



February 19, 2025

The Honorable Tim Houston,
Premier of Nova Scotia
7th Floor, One Government Place
1700 Granville Street
Halifax, NS B3J 1X5

premier@novascotia.ca

RE: Repealing the Uranium Exploration and Mining Prohibition Act and amendments to permit hydraulic fracturing of natural gas in Nova Scotia

Dear Premier Houston,

We are writing on behalf of the Nova Scotia committee of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) to express our deep concerns regarding your plans to remove bans on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for natural gas and uranium mining exploration and research. As physicians and healthcare providers, we feel it is our duty to bring to your attention the latest medical evidence of the health harms associated with these extractive industries.

CAPE is a non-partisan, physician-led organization with over 36,000 supporters across the country. It plays a unique role at the intersection of health and the environment, bringing a credible, evidence-based perspective delivered by the trusted voices of doctors, other health professionals, and researchers to support community and planetary health and enhance equity. CAPE Nova Scotia represents more than 100 physicians and other healthcare providers across the province.

We understand the economic challenges facing Nova Scotia, including US tariffs and uncertainty around federal funding. We are also acutely aware of the high rates of poverty in our province and how this profoundly affects the communities we serve. However, we strongly believe that pursuing resource extraction activities that contribute to significant health and environmental harms is not the solution to these challenges.

The medical evidence on the health impacts of unconventional oil and gas development, including fracking, is clear and growing. Recent studies have found strong correlations between proximity to fracking sites and:

- Increased rates of preterm births, low birth weight, and congenital defects

- Higher incidences of childhood asthma and leukemia
- Increased hospitalizations for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases
- Higher overall mortality rates and reduced life expectancy

For example, a 2022 study in *Environmental Health Perspectives* found that children living near fracking sites had 2-3 times higher odds of developing acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Another study in *JAMA Pediatrics* showed significantly increased risks of spontaneous preterm birth and low birth weight for pregnancies within 10 km of fracking wells.

Many of the chemicals used in fracking are known carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, or have other toxic effects. Groundwater contamination from fracking chemicals can persist for decades, impacting drinking water supplies and soils, and, in turn, adversely affecting human health.

Uranium mining poses its own set of health hazards, related to radiation exposure from radioactive materials released into air and water, and elevated levels of toxic metals. Historical evidence from uranium mining regions shows dramatically increased rates of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases among miners and nearby residents. While modern safety practices have improved, workers and those living in nearby communities face increased health risks from radon gas, radioactive dust, and potential water contamination.

The long-term environmental impacts of uranium mining is equally concerning. It leaves a toxic legacy of radioactive waste with a half-life of tens of thousands of years. Eighty-five percent of the radioactivity in the uranium ore is left behind as tailings, including many radioactive poisons – such as radium, polonium, and radioactive lead-210 – that are far more toxic than uranium itself. These uranium mining and milling wastes will constitute an everlasting health hazard and will have to be monitored and managed in perpetuity at public expense. The Church Rock uranium tailings spill in New Mexico, which released 94 million gallons of such radioactive waste, remains largely unremediated more than 40 years later. A power outage at a uranium mine in Elliot Lake, Ontario, resulted in the spill of two million litres of contaminated water from a tailings site.

We are also deeply concerned about plans to expand fossil fuel extraction and consumption in the province, at a time when we urgently need to transition away from fossil fuels. Building pipelines and other new fossil fuel infrastructure would only exacerbate the root cause of the severe flooding, monster wildfires, and heatwaves we are experiencing in Nova Scotia. The medical journal *The Lancet* has identified climate change as the greatest global health threat of the 21st century. As healthcare providers, we are already seeing the health effects of climate change in our communities.

The health impacts of fracking, uranium mining—and more broadly, climate change—disproportionately affect Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities and vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women, the elderly, disabled people, and

people with pre-existing conditions or biological susceptibilities. Rural and low-income communities also often bear a heavy burden of environmental contamination and health effects. These factors position this as a matter of social, racial, economic and environmental justice. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the UN declaration on the right to a healthy environment, and Canada's *National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act* should guide decision-making.

We recognize the need for economic development and healthcare funding. However, the boom-and-bust cycle of fossil fuel resource extraction and uranium mining offers only short-term gains at the expense of long-term public health and environmental costs. Instead, we encourage focusing on sustainable industries like clean renewable energy projects, which create more jobs per dollar invested than fossil fuels, while protecting our air, water, and climate. Such projects will need to be undertaken with community consultation and support, and at a scale that does not harm the local environment.

Nova Scotia has some of the most ambitious climate targets in North America. Expanding fossil fuel infrastructure would be a major step backwards and incompatible with our climate goals. Moreover, repealing laws that protect against the development of fracking and uranium mining would undermine the province's commitment to improve health care for all Nova Scotians.

Therefore, we respectfully call on your government to:

1. Maintain and strengthen existing restrictions on fracking, uranium mining, and other high-risk resource extraction activities
2. Invest in community-supported clean renewable energy and green infrastructure as a path to sustainable economic growth
3. Require comprehensive health impact assessments for any proposed resource extraction projects
4. Prioritize protection of drinking water sources and ecologically sensitive areas
5. Respect UNDRIP; engage in meaningful consultation with Mi'kmaw communities and ensure there is free, prior, and informed consent for any activities impacting Mi'kmaw territory.
6. Engage in meaningful consultation with rural communities, and work collaboratively with them to find shared solutions.
7. Respect the UN Declaration on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

We recognize the immense challenges you face as Premier during these difficult times. The pressures of US tariffs, healthcare funding gaps, and the need to ensure prosperity for all Nova Scotians are significant burdens to bear. However, we must be careful not to trade one crisis for another. The health of our communities and the natural environment that sustains us are



essential foundations for any lasting economic solution. By maintaining our commitment to environmental protection while pursuing sustainable economic development, Nova Scotia can lead the way on innovative solutions that preserve the health, environmental, and economic legacy we wish to leave for future generations.

Sincerely,

Laurette Geldenhuys, MBBCH FFPATH MMED FRCPC MAEd
on behalf of CAPE Nova Scotia

c.c. Claudia Chender, Leader of the Opposition
Derek Mombourquette, Leader of the Liberal Party