

Office of the
SENIORS' ADVOCATE

**Annual Performance Report
2019-2020**





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The Office of the Seniors' Advocate
Newfoundland and Labrador
2 Canada Drive
St. John's NL, A1E 0A1



MESSAGE FROM THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE



I am pleased to present the 2019-2020 Annual Performance Report for the Office of the Seniors' Advocate. This report has been prepared in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act** provisions for a Category Three entity. As the Seniors' Advocate, I recognize my obligations under the Act and I am accountable for the results reported herein.

This year was another very busy period of travelling, listening, discussing and connecting with seniors, supporters and policy-makers. In September I released my first report, **Long May Your Big Jib Draw**, which summarizes the main issues that seniors brought to my attention. It outlines my plans to move forward to ensure change.

In November we partnered to host an Older Workers Forum - the first of its kind for Newfoundland and Labrador - where older workers and labour market attachment was explored.

In January residents on the Avalon Peninsula were faced with a State of Emergency resulting in many seniors struggling to access food, medications and other necessities of life. It was followed soon after with COVID19 which has led to increased social isolation and loneliness.

Despite the many challenges I am pleased that seniors continue to be engaged, involved and participate, although in new ways, throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I remain committed to working toward the improvement of policies, programs and services for seniors.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Brake, PhD
Seniors' Advocate



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OVERVIEW

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate was created through the **Seniors' Advocate Act** which was proclaimed on December 14, 2016. The Act and Regulations came into force on July 5, 2017. Authority and duties for the Office are outlined in the Act.

Dr. Suzanne Brake was appointed as Newfoundland and Labrador's first Seniors' Advocate on November 7, 2017 for a first term of six years. Each year the Seniors' Advocate must report to the House of Assembly through the Speaker of the House of Assembly on the exercise and performance of her powers and duties under the Act.

For the purposes of the Act, seniors are identified as individuals aged 65 years or older, or less than 65 years of age and in receipt of seniors' service. "Seniors' services" are the programs, services or systems of support, prescribed in the regulations, that are related to health care, personal care, housing, transportation or finances that are used by or associated with seniors. "Service providers" means the public or private persons or bodies prescribed in the regulations who fund or deliver, in whole or in part, seniors' services.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate addresses systemic seniors' issues, which are problems in an overall system impacting a number of seniors. For additional details on the Office, including its mandate, vision and lines of business please visit <https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/>.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate has four staff: the Advocate, two Systemic Advocacy Consultants and an Administrative Officer. The Seniors' Advocate is an independent Officer of the House of Assembly and reports directly to the Legislature through the Speaker. All other staff members are members of the Public Service of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate serves the entire province and is physically located in St. John's. Personnel may be contacted in-person, via telephone (toll free), email, fax, mail or through the website.



The House of Assembly Management Commission approved an annual budget for the Office of the Seniors' Advocate of \$500,000 for fiscal year 2019-2020:

Salaries	\$ 386,400
Employee Benefits	5,700
Transportation and Communications	45,900
Supplies	5,000
Professional Services	9,000
Purchased Services	44,000
Property, Furnishings and Equipment	4,000
TOTAL	\$ 500,000





The Office of the Seniors' Advocate engaged in a process to determine how to ensure the achievement of our mandate as outlined in the Act. Using our lines of business: systemic advocacy, collaboration and public awareness, we developed the values which underlie the operations of the Office. The Office is an independent voice for seniors in this province. Every effort is taken to ensure that the integrity and core values of this office are reflected in its service to the public and in its internal activities.

Value	Action Statement
Independence	Powers and duties will be applied in an open, unbiased manner. There will be no conflict of interest or undue influence during any stage of the review process. Every effort will be made to provide timely, accurate and fair recommendations.
Respect	Every individual in contact with the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will be treated with respect. Differing opinions will be valued in an open, collaborative spirit.
Diversity	Every person is unique and the seniors' population, as a group, are not all alike. Differences in experiences and opinions will be welcomed and used to build an open, accepting and strong service to the public.
Empowerment	This office will support and encourage seniors to use their voices. Seniors will know that their issues are important and that they have a role in making positive changes.

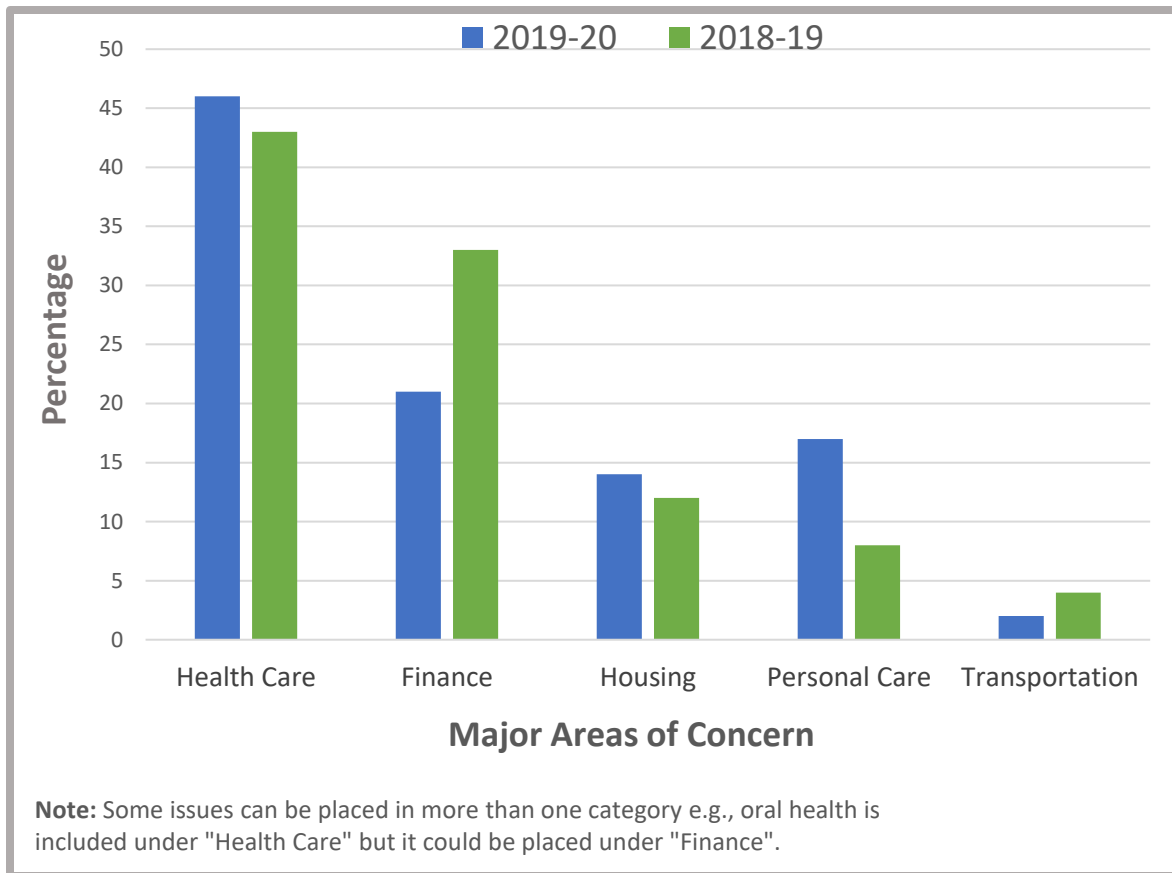
Whenever possible, documents produced by the Office of the Seniors' Advocate follow clear language guidelines by using plain text and setting up pages with a left-side alignment. Documents also follow Canadian National Institute for the Blind's accessibility guidelines. In this Report, bold fonts are used rather than italics or underlining. As well, the font is a san-serif style in a minimum 12-point size.



HIGHLIGHTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

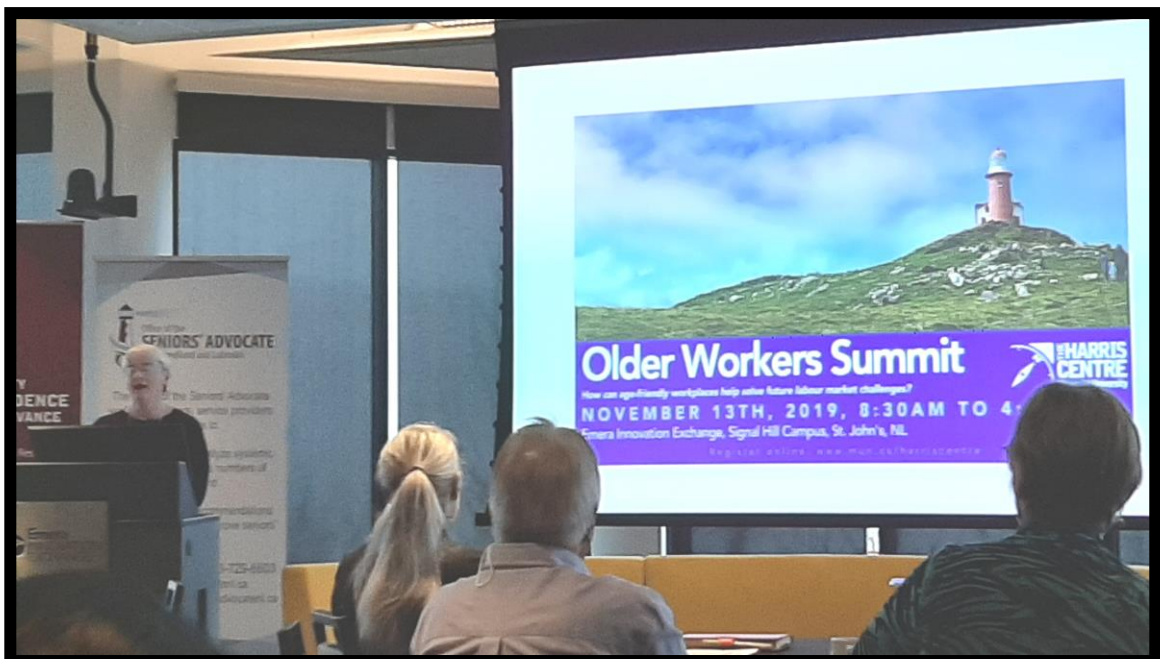
During the reporting period of April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate engaged in many activities including systemic advocacy, education, outreach and public engagement. Highlights of this time period include:

- A report entitled, **Long May Your Big Jib Draw**, was released on September 25, 2019. This Report outlined what has been heard from seniors and the Office's plan for prioritizing and addressing the concerns.
- During 2019 - 2020, the most important issues brought to the Advocate's attention by seniors and their families fell under five main categories as demonstrated below. Health care remains the major area of concern.





- An Older Workers Summit was held on November 13, 2019. The Summit brought stakeholders together to look at older workers and the labour market and plan for the future.
- In February 2019 staffing issues were finalized by the hiring of permanent staff.
- Several reports on systemic issues are being readied for publication.
- Work has begun on a review of the long term care sector.
- Ongoing networking opportunities with seniors' organizations and retiree groups.
- Initial meetings were held with five Ministers whose departments have direct responsibility for recommendations in **Long May Your Big Jib Draw**.





REPORT ON PERFORMANCE

ISSUE 1: OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

The mandate of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is to monitor the systemic issues which most concern seniors. This Office uses a collaborative, partnership model to engage seniors and stakeholders. The Office is committed to ongoing outreach; travelling throughout the province to meet and talk with seniors and stakeholders.

Objective: By March 31, 2020 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have undertaken measures to work collaboratively with seniors and others.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Continued engagement of seniors' organizations, community organizations, municipalities, governments and others.	<p>Participated in 94 events/information sessions in 13 communities.</p> <p>Ongoing networking opportunities with provincial Ministers (and/or their representatives) with portfolios including seniors' services, programs and/or policies.</p> <p>Regular ongoing meetings with Canada's other Seniors' Advocates.</p> <p>Quarterly meetings of all provincial Statutory Offices.</p>
Engaged SeniorsNL and the Office of the Citizen's Representative.	<p>Individual concerns were referred to the Office of the Citizens' Representative, as appropriate.</p> <p>Met semi-annually with SeniorsNL to discuss their data collection results and prioritization of issues.</p>
Continued implementation of a provincial outreach plan.	<p>Outreach ensured all regions of the province are being visited and ongoing implementation is underway. In addition to meeting with seniors on the island, in 2019 the Advocate was able to travel to areas of Labrador to meet with seniors including Indigenous seniors and elders.</p>
Extended offers to meet with, or offer presentations, to groups or stakeholders.	<p>50+ Clubs, community leaders and NunatuKavut Community Council assisted with arranging information sessions.</p> <p>Presentation to Quebec/NL Parliamentary Association.</p>



Discussion of Results:

Outreach and public engagement opportunities allow the Advocate to connect with seniors, families, stakeholders and organizations on a personal level. Through these meetings, the Advocate can have conversations with seniors about the issues and concerns which impact them. Provincial outreach will continue to be a major priority of the Seniors' Advocate as a way to both inform and learn.





ISSUE 2: PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate will inform the public of its duties and powers and the operation of the Office. As well, the Office will promote awareness of systemic issues impacting seniors.

Objective: By March 31, 2020 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to promote increased awareness of its role, powers and duties.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Updated the Website.	The website is continuously being updated as news and information evolves. Its purpose is to inform the public of issues and activities but also to solicit input. For electronic communication, the public may use email or an online Public Engagement Form.
Explored social media outlets.	The Office researched the practicality of establishing an official social media presence such as Facebook and Twitter but it was decided, for the present time, there are insufficient personnel to undertake this role. This decision may be revisited at a later date.
Distributed Information Cards.	Educational/promotional Office of the Seniors' Advocate Information Cards were circulated. https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/pdfs/OSA-InformationSheet.pdf
Developed and distributed other promotional materials.	Promotional materials including business cards, logo-inscribed pens and notebooks were distributed at meetings and public engagement sessions.
Participated in media interviews.	The Advocate participated in 8 media interviews.
Produced news releases and opinion pieces	Three news releases were issued https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/pdfs/NewsRelease1Oct2019.pdf https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/pdfs/NewsRelease25Sept2019.pdf https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2019/osa/0627n07/



Discussion of Results:

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate has established a physical and online presence with the creation of its website and promotional materials which are distributed at public engagement sessions.

The Advocate's in-person participation in radio, television and online events have been very important in promoting the positions, advocacy activities and policies of the Office. Media interviews, news releases and print articles are also very important in promoting the issues which are important to seniors; as well as ensure that government programs and services - especially any changes to them - are communicated to the public.

ISSUE 3: TRACKING AND TRENDING

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate uses a collaborative, partnership model for data collection and the monitoring of systemic issues impacting seniors.

Objective: By March 31, 2020, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to identify and monitor systemic seniors' issues.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Continued enhancement of protocols to identify and monitor systemic seniors' issues.	Every issue (individual and systemic) brought to the attention of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is collected in the HPE Records Management System. The database's tracking capability was used as a tool to assist in: 1. determining which issues are systemic in nature and 2. helping the Office monitor the frequency of issues, as well as other factors including regions or geography. All of the collected information can impact how the Office prioritizes systemic issues for further action.
Enhanced the electronic records management system.	The HPE Records Management System was customized to suit the needs of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate, which is primarily tracking of issues. The Administrative Officer is responsible for administration and maintenance of the System. This year the System was improved to collect data on both clients and callers because at times a person will call the Office on behalf of another person.



Indicators	Accomplishments
Received and reviewed matters related to seniors.	144 individuals contacted the Office of the Seniors' Advocate during this time period to express concerns about seniors' issues. Approximately 1326 individuals attended networking and information sessions with the Office. Many attendees shared their personal experiences with the Advocate.

Discussion of Results: The HPE Records Management System is the Office's main sorting and tracking tool. However, this tool may not assist the Office of the Seniors' Advocate in monitoring emerging (or potential) issues which may not yet be of concern for seniors. For such issues, the Office may choose to raise public awareness as an informative or as a preemptive measure. One example of an emerging issue this past year was the practice within some workplaces to terminate employee health benefits when employees reach age 70. As people remain attached to the workplace longer, there is no doubt this issue will receive more attention.



ISSUE 4: REVIEWS

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate was established to identify, review and analyze the systemic issues related to seniors. The Office will make recommendations to service providers to bring about positive changes to improve seniors' services. The public will be informed about reviews and actions resulting from the reviews.

Objective: By March 31, 2020, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have continued to implement systemic review(s) where necessary.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Identified areas where a systemic review is warranted.	The Office of the Seniors' Advocate has identified a number of priority issues which include long term care, housing and homelessness, oral health and older workers. The area which has raised the most concern from seniors and families is the long term care and personal home care sector; this is where the Office will be focusing its attention.
Conducted research.	All systemic issues require significant research. Research may include literature reviews, jurisdictional scans, consultations, surveys, focus groups and interviews.
Consulted with seniors, service providers and the public.	More than 144 people contacted the Office; 1326 connected through public engagement and community outreach sessions. Numerous service providers such as employees of regional health authorities, NL Housing, municipalities and SeniorsNL also consulted with the Office. All contact informs the work of the Office.
Made recommendations and informed the public.	The public was informed via public engagement sessions, news releases, media, in-person meetings and on the Office of the Seniors' Advocate webpage.



Discussion of Results: Although the Office has no legislative authority to investigate individual issues, every issue - including individual matters - brought to the attention of the Office is recorded in the Office's database. The tracking system can show whether an individual issue is becoming systemic or has potential to become systemic. When issues are not currently a priority but likely to become more significant in the near future, the Advocate decides whether or not to address them from a preemptive perspective; to raise awareness. Worth noting, when the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is asked to help resolve a non-systemic issue, the Office offers as much assistance as possible before (possibly) referring the caller to another more suitable office, service or program. When issues are identified as needing to be reviewed, initial research commences. In some cases more in-depth work is required and in others the research demonstrates there is no need for further exploration. Research of systemic issues may result in: reports with recommendations; reports with findings but without recommendations; opinion pieces; correspondence or presentations.





ISSUE 5: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILING

The population of this province is aging. This change should bring about a shift in how aging and the aging process are viewed. For policy-makers and service providers this also means that programs, policies and services must adapt. Demographic profiling will outline socioeconomic factors pertaining to seniors.

Objective: By March 31, 2020 the Office of the Seniors' Advocate will have developed a demographic profile of NL seniors.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Continued collection of demographic information in a range of areas including personal care, health care, housing, transportation and finances.	The Office of the Seniors' Advocate continues to collect and analyze statistics and information.
Continued analysis of demographic information as provided.	Demographic information and statistics are analyzed upon receipt to inform the Office so it can determine how seniors are living and what could make their lives better.

Discussion of Results: All of the data collected thus far is revealing a better representation of NL's senior population. As noted in the previous year's report data collection continues to present challenges. Specifically, data is forwarded to the Office at different times depending on how it is gathered at the source which means some data can become stale quickly. The collection and categorization of data as it relates to seniors continues to present challenges. Although most data collection breaks down ages by 10 or 15 year increments i.e., 45 - 55 or 56 - 64; most collection tools tend to group all people older than 65 as "65+". It is reasonable to assume that this category will encompass all people aged 65 - 105; not necessarily an insignificant number. Data collecting should reserve the use of "+" only when that sample size is inconsequential.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

One ongoing challenge for the Office of the Seniors' Advocate is human resources. In addition to the Seniors' Advocate, the budget can only support two Consultants and an Administrative Officer. Considering that these four individuals serve a population of about 112,000 people aged 65 years and older or 238,000 people who are aged 50 years and older - roughly 50 per cent of the entire population of Newfoundland and Labrador - it is a significant workload.

Another challenge for the Office is the issue of individual advocacy and the fact that the Act does not offer the legislative authority to address the concerns of individual seniors. While the Office of the Seniors' Advocate does refer some individual issues to the Office of the Citizens' Representative, as noted in the Act, the ability of the Citizens' Representative to respond to individual matters is limited; its mandate does not extend to private or not for profit entities. The Office has a responsibility to ensure that individuals are aware of the Office's limitations and its requirement to refer individual issues to appropriate offices or programs. That being said, all Office personnel work diligently to ensure issues are addressed, even if it means a referral. But explaining this limitation can be very frustrating for all parties, especially when an individual has already made numerous calls seeking help or is distressed. The Office personnel spend much time assisting seniors because it is the right thing to do; in spite of the fact that individual advocacy is not a component of the mandate of the Office.

Adapting work plans to a world with Covid-19 will be an ongoing challenge for the foreseeable future. Access to the Seniors' Advocate, including in-person meetings and public engagement sessions have been extremely effective for networking purposes. However, working within the current Covid-19 Public Health Orders means that travel throughout the province and in-person public engagement activities are severely limited. As well, work planning requiring in-person surveys and interviews, for example, will require modifications. The Office works with an understanding that current Covid-19 Public Health Orders are evolving and may become even more limiting. The Office will continually monitor the Public Health situation and make adjustments accordingly. The safety of all is tantamount while also ensuring that the mandate of the Office is carried out.

Seniors' issues are important to all people because these issues will impact everyone at some point in their lives. The Seniors' Advocate has successfully created a collegial, responsive, caring Office staffed with compassionate personnel. Seniors have expressed a high level of comfort in communicating with the Office, even when their experiences are frustrating or tragic. The Office has demonstrated a collaborative spirit; always emphasizing the need and desire for partnerships to advance shared goals and commitments. The ability to continue to involve seniors and listen to what they have to say has been instrumental in the development of a strong rapport between seniors, families and the Advocate. As well, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate has engaged policy makers and service providers in formal and informal discussions.



FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are based on information provided in the **Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for Year Ended 31 March 2020**.

	Estimates		
	Actual	Amended	Original
	\$	\$	\$
OFFICE OF THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE			
<i>Current</i>			
7.1.01. OFFICE OF THE SENIORS' ADVOCATE			
01. Salaries	366,160	386,400	386,400
Operating Accounts:			
<i>Employee Benefits</i>	1,281	5,700	5,700
<i>Transportation and Communications</i>	13,075	45,900	45,900
<i>Supplies</i>	2,079	5,000	5,000
<i>Professional Services</i>	-	9,000	9,000
<i>Purchased Services</i>	35,080	44,000	44,000
<i>Property, Furnishings and Equipment</i>	3,358	4,000	4,000
02. Operating Accounts	54,873	113,600	113,600
Total: Office of the Seniors' Advocate	421,033	500,000	500,000



CONTACT INFORMATION

(709) 729-6603

1-833-729-6603

seniorsadvocate@seniorsadvocatenl.ca

2 Canada Drive
Sir Brian Dunfield Building
P.O. Box 13033
St. John's, NL A1B 3V8

<http://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca>



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Newfoundland and Labrador