

June 16, 2023

Warden Eleanor Roulston and CAO Kim Ramsay
Municipality of the District of East Hants
15 Commerce Court, Suite 170
Elmsdale, NS B25 3K5

Dear Warden Roulston and Ms. Ramsay,

On behalf of the Northern Zone Public Health Leadership Team, thank you for taking the time to discuss areas Public Health can be a partner in shaping healthy communities when we met with you on March 2. For many of us in Public Health, much of the last three years were focused on our Covid response. We are now re-engaging in our work. Our partners' resilience has been tested, not only by the health, social and economic effects of the pandemic, but by the natural disaster of Hurricane Fiona and the collective grief of a mass casualty. Our initial meetings are helping us reconnect, grounding Public Health's work in supporting communities where they are now and informing our work as we re-establish our partnerships. This letter serves to summarize what we've heard so far.

Communities across the region, including First Nations partners, have stressed the importance of authentic engagement, particularly when it comes to developing policy. We heard from Tajikeimik how Public Health can support advocacy efforts by paying attention to and challenging colonial practices within the system. As we step back into our work, we will focus on building relationships so that regardless of the issue, we can begin with supportive and culturally responsive engagement.

Our local partners shared some similar themes, especially related to income and housing security. We heard concerns both about the availability of housing and appropriate services, to people facing homelessness, and the complexity of rural Nova Scotia. Across the province our Healthy Communities team members are involved in work groups focused on income, housing and substance use: as we rebuild our team of health promoters, they'll be equipped with information on policies and information to support our communities' most vulnerable populations.

Any conversation about community health in our area is done against the backdrop of the 2020 mass casualty. Since our meetings, the Mass Casualty Commission released its report and recommendations. The report calls for an approach that's "complex, nuanced and community-wide while also addressing the perspectives, experience and needs of marginalized communities," and Public Health will certainly have a role in engaging communities, providing sound information and supporting the adoption of these recommendations. Some of that work has already begun, as we collaborate with Mental Health and Addictions to coordinate community wellness and engagement sessions. These sessions provide health services as well as collect first-hand community feedback on what further support is needed. Further sessions are being scheduled to ensure we are meeting communities' needs.

Public Health works with others to understand the health of our communities and acts together to improve health.

We also appreciate the challenges around access to clinical health services, we heard this from many of you. While the planning and delivery of these services do not fall in our direct sphere of influence, know that these concerns were heard and we continue to raise these concerns with other health leaders. We also encourage you and your team members to bring these concerns and opportunities forward through the engagement sessions that are happening in the coming weeks. The Mass Casualty Commission brings to light how important our relationships are to one another in creating community health and wellbeing.

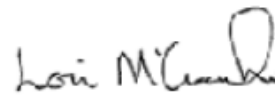
We appreciated your time to connect and meet. It is important for us to hear from community and continue development in collectively supporting the health of the community.

Please feel free to reach out to our leadership team. Their contact information is below:

Sincerely,



Cristin Muecke, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Regional Medical Officer of Health, Northern Zone



Lori McCracken
Director, Public Health Northern Zone

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