

April 15, 2021

The Honourable Dr. John Haggie
Minister of Health and Community Services

Dear Minister Haggie:

Congratulations on your continuing appointment as Minister of Health and Community Services. As part of this Cabinet, you are working on behalf of, and alongside, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to face the challenges confronting our province while preparing for the great opportunities ahead. I have confidence in our Government and in this province. This is the right team at the right time.

Together, we will deliver on our promises to the people of this province. Together, we will promote a healthy Newfoundland and Labrador, drive meaningful economic opportunities, foster inclusive population growth, modernize education and childcare, and build strong partnerships. We will realize our vision of a prosperous and fiscally responsible province that is inclusive and welcoming to people from all over the world.

As Minister, you will take a lead in building a prosperous future for this province. You will foster strong relationships with Indigenous governments and organizations and with relevant stakeholder groups. Each relationship must be founded upon respect and mutual understanding.

Now is the time to take meaningful steps on the path to prosperity, and decisive action to build a solid foundation for future generations. I am asking you to work with your Cabinet colleagues and with all Members of the House of Assembly to advance the following priorities.

Please continue your work to ensure the health system is ready to respond quickly and effectively to any future resurgence of COVID-19 and to reduce disruptions to the delivery of other health services caused by the public health emergency. This includes supporting the ongoing work and engagement set out by the Vulnerable Populations Working Group. Continue to facilitate and promote immunization via the COVID-19 vaccines.

As Minister of Health and Community Services, I ask that you work toward making our province one of the healthiest in Canada by 2031. Please develop a cost-neutral plan that improves the healthiness of our people, and uses the resulting healthcare savings to invest in community health infrastructure and programs with a focus on the social determinants of health.

You will continue to work with Health Accord NL and stakeholders towards the development of a 10-Year Health Accord. We must work to find ways to reduce health system costs and eliminate waste while improving services to meet the health needs of individuals, families, and communities.

In consultation with healthcare providers, patients with lived experience, and the Health Accord NL recommendations, identify opportunities to apply value-based healthcare practices. I ask that you collaborate with the Minister of Children, Seniors, and Social Development to reinvest identified savings into areas that will improve the social determinants of health and wellness of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

As part of our Government's commitment to wellness, you will also be responsible for increased public health promotion, awareness, education, and prevention measures in areas such as youth vaping and smoking cessation, chronic disease management, breastfeeding, and healthy eating. Please continue to prepare for full implementation of the new school food guidelines in the 2021-22 school year.

I ask that you continue to invest in a Health in All Policies approach to ensure all sectors are mindful of the influence that their activities have on the health and well-being of our province and its citizens. This will involve supporting Government decision-making by ensuring that the full impact of a decision on the health and well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is understood by our Government before we make changes to legislation, programs, or services. This includes services that disproportionately impact the health and well-being of women, Indigenous, and vulnerable persons.

As we work to position Newfoundland and Labrador as a national leader in eHealth/telemedicine, please work with the Minister of Digital Government and ServiceNL to explore the digitization of government health services to reduce expenditures and improve outcomes. Continue to invest in technology and expand access to healthcare in rural and remote regions of the province through eHealth and telemedicine infrastructure, including mental health and pharmacy services.

Ensure that cost savings realized through this service delivery shift will be reinvested into expanded subsidies for rural and remote residents, particularly residents of Labrador, to travel for specialized healthcare that cannot be offered digitally. Please continue to support families who must travel for medical care, and work to simplify and streamline the application process in order to ensure timely reimbursement of eligible expenses.

Continue expanding the number of primary health care teams throughout the province, improving the scope of practice for healthcare providers, increasing the number of nurse practitioners and licensed practical nurses to provide care in our communities, and filling vacant positions in the regional health authorities.

In collaboration with the Minister of Education, continue to improve access to Practical Nursing and Personal Care Attendant programs and enhance the use of paramedics and advanced care paramedics in communities throughout the province. Working with the Minister of Education, continue to implement an Advanced Care Paramedic Training program.

I ask that you continue to implement Towards Recovery: A Vision for a Renewed Mental Health and Addictions System for Newfoundland and Labrador, including ensuring that the voice of lived experience is heard in all our work through the support of our Recovery Council, composed solely of individuals with lived experience and family members. I also ask that you oversee the development and plan for the opening of the new Mental Health and Addictions Facility.

In collaboration with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, partner with the private sector to design, build, finance, and maintain new health care facilities in an effort to increase access to critical health care services while maximizing value for taxpayers.

Continue to work with the Minister of Finance and the federal government to work toward improvements in long term care, including the creation of a set of national best practices. Explore innovative approaches to long term care. Continue to enhance home-based supports for people with complex care needs, such as individuals living with dementia or needing palliative care.

Please also support the Minister of Education in updating the province's health curriculum in schools. Creating a healthy and health-conscious population starts with creating habits and acquiring knowledge from a young age. Please collaborate with educators, experts in the field and community organizations to rework the health curriculum and update it with the most recent findings on exercise, nutrition, substance use/abuse, relationship building, mental health and sexual health. In fostering healthy schools, please also work with Minister of Education to implement free period products in schools.

Working with stakeholders and the Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equality, please increase access to fertility treatments in the province. While that work is ongoing, provide funding to eligible Newfoundland and Labradorians who must travel to out-of-province fertility clinics. I also ask that you continue to engage with regional health authorities regarding the expansion of midwifery services.

We will always remain focused on a robust economy where there is a place for all workers, an economy that embraces renewable energy while maximizing our oil and gas advantage. We will foster a business environment that supports new and growing technology and we will reimagine and reinvigorate our fishing and mining sectors to meet global demand for our abundant resources.

As we work to build a strong economy, we must also work to create a prosperous society. We envision a province with healthy, active residents who not only have access to the means to treat illness but also to achieve wellness. We envision a province with vibrant, engaged communities in which nobody is left behind. We must ensure that in our quest to build economic wealth we also build social and cultural wealth.

Our Government must always be mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and must ensure that quality social services are available and accessible to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. To ensure our Government is meeting this need, a Gender-Based Plus Analysis must be integrated into all policies and proposals.

I call on you and every other Newfoundlander and Labradorian to join me in my commitment to make a difference for our province. Together, we will harness our collective strengths and build a better and brighter future for this province.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Furey', written in a cursive style.

DR. ANDREW FUREY
Premier