



Office of the
SENIORS' ADVOCATE
Newfoundland and Labrador

2024-2025

JUNE 2025

STATUS
REPORT
ON

RECOMMENDATIONS

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MESSAGE FROM THE **SENIORS' ADVOCATE**

I am pleased to release the **2024-2025 Status Report on Recommendations**. This fourth annual report represents our ongoing commitment to report publicly on the status of outstanding Office of the Seniors' Advocate's recommendations.

The report highlights that government has made progress on the recommendations of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate, however, most of that progress relates to recommendations made in 2019. The majority of the outstanding recommendations in this status report were made in the **What Golden Years?** report in November 2023 and relate to two main areas:



1) Helping seniors with cost of living challenges. NL seniors have the lowest median income in the country. Further, NL seniors have the highest usage of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), an indicator of poverty, at 44 per cent provincially versus 32 per cent nationally. Poverty is even more pronounced when you look at regional data, with seniors in Central and Western NL receiving GIS at a rate of 59 and 54 per cent respectively.

2) Alleviating the financial stress seniors are experiencing trying to pay for home support services. The majority of provinces and territories in Canada provide home support to seniors free of charge. Unfortunately, Newfoundland and Labrador is not one of those provinces. Every senior, regardless of their income, must pay some or all of the cost of their home support. Many simply cannot, and try to do without, resulting in poorer health outcomes and potentially earlier admission to out-of-home care.

Addressing these two issues will require bold and sustained action. I remain encouraged by the renewed energy and commitment shown by many within the provincial government to respond to the recommendations of my Office and improve services for seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador.

“Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work”. - Vince Lombardi

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Susan Walsh, MSW RSW
Seniors' Advocate NL

MONITORING PROCEDURE

AUTHORITY

The **Seniors' Advocate Act** (the Act) provides the Office of the Seniors' Advocate (OSA) with legislative authority to make recommendations to improve any seniors' services that are related to health care, personal care, housing, transportation or finances. Further, by the authority provided under Sections 16.1(e) and 16.2 of the Act, the Seniors' Advocate can request information and must be provided with that information if it is in the entity's custody or control.

PROCESS

The OSA makes recommendations to improve seniors' services. All recommendations are made after carefully considering input from seniors and families, research, and analysis of best practices.

Recommendations made by the OSA are monitored. The Seniors' Advocate requests written updates on the progress made in implementing recommendations. The reporting period is April 1 through March 31. The responses are published annually in a Status Report on Recommendations. The OSA assesses the progress made on each of the recommendations and assigns one of the following four categories: implemented, implemented ongoing, partially implemented, or not implemented.

If a recommendation falls under the jurisdiction of more than one entity, the recommendation will remain in the partially completed category until all elements of the recommendation are implemented. Updates on each recommendation are requested annually until the Seniors' Advocate is satisfied that the recommendation has been addressed. The results are reported publicly and can be found at:

<https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/StatusReports.aspx>

DEFINITIONS

IMPLEMENTED:

The recommendation has been completed.

IMPLEMENTED-ONGOING:

The recommendation has been completed and the initiative is expected to grow and continue to be enhanced.

PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED:

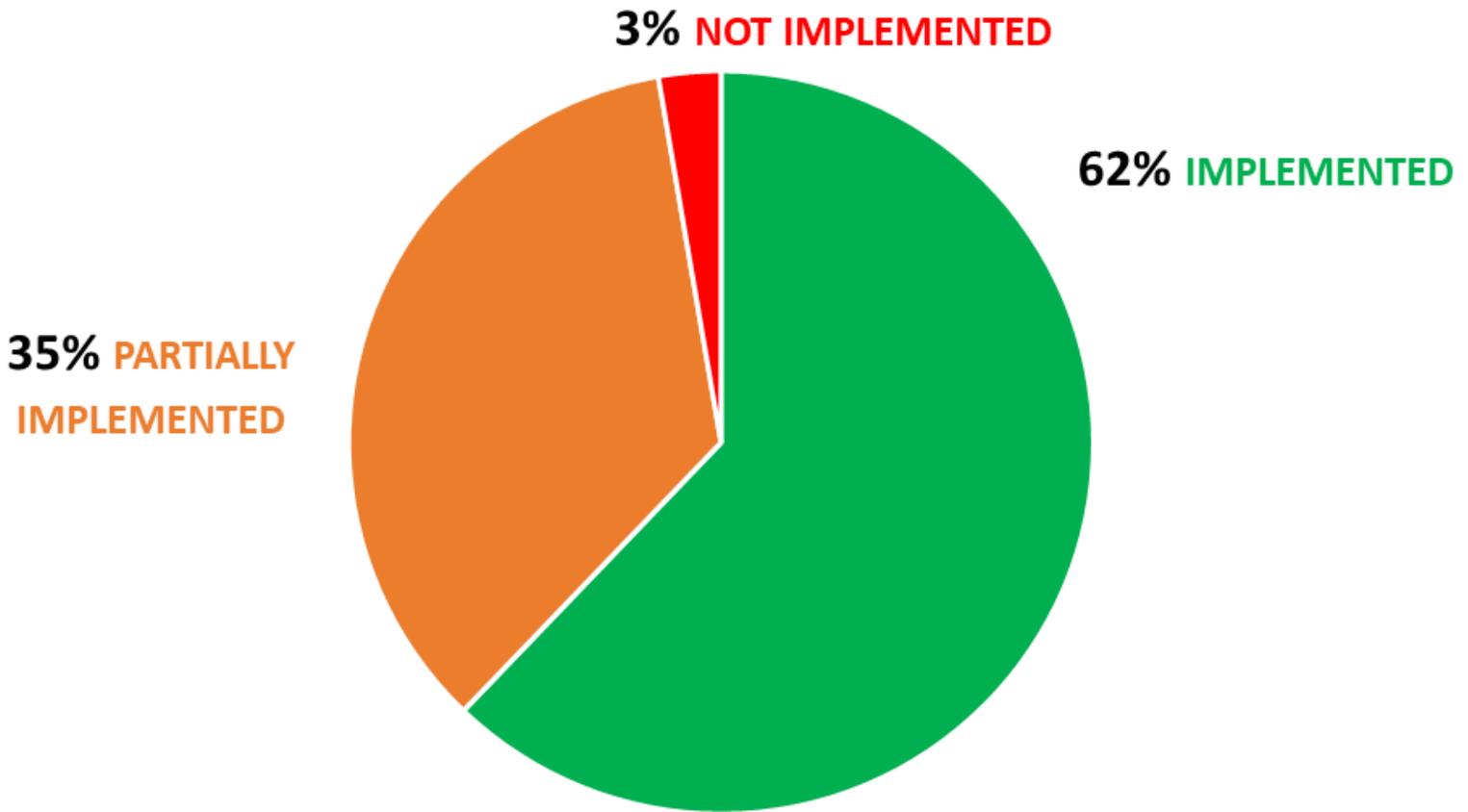
There has been some progress but there are still outstanding issues to be addressed to satisfy the recommendation.

NOT IMPLEMENTED:

There has been no substantive progress made at this point on the recommendation.

STATUS OF ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2019, the OSA issued 25 recommendations and in 2023, the OSA made an additional 12 recommendations. As of March 31, 2025, 62 per cent of the 37 recommendations have been implemented; 35 per cent are underway; and 3 per cent have no substantive progress.



This chart outlines the status of the total number of recommendations made by the OSA.

REPORT	IMPLEMENTED	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED	NOT IMPLEMENTED	TOTAL
Long May Your Big Jib Draw	20	5	0	25
What Golden Years?	3	8	1	12

STATUS OF

RECOMMENDATIONS

LONG MAY YOUR BIG JIB DRAW

This Chart details the status of the recommendations from the **Long May Your Big Jib Draw** report that remained partially implemented or not implemented in the last **Status of Recommendations 2023-24** report.

For conciseness, the wording of each recommendation has been edited in the chart, below. The complete wording of each recommendation can be found in the 2019 Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTED	IMPLEMENTED - ONGOING	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED	NOT IMPLEMENTED
Expand and enhance the Provincial Home Repair Program.			X	
Monitor implementation of the Provincial Home First Initiative and recommendations from the Provincial Home Support Program Review.			X	
Raise awareness and provide opportunities to access Advance Health Care Directives, Enduring Powers of Attorney, and Wills.			X	
Review the province's personal care homes and long term care homes.		X		
Offer the shingles vaccine free of charge.			X	
Monitor the Provincial Dementia Care Plan.			X	
Transfer funding responsibilities for the hearing aid and vision care programs to the Department of Health and Community Services.	X			

STATUS OF

RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT GOLDEN YEARS?

This chart outlines the status of the recommendations made by the Office of the Seniors' Advocate in the **What Golden Years?** report which remained partially implemented or not implemented in the last **Status of Recommendations 2023-24** report.

For conciseness, the wording of each recommendation has been edited in the chart, below. The complete wording of each recommendation can be found in the 2023 Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTED	IMPLEMENTED - ONGOING	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED	NOT IMPLEMENTED
Annually index the NL Seniors' Benefit; the benefit amount must not decrease.			X	
Review both the current max. income threshold of \$29,402 for full NL Seniors' Benefit eligibility and the 11.66% phase out rate. Report publicly on the outcome.			X	
Undertake measures to ensure that thresholds for provincial benefits are adjusted to ensure that any increase to federal pension programs are not lost through a "claw back" process.			X	
Revise the financial assessment policy so seniors in receipt of GIS are automatically financially eligible for home support services, with no client contribution.			X	

RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPLEMENTED	IMPLEMENTED – ONGOING	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED	NOT IMPLEMENTED
Revise the financial assessment policy so households with family net income of less than \$29,402 are automatically financially eligible for home support services, with no client contribution.			X	
Review the financial assessment policy for seniors whose family net income is between \$29,402 and \$42,404, and reduce the current assess rate of up to 18%.			X	
Review the annual exemption thresholds in the financial assessment policy to the highest income thresholds, considering the substantial income range as it relates to the percentage rate (18%) which income is assessed.			X	
Ensure that food banks can provide food delivery in circumstances they assess as necessary.				X
Change the per kilometer allowance reimbursement rate to 40.89 cents per kilometer.			X	

RECOMMENDATIONS

PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED



The Advocate supports an expanded and enhanced Home Repair Program.

Response from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC):

For the year ended March 31, 2025, seniors were supported by these NLHC programs: 24 per cent of the Rental Housing Program; 81 per cent in partner-managed community housing; 54 per cent of the Rental Subsidy Program; and 43 per cent of those in receipt of a Canada Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Benefit (C-NLHB). This newest stream of C-NLHB is geared toward gender-based violence, is comprised of 18 per cent seniors.

Home repair and modification programs supported over 1,375 households in 2024-25 with approximately 76 per cent being senior households: Seniors comprised 77 per cent of clients in the Provincial Home Repair Program; 79 percent of clients in the Home Modification Program; and 72 per cent of clients in the Home Energy Savings Program.

To ensure its home repair programs are meeting the current and emerging needs of clients, NLHC commenced a detailed review of the programs in 2023-24, with a primary focus on evaluating program effectiveness and enhancement of program delivery, this review is anticipated to be complete in spring 2025.





The Advocate is closely monitoring the implementation of the Provincial Home First Initiative as well as the recommendations from the Provincial Home Support Program Review.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

Provincial Home First Initiative:

The Department of HCS, in collaboration with NL Health Services has been leading implementation of Home First since 2018. Additional resources have been provided to the Provincial Health Authority to support implementation; for 2024-25 approximately 1,100 individuals, the vast majority which are seniors, availed of these supports. An addendum was also made to the Home First framework which included guidelines to support Home First in personal care homes, which takes a preventative approach to ensure residents with higher care needs are supported to age in place and homes are supported to provide care.

HCS is leading a committee to ensure standardization of Home First across NL Health Services and to increase awareness through the development and implementation of a communication plan.

Provincial Home Support Program Review:

Of the 25 recommendations, 11 have been completed, 11 are substantially completed, one is in progress and two have not commenced.

An education curriculum has been shared with training institutions. Approved institutions can begin offering the program September 2025. HCS, in collaboration with the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills (IPGS), is working with Keyin College on a 45-hour micro credential course anticipated to be available spring 2025.

Consultations to inform finalization of a revised Levels of Care and Support Allocation Framework are underway. Finalization is anticipated by fall 2025.

The Seniors' Health and Well-Being Plan provides direction on how to support the health and wellness needs of seniors by supporting communities and providing services in the community that offer independence, choice, and safety to enable aging at home.



The Advocate encourages raising awareness and providing affordable opportunities for seniors to access Advance Health Care Directives, Enduring Powers of Attorney, and Wills.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

The Dementia Care Action Plan has a related action and HCS continues to work with the provincial health authority to implement an awareness campaign on advance care planning.

A working group has been established with representatives from various departments, including HCS, Children, Seniors and Social Development, Justice and Public Safety, and the Office of Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation. Public consultations are planned to inform the development of revised materials on advance care planning and financial planning. Once completed an awareness campaign will be developed.



The Advocate recommends that the shingles vaccine be offered free of charge to low income seniors and others with compromised immune systems.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

On March 12, 2025 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced that effective June 1, 2025 shingles vaccine will be available free of charge to residents 65 to 70 years of age and immunocompromised residents over the age of 70 as part of the provincial immunization program.





The Advocate will be closely monitoring the development and implementation of a Provincial Dementia Care Plan

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

HCS released the Dementia Care Action Plan on March 30, 2023. This three-year plan has 36 actions aimed to improve awareness, improve supports and services, and support staff professional development and training. The Dementia Action Council, informed plan development and will support implementation. Highlights from 2024-25 include:

- Dementia Friendly NL website and social media campaign;
- Funded enhanced dementia care training for health care providers, dementia friendly training for businesses and first responders, and First Link support groups for people living with dementia offered by the Alzheimer Society of NL.
- HCS and CSSD are working together to include dementia considerations in the Age Friendly Communities Program.
- A Provincial Dementia Navigator position within NL Health Services will provide education and navigation support for individuals and families.
- A cognitive assessment template has been developed by the Family Practice Renewal Program's Frailty Program physician team to ensure care providers have access to evidence based diagnostic tools.
- St. Clare's Mercy Hospital implemented a pilot project to add recreation services to the medicine and surgery program to support centres of excellence in aging.
- HCS is supporting dementia-inclusive long term care homes by expanding social and recreational programming and enhancing dementia inclusive environments.
- Community based services in personal care homes were implemented including the Adult Day Program, and the Enhanced Dementia Care Program. Program evaluations to inform expansion plans are near completion.
- A provincial recreation knowledge exchange committee supports best practices in dementia care.
- Funding provided to NL Health Services to support Gentle Persuasive Approach coach certification training.
- Increased access to behaviour management services for long term care and personal care homes, through funding of five full time equivalent positions.



The Department of Finance annually index the NL Seniors' Benefit so it reflects increases in the cost of living. Further, the benefit amount must not decrease in the event the cost of living goes down.

Response from Department of Finance:

The NL Seniors' Benefit was increased by 10% in 2022 and an additional 5% in 2023, which saw the benefit increase from \$1,313 to \$1,516 over that time. On December 4, 2024, government committed to annually indexing this benefit to be announced in Budget 2025.



The Department of Finance review both the current maximum net family income threshold of \$29,402 for full NL Seniors' Benefit eligibility and the 11.66 per cent phase out rate, and report publicly on the outcome of the review and any program changes.

Response from Department of Finance:

The Department of Finance has completed a review of the income threshold and the phase-out rate.



The Department of Finance in collaboration with all relevant departments, undertake measures to ensure that thresholds for all provincial benefits programs and services are adjusted to ensure that any increase to federal pension programs are realized by seniors and not lost through a "claw back" process.

Response from Department of Finance:

Beginning in July 2025, the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit (both the payment amount and income threshold) will be indexed to provincial CPI, which will help reduce the impact on seniors that receive this benefit. Adjustments to other provincial benefits programs and services will be considered on an annual basis during budget deliberations.



The Department of Health and Community Services revise the Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services to reflect that seniors in receipt of GIS would be exempt from the financial assessment requirement for access to Home Support Services; they would automatically be financially eligible, and not have any client contribution.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

Government continues to review income thresholds for all programs and services that are income tested.



The Department of Health and Community Services revise the Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services to reflect that households with a family net income of less than \$29,402, would be exempt from the financial assessment requirement to access Home Support Services; they would automatically be financially eligible, and not have any client contribution.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

Government continues to review income thresholds for all programs and services that are income tested.



The Department of Health and Community Services review the Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services specifically for seniors whose family net income is between \$29,402 and \$42,404, recognizing that they are also in receipt of some portion of the NL Seniors' Benefit, and reduce the current assess rate of up to 18 per cent.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

Government continues to review income thresholds for all programs and services that are income tested.



The Department of Health and Community Services review the annual exemption thresholds outlined in the Income Based Financial Assessment Policy Manual for Long Term Care & Community Support Services, related to the highest income thresholds (\$42,405 to \$150,000), considering the substantial income range as it relates to the percentage rate (18%) which income is assessed at.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

Government continues to review income thresholds for all programs and services that are income tested.



The Department of Labrador Affairs change the per kilometer allowance, which is currently set at 20 cents per kilometer, to make it in line with the travel policy offered to government employees (travel in employee owned vehicles), and extended frequently to volunteers members of government committees/ working groups/councils; presently that reimbursement rate is 40.89 cents per kilometer. This recommended rate change should be effective immediately, irrespective of the status of the review of the Medical Transportation Assistance Program.

Response from Department of Labrador Affairs:

The Department of Labrador Affairs continues to assess the needs of patients who incur significant out-of-pocket expenses to travel from rural and remote areas to larger centres for future improvements.



RECOMMENDATIONS

NOT IMPLEMENTED



The Department of Health and Community Services, in collaboration with the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, immediately implement recommendation 4a of the Rethinking Food Charity in Newfoundland and Labrador: Results, Reflections and Recommendations 2022-23 report to ensure that food banks can provide food delivery in circumstances they assess as necessary.

Response from Department of Health and Community Services (HCS):

Government continues to prioritize food security and initiatives to reduce poverty in NL. Supports outlined in the Seniors Health and Well-being Plan include the \$500 annual supplement for seniors living in coastal Labrador to help with the increased costs of food and heating, as well as the Aging Well at Home Grant provides \$400 annually to support well-being with services like grocery delivery, snow clearing, etc.

Government is partnering with community organizations to support access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food for all residents, and considers recommendations from the Rethinking Food Charity consultation, which included continuing to facilitate the Provincial Food Security Working Group with Food First NL as well as key ideas for enhancements to community food program service models. Information on community food supports is available from 211, such as any programs that provide delivery services.



CONCLUSION

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate acknowledges the progress made by government on addressing the recommendations of the OSA.

Improvements are being made but it should be noted that most of the recommendations still requiring action are related to helping seniors with cost of living challenges as outlined in the OSA report **What Golden Years?**. Seniors continue to struggle financially. The OSA's December **2024 Seniors' Report** clearly demonstrates that seniors are concerned about income and affordability. At \$27,800, NL seniors have the lowest median income in the country. Further, NL also has the highest number of seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) which is an indicator of poverty, and this becomes even more concerning when regional differences are considered.

The number of seniors continuing to experience challenges in accessing and affording much-needed home supports in order to age in place, is quite concerning and the OSA has made several recommendations to alleviate the financial stress of home support services. Government's response to those recommendations for 2023-24 was that it *was currently reviewing income thresholds for all programs and services that are income tested*. And its response to those same recommendations for 2024-25, was that *it continues to review income thresholds for all programs and services that are income tested*. While it is good that government reviews income thresholds, there is no discernable action to advance these recommendations.

Step by step the recommendations are advancing. The Office of the Seniors' Advocate – and, more importantly, the seniors of the province – are hopeful that this coming year will see even more progress on the recommendations already reported on as well as those in our newest reports **An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure** and **From Review to Action: A Continuum of Care Approach**.

The province's population of seniors aged 65 and older will increase to approximately 30 per cent by 2032, and the number of seniors 80 years of age and older will increase to about 9 per cent. These numbers are significant and the impact this will have on programs and services for seniors must not be discounted. It is therefore imperative that seniors' programs and services must be planned, developed, implemented and adapted now to ensure the future needs of Newfoundland and Labrador seniors are met. Seniors deserve no less!

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