Transforming Services for Persons with Disabilities

Q&As

Q: Explain how this new vision will better serve persons with disabilities and their families?
More independence and choice over where and how they live. Families have told us they are frustrated to navigate a bureaucratic sand inflexible system. That is not good for families and it is not what the province wants either. Everybody deserves a safe home that is appropriate to their needs.

Q: How much will this transformation cost?
We are spending close to $1 billion on a system that is out of date and many families find frustrating. I rather spend that on a model that produces better results. This is about providing better care and a more responsive approach to support persons with disabilities. Between DHW and DCS the province spends $945 million annually providing services and demands are growing.

Q: Is the current system broken?
The current system isn’t meeting everyone’s needs. It needs to become more flexible. It needs to person driven and focused rather than program driven. There needs to be more choice for individuals and families.

Q: Advocates have been critical of the current SPD system for years. Why now? Is this because of the election?
This has been a priority since we came into office. We heard what families and advocates and staff have been telling us. We listened, we consulted and we are taking action. Work has been underway for many months with the Putting People First consultation and the SPD transformation committee, which is comprised of many stakeholders. The action we are taking comes from their input.

Q: The SPD committee has a 5-year time line for change. Can change occur in 5 years?
Five-years is an aggressive timeline. The first five years will involve planning, implementation and ongoing consultation with families, service providers and our other partners. But let’s be clear, we are in for probably a decade of change.

Q: Why does it have to take so long?
It took decades to get here and it will take time to get Nova Scotia back to being a leader. There is of course urgency but it has to workable and it takes time to design and implement. The first steps start today and that is very exciting news.
Q: A decade is a long time. What do you say to individuals and families frustrated now with a system they believe doesn’t meet their needs?
We understand the kind of stresses families of loved ones who have disabilities and want to see immediate change. Our staff are dedicated and hard working and care deeply about the people we serve.

What we are announcing today is exciting as it is historic. It is major change in direction for Nova Scotia.

I hope families will understand that we heard them and we will move as quickly as we can, but it cannot be rushed. We need to plan and we need to build supports that are needed within the communities first.

Q: What do you say to critics who has been very public about their disappointment in the lack of options?
There have been a number cases that have received public attention over time and needed a better response. We heard the frustration. That’s why we are committing to a bold change of direction and a better way to support persons with disabilities, seniors and mental health clients in their own communities.

Q: Will there be a moratorium on expanding institutional care?
Our commitment is clear: we are going to do things differently. We are taking immediate action in three areas: legislative reform, single entry access and a housing demonstration project. It is our first step towards a more person directed, socially inclusive and community-based system.

Q: Will all or many institutions be closed and if so, when?
Right now Nova Scotia has the most people in institutionalized care. The goal is to have many more people living in communities and choosing where and how they live. we want to reduce reliance on institutional care. It will take time and service providers will be at the table as we adapt. What is really being recommended here is redefining the roles of service providers.

Q: Will this cost jobs?
Demands for service are increasing. There will not be less work. What we are really talking about here is redefining roles. What will change is how we work and where we support persons with disabilities.

This is about creating an improved and more comprehensive service for individuals and families and about making the very best use of our combined talents, knowledge and expertise.
Q: What have unions, service providers have to say about this change of direction? Have they been consulted?
Yes. Both unions and service providers, along with community and government were involved represented on the transformation advisory committee. They will continue to be part of developing solutions.

Q: How many Nova Scotians with disabilities receive support from the province?
About 5,200 Nova Scotians are supported through the Services to Persons with Disabilities Program.

Q: How many persons with disabilities live in institutional settings?
About 1,100 per cent live in large care facilities.

Q: Will there still be a place for large institutions?
The goal is to have many more people living in communities and choosing where and how they live. We want to reduce reliance on institutional care. It will be important however to have a full range of supports to address every need.

Facilities will not be closed until community supports are in place. Service providers, employees unions and families will be at the table to develop a transition plan.

Q: Is the moratorium on Small Options Homes still in place?
As part of the transformation, the Department will be looking at creating a different model for these community living settings, so this moratorium will be lifted. However, In the meantime, we will not be setting up any more small option homes base on the current model.

Q. (CC/SPD) But there are no details on this demonstration project, where will it happen? How will people be picked?
We will be outlining the details of the project soon. It will be designed to help individuals and families develop their own supported housing solutions. It will be an important blueprint, as it can serve as a tool to assist others who may be interested in arranging similar housing options. For the first time, individuals will have a part in the decision making, the first step toward a more person directed system.
Q. (CC/SPD) Why a single entry system? Isn’t that just going to cause even more problems?
If you’ve ever tried to access the system, you wouldn’t ask the question. Having multiple entry points means telling your story several times to different providers, only to find that you’re not the right fit for what’s being offered. We think that’s the wrong approach. Instead, we want to offer an opportunity for individuals and families to knock on one door, which is always the right one. One call will result in an initial assessment and a referral to the appropriate service from there.

A 1-800 line is only part of single entry. There is much work to be done to ensure calls are answered and services are available. More support for those will come in the CC/SPD Action Plan.

Q. (CC/SPD) You’re getting rid of one piece of legislation and replacing it with two, why? Doesn’t that add to the silos you already have?
The Department of Health and Wellness committed last January to develop new legislation around Continuing Care. The outdated Homes for Special Care Act needs to be replaced. The two departments will work collaboratively in crafting the legislation to ensure we have a modern, legislative framework supporting the work we do. We hope to be able to introduce new legislation in the spring of 2014.

Q: What are the next steps?
The province will develop a 10-year process to provide choice, flexibility and a person-focused approach in line with the recommendations in the roadmap. Planning, policy development and the groundwork to reshape SPD will happen over the next 5 years.

-- Work begins right away to get a team in place to plan and implement to be ready for April 1 2014. An action plan and framework will be developed for the fall of 2013 with costs and implications.

-- Legislation will be passed to more supportive of the new framework by the spring of 2014.

-- Nova Scotia will pilot a project that will provide individualized funding approaches so families can develop their own housing options and models in the community.