

**Via Email and Mail**

February 2, 2022



The Honorable Andrew Furey  
Premier of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador  
The Office of the Premier  
Confederation Building, East Block  
P.O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

And/

The Honorable John Haggie  
Minister of Health and Community Services  
Department of Health & Community Services  
Confederation Building, West Block  
P.O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Premier Furey and Minister Haggie:

On behalf of the Registered Nurses' Union (RNU) Newfoundland & Labrador, I would like to outline our perspectives on Health Accord NL.

Premier, I would like to recognize you and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for your leadership in establishing Health Accord NL, and recognizing the dire need to transform our health care system.

We extend our sincere thanks to Health Accord NL Chairs Sister Elizabeth Davis and Dr. Pat Parfrey for their leadership, expertise and commitment to this process. Together with members of the Task Force, strategy committees and working groups, they used evidence and engagement to create a plan for improved health and health outcomes for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

RNU and our members were active participants in this process. It was vital for the voices of registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) to be heard. I served as a Task Force member and championed the vital role of RNs and NPs in a reimagined system. RNU facilitated several feedback opportunities for our members including town halls and focus groups.

RNU brought many perspectives and priorities to the table, which we outlined in many discussions, presentations, and a focus group report. However, the most single most important priority for RNU and our members is addressing recruitment and retention.

Even before COVID-19, RNs and NPs were under extreme stress due to excessive workloads and shortages. Now, the pandemic has not only increased the workload of our members, it has led RNs to report worsening mental health and high rates of burnout.

We cannot have a functioning health care system without a healthy workforce. Transformation of our health care system will not be possible until the province adequately addresses health human resources.

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We commend Health Accord NL for addressing this issue with specific calls to action regarding workforce planning. We urgently call on the Premier and government to implement these measures and take the immediate actions necessary to create safe working conditions and adequately recruit and retain RNs, NPs and other health care providers.

**While we agree with the guiding principles and much of the Health Accord NL Report, we are not in a position to fully endorse or support the report and implementation plan in its entirety.**

Our members agree the health care system is broken and needs to be fixed. RNU is supportive of evidence-based, quality public health care for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Many of the changes proposed by Health Accord NL will have a positive impact for patients and healthcare professionals assuming these changes are implemented at the right time and in the right way.

Aligned with Health Accord NL, we support all providers to work to their full scope of practice. We commend Health Accord NL for placing a focus on improving child and elder health. We are pleased that Health Accord NL focuses greatly on social determinants of health, however, we worry the required level of investment that is warranted by government to affect change may not be made.

Improving access to primary health care is a key principal in the report, which we applaud. We have advocated for RNs and NPs to play a critical role on Community Care Teams and be employed under the Regional Health Authorities.

Health Accord NL recommends increased use of virtual care. Although virtual care can be a useful tool, if not used appropriately it can exacerbate challenges for patients and staff. Members raised concerns in relation to the inappropriate use of virtual care during the pandemic. Appropriate use of virtual care, such as using it in conjunction with a nursing appointment to access a specialist, is vital. Adequate education on virtual care must be provided to staff. Adequate supports and infrastructure for patients, including those who are elderly and experiencing poverty, are critical for this tool to be effective.

As outlined above, while we support many of the report's recommendations, RNU has concerns regarding the implementation of Health Accord NL.

RNU is a strong advocate of public health care. We will not support privatization of any services and have made this position clear at the Health Accord NL table. The impact of the pandemic here at home and across the country has once again reminded us of the risks of private for-profit health care. It was heartbreaking to see the level of outbreaks and deaths in private for-profit long term care facilities across Canada. There is overwhelming evidence showing private delivery approaches to health care compromise staffing levels and standards of care, as well as marginalize health care workers.

As well, we do not support the implementation of Health Accord NL as it relates to any potential job losses or measures that result in the marginalization of health care workers. We cannot afford to drive health care providers away from the system. RNs and other providers are already considering leaving the profession or planning to retire early. Stabilizing health human resources is vital. This lens must be used when decisions are being made regarding service delivery changes in communities.

RNU will continue to advocate for a fair transition for our members who may be affected as plans are implemented. We call on government to listen to the opinions and concerns of our members when the plan is rolled out. RNU will stand by members who feel care in their communities will be negatively impacted.

To affect transformational change, proper governance and implementation is critical. RNs and other providers will need to be properly supported as Health Accord NL changes are rolled out. A piecemeal approach to implementation of the calls to action will not produce the envisioned transformation.

As leaders within health care and communities, our members acknowledge the great need for improved and equal access to health services for all residents of our province. Despite supporting the principles of Health Accord NL broadly, RNs and NPs have experienced failed attempts at positive change in the past. They are fearful of what could result should the recommendations be implemented by government using a piecemeal or one size fits all approach.

In addition, ongoing monitoring and careful review well beyond the implementation stage will be critical to ensure Health Accord NL changes have the intended outcomes in communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Transformation will not come easy. Implementation of Health Accord NL will lead to an enormous shift in the delivery of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador. The people of our province and all health care workers will be greatly impacted by this shift. As outlined in the Health Accord NL Report, it will be vital to invest in ongoing education and change management to support the transformation envisioned.

RNU appreciates the opportunity to be an active participant and voice for RNs and NPs during the creation of Health Accord NL. The Co-Chairs, Task Force and Committees have produced a visionary plan with a focus on sustainability and improved health outcomes for the people of NL. It is our hope Health Accord NL will lead to positive outcomes for patients and the hardworking, dedicated professionals working throughout our health care system.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Yvette Coffey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Yvette" and last name "Coffey" clearly distinguishable.

Yvette Coffey, RN  
RNUNL President

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