



Nova Scotia Provincial
Housing Agency

2023-24 ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency (NSPHA) for the year ended March 31, 2024, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines.

These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against NSPHA's Business Plan for the fiscal year just ended. The reporting of NSPHA's outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by NSPHA management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of NSPHA management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the NSPHA 2023-24 Business Plan.

Original signed by:

The Honourable John Lohr
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Byron Rafuse
Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency

CEO Message

I am proud to present the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency's (NSPHA) 2023-24 Accountability Report. Throughout this year, NSPHA has experienced significant progress and transformation, with meaningful achievements spanning all aspects of the organization.

On creation of NSPHA in 2022, a new governance structure and corporate team was introduced to strengthen oversight and management of public housing. This year, NSPHA published its first strategic plan, "*A New Path Forward*." The plan highlights NSPHA's new policy framework, aimed at improving consistency in operations and client service. Through initiatives like this, NSPHA is making strides on implementing recommendations from both the June 2022 and January 2023 Office of the Auditor General reports on public housing.

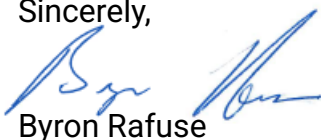
In 2023-24, Government made historic investments in public housing, announcing 247 new units across the province that will provide deeply affordable rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing for more than 600 people. NSPHA is leveraging innovative modular construction methods so more low-income Nova Scotians can access new public housing faster. To meet the diverse needs of NSPHA clients, the ground floor of all new units will be barrier-free. Architectural designs prioritize energy efficiency, ensuring the new public housing is sustainable now and into the future.

As part of NSPHA's ongoing commitment to enhancing client service, over 20 client engagement sessions were conducted to better understand the needs of tenants. Operational policy updates have expanded access to public housing, resulting in a four-month reduction in average wait times and seven-month decrease in priority access wait times. Changes made to NSPHA's priority access policy in collaboration with the Department of Community Services have helped 57 households experiencing homelessness find a place to call home.

Talent management is another key area of focus for NSPHA. To gain insight into the state of inclusion within the organization and build a workforce that reflects the diverse clients we serve, NSPHA launched its first Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access staff survey. NSPHA is transforming its organizational culture by actively involving employees in the strategic planning process, conducting province-wide employee engagement sessions and investing in customer service training.

The achievements highlighted in this report demonstrate the dedication and commitment of NSPHA's 500+ employees to enhancing the public housing system through collaboration with community partners and all levels of government. Together, we are setting a new standard for the delivery of affordable housing in Nova Scotia, providing more people with a safe and affordable place to call home.

Sincerely,



Byron Rafuse

Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency

About the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency

The Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency (NSPHA) is a Crown corporation that supports Nova Scotians and the priorities of the Government of Nova Scotia, in partnership with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to ensure low-income individuals and families have access to public housing that they can afford and meets their diverse needs.

The *Housing Supply and Services Act* outlines NSPHA's legislated mandate. Accountable to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, NSPHA is responsible for maintaining, managing and operating safe and suitable subsidized housing for low-income Nova Scotians and attaining acceptable levels of client service.

NSPHA maintains and operates more than 11,200 public housing units, including high-rise and low-rise apartment buildings, duplexes and single-family homes. NSPHA serves a diverse population and collaborates with clients, other departments and levels of government as well as private and community partners to deliver its mandate.

Measuring Performance

Since its creation on December 1, 2022, NSPHA has worked hard to transform how public housing is delivered in Nova Scotia so more Nova Scotians have a place to call home. The 2023-24 Accountability Report highlights achievements made in four strategic priority areas:

1. Client Service
2. Asset Management and Operations
3. Corporate Governance and Accountability
4. Talent Management

Client Service

Deepen client focus and improve client experience.

2023-24 Targets:

Application processing time

- Improve application processing time from 44 to 39 days
- Reduce backlog by 5%
- Achieve an application completion rate of 90%

Outcomes

- ✓ Improved application processing speed from 44 days to 32 days – exceeding the target by seven days. Application processing time is the date NSPHA staff receive an application to when they complete the eligibility review.
- ✓ Reduced the application backlog by 5% - to an average of 2%. Applications are backlogged when a pending application is queued for 40 days or more.
- ✓ Exceeded the target application completion rate with 92% of applications completed. The application completion rate is the percentage of applications entered that have all data entry points recorded.
- ✓ Held over 20 consultations with clients, external stakeholders and government partners to support development of a new Client Engagement Strategy outlining how NSPHA will deepen client focus and track and evaluate client satisfaction.
- ✓ Housed 54 families through improvements to the overhousing policy, decreasing the number of severely overhoused households by 40%. A household is considered overhoused when there are more bedrooms than the National Occupancy Standard (NOS) recommends for the household size – severely overhoused means there are three or more empty bedrooms.
- ✓ Expanded the priority access policy, in partnership with the Department of Community Services, to create a new stream for applicants experiencing homelessness. Through

this new collaboration, NSPHA has helped 57 vulnerable households transition out of homelessness into public housing since November 2023. NSPHA also worked with the Department of Justice and community service providers to enhance the family violence priority access stream, ensuring better support for the diverse needs of survivors.

- ✓ Launched a new client-focused software – RentCafe – to improve the application process, enabling households to apply for public housing, update their file and review their application status online. Applicants can also confirm their continued need for public housing, resulting in more effective waitlist management.
- ✓ Supported Government's response to the 2023 wildfires by partnering with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Canadian Red Cross to launch the Nova Scotia Wildfires Housing Support program. The program provided housing to Nova Scotians who lost or experienced severe damage to their homes due to the wildfires in Shelburne County and Halifax Regional Municipality.

Asset Management and Operations

Invest strategically in our housing assets so that the Nova Scotians we serve have a place to call home now and into the future.

2023-24 Targets:

Accessible Units

- 20 barrier-free units
- 60 near-accessible units

Deep Energy Retrofits

- 114 one- and two-unit deep energy retrofits

Unit Turnaround Time

- 60-day provincial average

Outcomes

Public Housing Infrastructure Investments

- ✓ Committed \$43.7M to execute more than 830 projects in over 280 buildings across the province. Through this work NSPHA is preserving government-owned housing stock so the places tenants call home remain comfortable, energy efficient and accessible.

New Public Housing and Accessibility Improvements

- ✓ Made a historic multi-year investment of \$83M, in partnership with the federal government (\$58.8M from the Province, \$24.2M from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation), to build 222 new public housing units in rural and urban communities across the province. These new builds will include 80 barrier-free units and completely

accessible first floors – exceeding the Province’s accessibility targets under the National Housing Strategy Bilateral Agreement.

- ✓ Invested an additional \$8.1M to install 25 new modular units in eight communities across the province to give up to 88 Nova Scotians a safe and affordable place to call home.
- ✓ Completed accessibility upgrades to 123 units and created 33 barrier-free units under our Accessibility Improvement Program so that more seniors can age in place and more families can access affordable and accessible housing.

Energy and Sustainability Investments

- ✓ Executed 170 deep energy retrofits in public housing units across the province to improve tenants’ quality of life, ensure the long-term sustainability of the government-owned public housing portfolio and support achievement of federal and provincial targets of net-zero emissions by 2050. Deep energy retrofits are renovations that increase energy efficiency to increase tenant comfort and reduce energy costs.
- ✓ Developed a long-term Energy and Emissions Management Plan that sets out NSPHA’s commitment to a more energy efficient, affordable and sustainable future. The plan establishes baseline energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and provides a framework for achieving energy goals and targets.
- ✓ Implemented the Efficient Product Install Program, in partnership with Efficiency One, to install energy efficient light bulbs, fixtures and showerheads across the public housing portfolio – at no cost to tenants. This has resulted in 52,391 kWh in energy savings and supported the objectives under the NSPHA-Efficiency One Memorandum of Understanding to reduce utility costs for public housing tenants.

Operations

- ✓ In 2023-24, unit turnaround times – the time it takes to prepare a vacant unit for tenancy – averaged 108 days. This is a 28% reduction from 151 days in 2020 reported in the 2022 Office of the Auditor General’s Report. Reasons for vacancies of more than 60 days include: accessibility improvement upgrades; planned capital renewal work; units requiring extensive repair; and challenges obtaining specialized contractors to complete the work.
- ✓ Launched a new Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) program to establish a consistent approach to OHS work across the organization, increase workplace safety, reduce accidents and promote overall employee wellbeing.

Corporate Governance and Accountability

Deliver improved oversight and management of public housing.

2023-24 Targets:

Implementation of the Office of the Auditor General Recommendations

- Complete 40% of the recommendations from the June 2022 Auditor General's report on *Oversight and Management of Government Owned Public Housing*.
- Complete 100% of the recommendations from the January 2023 Auditor General's report on *Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority – Examination of Service Contract Awards*.

Outcomes

Policy and Strategy

- ✓ Completed 45% of the recommendations from the Auditor General's [June 2022 report](#) with the remaining recommendations on track for completion by 2024-25.
- ✓ Strengthened NSPHA's overhousing policy, which moves households with more bedrooms than the National Occupancy Standard (NOS) recommends for their household size, to more suitable units, providing a more consistent and fair unit allocation so more low-income families can access public housing. By working closely with each household to help them select a unit in their community that meets their needs and support them through the process, NSPHA reduced the number of severely overhoused households by 40% and housed 54 families from the waitlist.
- ✓ Established a new policy framework for NSPHA that ensures an inclusive, fair and standardized approach to public housing delivery. This work has established a solid foundation for the ongoing review and enhancement of our operational policies, processes and tools.
- ✓ Collaborated across government and with community partners to develop new processes and tools that support consistent decision making on priority access applications across the province. This initiative has provided clarity and guidance to staff on priority access criteria, third-party verification to confirm eligibility and fair and equitable allocation of units for priority access applicants.
- ✓ Published NSPHA's first five-year strategic plan, [A New Path Forward](#), which outlines our mission, vision and values and establishes our strategic priorities. The plan sets an agenda for changes we will make to improve public housing delivery and sets performance targets to ensure we are accountable for achieving our goals.

- ✓ Implemented a new Conflict of Interest policy, along with guidelines and tools to assist employees in identifying, managing and mitigating real or perceived conflicts of interest, achieving 100% compliance.
- ✓ Worked with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to draft Government's five-year housing plan, *Our Homes, Action for Housing*.

Business Solutions and Accountability

- ✓ Implemented a new case tracking system that provides new functionality for documenting complaints and inquiries from clients, assigns staff members to address them and monitors progress on responding to complaints. NSPHA's new complaint resolution process helps to meet the diverse needs of clients while fostering a culture of continuous improvement.
- ✓ Invested in upgrades to the client service and asset management system to streamline business processes, improve data quality, increase administrative efficiency and automated waitlist management and lease renewal processed to reduce the risk of error and support a more equitable and consistent unit allocation process.

Information Technology and Finance

- ✓ Updated our procurement processes in alignment with Provincial guidelines in response to the Auditor General's [January 2023 Report](#) with all recommendations on track to be completed by September 2024.
- ✓ Developed a procurement strategy, in alignment with the Provincial procurement group, to solicit proposals for the construction of the 247 new public housing units.
- ✓ Worked with the Department of Justice's Major IT Contract group to develop a procurement strategy tailored for the acquisition of a new human resource information system (HRIS) and an e-procurement system.

Talent Management

Attract and retain top talent.

Outcomes

- ✓ Developed a Human Resources Plan to streamline business processes, reducing timelines for the Recruitment Position Action Request (PAR) approval process from an average of 6 days to 2.7 days.
- ✓ Administered our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Survey to enhance workforce diversity, ensuring our workforce better reflects the diversity of the clients we serve and supporting retention of employees recruited through diversity initiatives.
- ✓ Introduced a performance planning program that empowers all employees to set goals and objectives with their managers, promote professional development and support continuous improvement.

Financial Results

For the year ended March 31, 2024

(In thousands of dollars)

	2024 Estimate	2024 Actuals	Variance
Revenue			
Tenant rent revenue	\$ 63,551	\$ 68,782	5,231
Other	5,720	6,191	471
Provincial (MAH)	88,759	85,681	(3,078)
Provincial (TCA Grant)	1,900	1,213	(687)
	<u>\$ 159,930</u>	<u>\$ 161,867</u>	<u>\$ 1,937</u>
Expenses			
Utilities	26,991	26,272	719
Maintenance	89,343	94,444	(5,101)
Administration & Other	29,660	28,103	1,557
Property tax	12,710	12,778	(68)
	<u>\$ 158,704</u>	<u>\$ 161,597</u>	<u>\$ (2,893)</u>
Annual surplus	<u>\$ 1,226</u>	<u>\$ 270</u>	<u>\$ (956)</u>

Revenues variance explanation:

Tenant rent revenues are higher primarily due to higher senior tenants' income – \$5.2M.

Provincial revenue is lower primarily due to:

- accessibility projects reprofiled to DMAH owned TCA – \$2.45M
- corporate office reallocation delayed to 2024-25 – \$0.545M
- NSPHA TCA projects delayed – \$0.687M

Other revenue is higher primarily due to interest earned on bank balances - \$0.49M.

Expenses variance explanation:

Total expenses compared to budget were higher by 1.8% which was offset by higher tenant revenue. The main drivers of the overspend are:

- Snow removal costs after the extraordinarily large snowstorm in Cape Breton – \$1.2M
- Increased focus on renovating vacant units for a quicker turnaround – \$3.1M
- Increased costs due to additions to the vehicle fleet – \$0.36M
- Higher market rates in awarded service contracts – \$0.70M
- Accessibility projects reprofiled to DMAH owned TCA – (\$2.45M)
- Corporate services office relocation delayed to 2024-25 – (\$0.545M)

Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing

Annual Report under Section 18 of the Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011.

The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A Wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment, or
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Agency

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2023-2024
The number of disclosures received	None
The number of findings of wrongdoing	None
Details of each wrongdoing	N/A
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing.	N/A