one that protects upstream investments in income security, affordable housing, cultural well-being, and community capacity as essential, not discretionary, pillars of a healthy province.

PHANS will continue to advocate for policies that prioritize prevention, equity, and the social determinants of health. The association calls on the provincial government to ensure that the programs most critical to reducing health inequities are shielded from further reductions in the years ahead.

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About PHANS

The Public Health Association of Nova Scotia (PHANS) is a provincial association dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of all Nova Scotians through advocacy, education, and the promotion of evidence-based public health policy.

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