



Annual Report

2024 - 2025



Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia's annual report for the year ending March 31, 2025, was prepared under the direction of the Board of Directors. We considered all known economic, environmental, and financial impacts while preparing this report.

The annual report was approved by the Board of Directors on June 26, 2025.



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Message from the Board Chair and CEO

ADVANCING ACCESS, EMPOWERING VOICES, AND BUILDING MOMENTUM

This past year at Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) was shaped by our continued commitment to the strategic goals of **accessibility**, **communication**, and **engagement**. Together with our Board, staff, patient partners, and community collaborators, we advanced key initiatives that improve access to quality care for Nova Scotians. We remain proud of the energy and innovation shown across the organization as we continue to grow and adapt to evolving community needs.

A major focus this year was addressing inequities in preschool hearing and speech wait times across the province. With \$1.4 million in new funding from the Department of Health and Wellness, we piloted group service models and hybrid virtual/in-person care to reach more families, more efficiently. We also launched a trial of evening and weekend hours to better support families with busy schedules. These innovations reflect our long-standing commitment to equitable and timely access for all Nova Scotians.

While preschool services were a key focus, adult hearing and speech services remain a priority. Stroke, brain injury, ALS, and age-related hearing loss can all significantly impact quality of life and social connection. Yet this area has seen little new funding for decades. As demand continues to grow, we remain committed to advocating for resources to address these concerns.

This year also marked the launch of the HSNS Innovations Fund, with the first grant awarded to Patient Advisor Ferne Mardlin-Smith. Her Life After Stroke project is a client-led initiative supporting stroke survivors with communication challenges after hospital discharge—helping them stay connected through peer networks and skilled volunteer support. We're incredibly proud to see this first project come to life and grateful to Ferne for turning lived experience into meaningful change.

In another step forward, we introduced Patient Advisor positions with a seat at Board meetings, deepening our commitment to include client voices at every level.

Our work in equity, diversity, and inclusion also evolved with the expansion of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, Accessibility (EDIRA) Committee to include reconciliation and accessibility. A key milestone was a Board-led Indigenous engagement process, including a workshop led by Houston Barnaby of Balsam. That process led to a Board-approved call to action and a draft EDIRA action plan—an important step forward in our journey toward reconciliation with our Indigenous communities.

To ensure the wellness of our workforce, we engaged a consultant to help develop a comprehensive talent management plan. The plan introduced new bursaries, a workforce survey, and actions to support wellness and retention. We also launched Best Practice Councils in audiology and speech-language pathology to give staff a stronger voice in shaping clinical priorities.

We were heartened by the feedback from our new hires, who cited our inclusive culture, meaningful work, and support for work-life balance as key reasons they joined HSNS.

One of our standout achievements this year was completing a two-year informed consent project. Many of our clients face communication challenges, and this work helped ensure every client can truly understand and participate in decisions about their care.

We also piloted a new appointment reminder system in Cape Breton, tested new screening technology to reduce wait times, and began exploring remote audiology testing—all driven by community feedback and clinical insight.

Managing waitlists remains a constant and pressing priority, one that has shaped HSNS for more than 60 years. Behind the scenes, our teams continue working hard to deliver timely, high-quality services, even as demand and complexity increase.

Community feedback also guided major decisions like the upcoming relocation of our largest clinic in Halifax. Clients and staff alike emphasized the importance of accessible transit, free parking, and a bright, welcoming space. We're excited to open our new Mumford Road site in 2025, marking the start of a new chapter for care in the HRM.

We're also expanding opportunities for public input, from QR codes in waiting rooms to online policy feedback. We're making it quicker and easier than ever for clients and caregivers to share their voices and help shape how services are delivered.

HSNS is fortunate to be working with many partners in its efforts to provide quality and culturally safe audiology and speech-language pathology services. Of note is the spring announcement of funding from the Focused Research Investments program, naming HSNS as a partner with the IWK and Tajikeimik for the seven-year project *Etuaptmu'k W'loti: Using Mi'kmaw Knowledge to Create Health and Wellness Solutions*.

Looking ahead, our current strategic plan is coming to a close. We're now preparing to co-create a new one with input from staff, communities, and clients. We're also getting ready for Accreditation Canada's site visit in fall 2025, a rigorous process that few organizations our size pursue. We welcome the challenge and are confident in the foundation we've built.

To everyone who contributes to our mission—staff, Board, volunteers, advisors, clients, and partners—thank you. You inspire us every day. As we move into this next chapter, we do so with renewed purpose to fulfil our vision: Every person deserves a voice. Every voice deserves to be heard.



Mark Landy, *Board Chair*



Anne Mason-Browne, *CEO*



Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia Strategic Plan 2024



Our Mission: To improve the lives of Nova Scotians by delivering quality audiology and speech-language pathology services.

Our Vision: Every person deserves a voice. Every voice deserves to be heard.

Our Values: Foundational to HSNS core values is our commitment to honour the cultural heritage and diversity of our communities, always doing our best to promote equity, accessibility, and inclusion in all that we do.



Strategic Plan 2024

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2024-25

ACCESSIBILITY - Goals

- Sites, services, and information meet provincial accessibility and patient safety standards.
- Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) Patient and Family Centred Care is guided by Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Accessibility (EDIRA).
- IT supports accessible administration.
- Safety—physical and psychological—is a core value.

This year we achieved:

- ✓ Completed Yarmouth clinic restoration; relocation of Halifax Community Clinic planned for summer 2025.
- ✓ Established EDIRA framework and action plan across services, education, policy, communication, and recruitment.
- ✓ Implemented organization-wide EDIRA education and resources.
- ✓ Trialed access strategies including remote audiology, virtual group care, extended hours, and appointment reminder systems.
- ✓ Approved Life After Stroke Innovations Fund project for 2025.
- ✓ Introduced staff wellness initiatives including Wellness Minute, Cheers to Peers, site wellness events, and Employee and Family Assistance Program sessions.
- ✓ Increased staff participation and feedback opportunities; hosted staff appreciation day.
- ✓ Integrated EDIRA and Patient- and Family-Centred Care into onboarding and Accreditation Canada preparation.
- ✓ Conducted mock tracers and developed tools for Accreditation Canada site visit.

COMMUNICATION - Goals

- Expand internal and external communication strategies.
- Share client, staff, and partner experience stories.
- Promote HSNS as a household name.

This year we achieved:

- ✓ Expanded feedback and communication channels for clients, staff, and partners.
- ✓ Established presence on the YourHealthNS app.
- ✓ Enhanced Engagement Plan to include external voices in strategic planning.
- ✓ Increased transparency through social media and website updates.
- ✓ Piloted appointment reminders for audiology.
- ✓ Achieved +130% in social media views, +142% in website visits, +213% in total reach.

Strategic Plan 2024

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2024-25

ENGAGEMENT - Goals

- Support professional and leadership development.
- Use collaborative decision-making with staff, clients, and partners.
- Promote recruitment, retention, and inclusive workplace culture.

This year we achieved:

- ✓ Established Audiology and Speech-Language Best Practice Councils.
- ✓ Improved informed consent practices.
- ✓ Advanced recruitment and retention through targeted, EDIRA-aligned strategies.
- ✓ Developed Workforce Action Plan and evaluation metrics.
- ✓ Launched Provincial Preschool Autism Service with partners.
- ✓ Formalized Patient Advisor roles on HSNS Board.
- ✓ Updated incident reporting processes to include tracking of discrimination and racism; enhanced transparency and staff education.
- ✓ Strengthened student support through Dalhousie University partnerships and onboarding tools.
- ✓ Finalized Reconciliation Action Plan; conducted staff interviews; held Board EDIRA workshop.
- ✓ Hosted partnership planning with Eskasoni and Millbrook.
- ✓ Attended career fairs and launched outreach for rural and underrepresented communities.
- ✓ Developed targeted strategies for hard-to-fill EDIRA-designated roles.

Expanding access through partnership: a donor's vision improves speech-language care



Sometimes, the most meaningful healthcare innovations begin with personal experience. That was true for one generous donor, a healthcare worker himself, who realized that during his own care, he wasn't aware of the speech-language pathology (SLP) services that could have helped him.

Motivated by that experience, he set out to ensure others would not only be aware of these important services, but able to access them when they're needed most. With support from the QEII Foundation and in partnership with Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS), that idea took shape and became a reality.

The donor and his wife worked closely with HSNS leadership and the Foundation to create a dedicated, temporary SLP position aimed at improving access to speech-language and swallowing care for both inpatients and outpatients in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The goal was twofold: to raise awareness of the role SLPs play in recovery, and improve timely access to this critical care.

With added capacity, SLPs were able to participate more fully in interprofessional rounds and clinics,

working side by side with physicians, residents, and hospital staff. They offered training, shared knowledge, and made speech-language services more visible and better understood across care teams and by patients.

The impact has been clear. Referrals have increased, wait times have dropped, and healthcare providers know when and how to connect with HSNS.

But the success of this initiative also reveals a long-standing gap: adult speech-language services remain underfunded. As the initial funding period winds down, the question now is how to sustain and build on this progress.

Still, this project stands as a powerful example of what's possible when lived experience sparks action, and when donors, clinicians, and leaders work together with a shared commitment to better care.

Looking ahead, it offers a strong model for future partnerships—ones that continue to reduce barriers, build capacity, and help more Nova Scotians receive the care they need, when they need it.

Rethinking access to pediatric hearing and speech care

For young children, timely access to support can shape their future. At Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS), the Preschool Accessibility Innovations Project (PAIP) is reimagining how care is delivered, so more children, families, and caregivers receive timely access to care—no matter where they live.

"We know that the first 2,000 days of a child's life are critical for brain development across language, emotion, and learning," says Sharon Walker, Director of Pediatric & Autism Hearing and Speech Services. "If kids are waiting too long for assessment or intervention, we risk missing that window."

Supported by \$1.4 million in funding from the Department of Health and Wellness, the PAIP team began by taking a phased approach: increasing clinical capacity, scaling up existing service models, and introducing flexible, family-centred options across the province. That meant hiring new staff, expanding audiology and administrative support, and offering services in the evenings, on weekends, and even in community locations like libraries or playgrounds.

Instead of every child waiting for a spot on their local clinic's list, HSNS introduced a more provincial lens. "Virtual care and flexible scheduling helped us create options," says Sharon. "Some families prefer



weekends. Others need in-person support. Some can travel to another site, others can't. This is about meeting people where they are."

The project uses a continuous quality improvement model—Plan, Do, Study, Act—to test and refine ideas based on real feedback. "In some zones, virtual evening appointments didn't work—but Saturday mornings did," says Sharon. "We listen, we pivot, and we try again."

The impact is clear: wait times are decreasing, equity is improving, and staff feel empowered to innovate. "Our team has been energized. We're doing things we've wanted to do for a long time and are seeing real results for the families we serve," says Sharon.

As the project enters its next phase, HSNS is continuing to pilot remote audiology services, expand early language programming, and, with more funding, aims to design culturally responsive care with communities. Team Lead roles were introduced to support mentorship, leadership, and process development across clinical and support roles.

"We're building a system that adapts to families, not the other way around," Sharon reflects. "By listening, learning, and evolving together, we're creating something stronger for the future."

Mapping better care to improve dysphagia services

For Nova Scotians living with dysphagia (difficulty swallowing), timely, coordinated care can make a world of difference in quality of life and overall health. In March 2025, teams from Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) and dietitians from across the province came together with a shared goal: to strengthen how dysphagia services are delivered.

Over the course of three hands-on sessions, staff from multiple disciplines gathered around long sheets of brown paper, visually mapping the swallowing assessment journey from the clients' perspective. With support from Dalhousie University's Faculty of Open Learning and Career Development, teams used Lean improvement tools like SIPOC (suppliers, inputs, process, outputs, customers) diagrams and process maps to identify pain points, gaps, and opportunities.

Michele Tenyenhuis, an Administrative Support Professional at HSNS, says the experience offered rich insight. "It provided a valuable opportunity to deepen my understanding of the processes involved in both inpatient and outpatient dysphagia care," she says. "Understanding this workflow allowed me to identify ways I can better support clinicians by helping to reduce the administrative burden."

Her experience underscored the value of including diverse roles in efforts to improve care across the system.

"Our inspiration came from a shared desire to move beyond quick fixes," says Marika Holmes, Professional Practice Development Officer. "We knew that meaningful change would take a structured, data-informed approach, and that we couldn't do it without everyone at the table."

The sessions revealed several recurring issues: repeated assessments, duplicated documentation,



bottlenecks that caused delays, and referral pathways that left clients feeling like they were starting from scratch.

One particularly impactful insight came when teams realized clients were often asked to retell their story to multiple providers due to disconnected systems. That moment sparked a flurry of ideas around streamlining documentation and improving communication between disciplines.

"Our clients deserve a system that works better for them," says Marcia Curry, Manager at HSNS. "By collaborating with dietitians, we're building a more efficient and compassionate process that reduces wait times, cuts down on repetition, and focuses more energy on the care itself."

While still in the planning phase, the momentum is already strong. Teams have identified several early wins—like aligning intake forms and clarifying referral criteria—and are now working on piloting process changes in select sites before scaling province-wide.

Greg Noel, Director of Adult & Mi'kmaq Hearing and Speech Services, sees the potential for lasting impact. "When we bring together the right people with a shared purpose, we unlock the kind of system-level thinking that leads to real change. This work is about maximizing our collective expertise to serve clients better, reduce waste, and create something more sustainable."

With a foundation built on collaboration, HSNS and its partners are improving dysphagia services by modelling what's possible when teams come together with curiosity, commitment, and a clear focus on the client journey.

A reminder that makes a difference in how clients access care

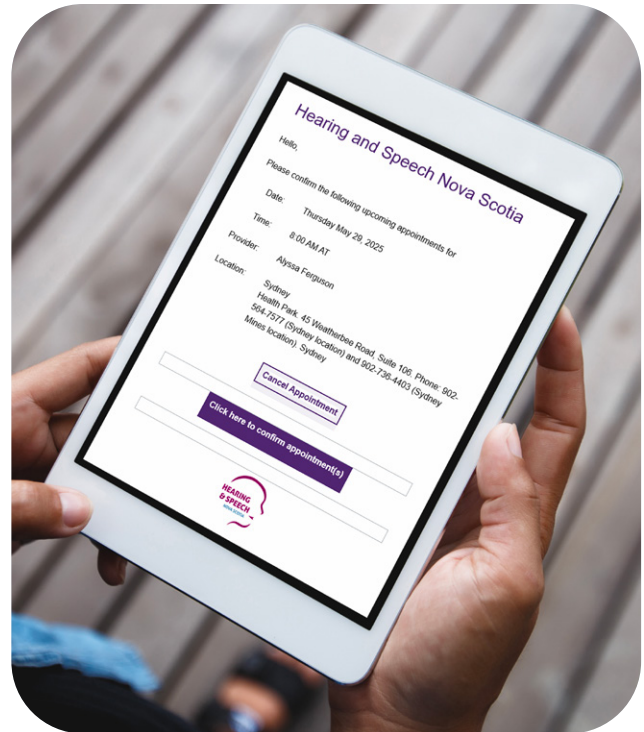
After years of discussion, planning, and persistence, a simple change is making a big impact for both clients and staff at Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS). In December 2024, three sites—Sydney, Sydney Mines, and Eskasoni—became the first to launch Pomelo appointment reminders, a long-awaited add-on to the electronic medical record system used by HSNS staff across the province.

The project began as part of the Audiology Wait Times (AWT) project in 2018, when staff across the province identified appointment reminders as a practical way to reduce missed appointments, improve scheduling flow, and ultimately help bring down wait times.

"Clients told us they didn't want to miss their appointments," says Angela Ryan, Manager at HSNS. "And staff noticed that late cancellations or no-shows made it harder to make the best use of clinical time. We saw an opportunity to improve the system for everyone."

With support from HSNS leadership and the Pomelo team, a diverse project group was formed, including audiologists and administrative support professionals from both rural and urban clinics.

"We selected sites that had a wide range of clients and services, including specialized testing, so we could really see how this system could work across



different needs. We've only heard positive things," Angela explains.

Clients appreciate having appointment details at their fingertips, Angela adds—a sentiment echoed by Teresa McNeil, an Administrative Support Professional at HSNS.

"When I ask for an email address while booking or taking a referral, clients are enthusiastic to provide it," says Teresa. "They often don't have a pen or paper handy, so they really appreciate getting the confirmation and clinic address by email. I'd imagine our no-show numbers have dropped significantly since December."

The success of the initial rollout is now guiding the next phase of expansion. With plans underway to bring Pomelo to more sites in the near future, the energy around the project remains high.

"What stands out to me is the leadership and change-readiness of our staff," Angela reflects. "They've embraced this because they see how it supports clients, increases efficiency, and strengthens our ability to manage audiology wait times across the province."



From left to right: Erin Lamond (Manager at HSNS), Ferne Mardlin-Smith (Patient Advisor), Mark Landy (Board Chair)

Strengthening staff wellness and community connection through engagement

Strong care starts with strong relationships within teams and within the communities we serve. In 2024, Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) deepened its focus on engagement by taking a closer look inward and outward: supporting staff through the Health Standards Organization (HSO) Workforce Wellness and Safety Survey and strengthening external relationships through a renewed Engagement Plan. These initiatives are a key component of HSNS's commitment to continuous improvement and Accreditation Canada standards.

The HSO survey invited staff across HSNS to share their experiences with workplace well-being, psychological safety, and leadership support. While results highlighted staff's deep connection to their clients, support from their supervisors, and the purpose of their work, the survey also identified opportunities to grow: improving open

communication, clarifying incident reporting, and expanding well-being supports.

"This was a chance to hear directly from our team about what's working and what needs more attention," says Marika Holmes, Professional Practice Development Officer. "The feedback helped us shape a clear action plan grounded in learning, safety, and support."

That action plan includes launching Clearview, a new platform for incident reporting and feedback; embedding "Just Culture" principles into training and leadership development (a system that balances accountability with fairness and learning); and increasing visibility and communication from leadership across sites. It also emphasizes mental health, work-life balance, and tools that support wellness at the team level.

While the survey focused on the staff experience, the updated HSNS Engagement Plan outlines how the organization connects with external partners including clients, community groups, Dalhousie University, and underserved populations. The plan specifies engagement tools, timelines, and approaches based on partner needs—from information sharing to full collaboration.

"Our focus is on building relationships that last, rooted in mutual respect and meaningful dialogue," says Greg Noel, Director of Adult & Mi'kmaq Hearing and Speech Services. "That's how we ensure our work reflects the voices and needs of our communities."

The plan is a key tool in advancing HSNS's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, reconciliation, and accessibility. It directly supports the Reconciliation Action Plan and helps guide culturally responsive partnerships with Indigenous communities. It also backs the work of the Best Practice Council by ensuring underserved clients have a voice in how services are designed and delivered.

Together, the survey and the engagement plan reflect a broader shift toward shared responsibility and connection at every level of HSNS. Whether it's creating safer internal systems or meeting communities where they are, the focus remains the same: to ensure everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

"Engagement is about trust," says Marika. "When people feel safe to speak up and see that their voice helps guide decisions and outcomes—that's when progress happens."





A brighter, more accessible future for hearing and speech services in Halifax

Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) is preparing to open the doors to a new Halifax Community Clinic location—one shaped by feedback from staff, clients, and families, and designed to better reflect the way care is delivered today.

With the lease at the Park Lane site approaching review, leadership at HSNS saw an opportunity to rethink the clinic environment. “The current design reflects a more traditional service model,” says Danielle Doucet, Manager at HSNS. “We wanted to find a space that supports both staff and clients and allows us to deliver services in a way that’s flexible, accessible, and welcoming.”

From the earliest stages, input from clients and staff helped guide the search based on common themes that emerged: accessible parking, proximity to transit, and a space that feels warm, bright, and less clinical.

Located at 6940 Mumford Road in Halifax, the new clinic delivers on that vision. The clinic features free

parking and is situated near the Armdale Rotary, an area identified in feedback as a more convenient hub for many families. Inside, the space is filled with natural light, with large windows, a welcoming reception area, and a layout that supports both privacy and flexibility.

Clients will benefit from a sensory space designed to meet the needs of children, and staff will have access to bookable clinical rooms and a dedicated workspace to enhance collaboration and flow.

“We believe this new space will be much easier to access and more comfortable for the people we serve,” says Danielle.

Patients will be welcomed at the relocated clinic starting in early July.

“There’s still work to be done, but there’s a sense of excitement,” Danielle adds. “Staff are looking forward to starting fresh in a space that truly reflects how we want to work with—and for—our clients.”

Risk and Safety Report

At Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS), safety is part of everything we do. In alignment with Accreditation Canada's rigorous standards, we're strengthening our focus on transparency, accountability, and excellence, because protecting the health and well-being of our clients and staff is foundational to the care we provide.

Whether it's tracking patient safety concerns or improving workplace conditions, our goal is to create safe, supportive environments where everyone feels valued, heard, and protected.

HSNS embraces Healthcare Excellence Canada's expanded view of safety as proactive, compassionate, and resilient care—integrating these principles into daily practice to keep services safe, inclusive, and responsive to client needs.

Patient and staff safety are central to our mission, supported through:

- Regular training
- Quality improvement initiatives
- Ongoing engagement with clients and staff

Core values guiding safety

- Client-centred care
- Leadership
- Accessibility
- Support
- Safety
- Integrity
- Collaboration



Staff safety at HSNS

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is about keeping staff safe, supported, and informed. Over the 2024–25 reporting period:

- 35 staff safety incidents reported
- 32 were related to infrastructure
- Each site has a designated OHS representative
- OHS Committee meets monthly
- Annual hand hygiene training and audits

- Annual site inspections at all locations
- Information shared with Nova Scotia Health, IWK Health, and the Department of Health and Wellness

OHS goal

To use incident trends and site data to drive safety improvements and integrate findings into broader quality initiatives aligned with HSNS values and Accreditation Canada's standards.



Client safety at HSNS

Patient safety means delivering care that is timely, respectful, and free from harm.

Examples of client safety concerns might include:

- Delays in accessing services
- Concerns about care delivery or experience

Over the 2024–25 reporting period:

- 30 harmful incidents
- 25 no-harm incidents
- 19 near misses
- 74 total client safety incidents

We track and analyze every incident.

With 58,425 total client visits during the year, 74 client safety incidents represent 0.13% or approximately 1 incident per 1000 visits.

Transparency in action

With thousands of visits each year, even a small percentage of safety incidents offers valuable insights into how we can do better.

Looking ahead

By embedding safety into every level of service and decision-making, HSNS is building a culture of learning and accountability for our clients, our teams, and our future.

From lived experience to leadership: one Board member's journey with HSNS



As a law student, Maria Rizzetto wanted to contribute to something meaningful. When she discovered an opportunity with the Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) Board of Directors, a personal connection to the organization's mission drew her in.

As a child, Maria worked with a speech-language pathologist to address a raspy voice that made her difficult to understand. Years later, her father—a respected lawyer in Cape Breton—developed a neurological movement disorder that rapidly impaired his ability to communicate. “It was difficult watching people speak to him like he couldn't understand them,” Maria shares. “Even harder was watching him withdraw from the world because of it.”

In 2015, he underwent deep brain stimulation surgery and was diagnosed with dysphagia. HSNS played a key role in his recovery, helping him regain communication skills and improve his quality of life.

Years later, Maria joined the Board while still an articled clerk, and with support from former Vice Chair and mentor Tammy Manning, she found her place quickly. “I was welcomed, respected, and heard from day one,” she says. Today, she holds the role of Vice Chair and chairs the Nominating Committee.

Now practising criminal, family, child protection, and general litigation law in Cape Breton, Maria says regional representation has deepened her perspective. “Our organization serves all of Nova Scotia. It's important that our Board reflects that.”

Maria particularly values the opportunity to meet staff and clients during site visits. One moment that stayed with her was hearing from a Patient Advisor who, like her father, had lost their ability to communicate during their career. Watching them not only recover their voice but also contribute to the Board reminds Maria how impactful HSNS's services can be.

Outside of her legal practice and Board commitments, Maria stays deeply engaged in her community. She serves on the boards of the Savoy Theatre, the Cape Breton Music Cooperative, and the Three Brothers Project, and is also a Patient Family Advisor with the Cape Breton Regional Municipality Health Care Redevelopment Project.

In her downtime, Maria enjoys spending time with her husband, family, and friends, and can often be found at local sporting events, theatre productions, and live music shows.

Bringing client perspectives into every conversation



When the Partners in Care committee first took shape, it was in response to a simple but powerful realization: Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) needed to truly hear and understand the voices of those we serve.

"We've always tried to imagine the client perspective," says Erin Lamond, Manager at HSNS. "But imagining it isn't the same as hearing it. Once we started working directly with people who had lived experience, we realized how much we were missing—and how much more thoughtful, compassionate, and effective our services could be with their voices at the table."

The committee brings together clients, families, and caregivers with diverse backgrounds to share insight, challenge assumptions, and help co-design services. Their purpose is rooted in a principle widely echoed across the patient advocacy community: *nothing about us without us.*

Partners in Care exists to ensure that the services HSNS provides truly reflect what clients need—because they've helped shape them.

"Sometimes their input validates what we're doing," Erin says. "Other times, they stop us in our tracks with something we hadn't considered but absolutely should have."

This past year, the group celebrated several meaningful accomplishments. HSNS appointed two Patient Advisors, Ferne and Courtney, to the Board of Directors, bringing the clients' voices directly into strategic decision-making.

The committee also successfully applied for an innovations grant to address a critical gap in stroke care. Brought forward by Ferne, the Life After Stroke project will create a part-time speech-language pathologist role to coordinate professional volunteers and support stroke survivors during the often-isolating period between rehabilitation and outpatient care.

Members like Ferne, Heather, Cheryle, Angela, Courtney, and Shaun have each shaped HSNS services in lasting ways, whether it's Heather helping redesign early language group support, Cheryle contributing to staff orientation, Angela lending her design skills to resources, or Courtney co-chairing and facilitating meetings.

"Everyone brings something different," Erin says. "But what unites them is their generosity, their insight, and a commitment to helping us grow together."

Shaun Cadden, the committee's first member, wrapped up his eight years of service this spring.

A devoted father of two children with autism, he played an instrumental role in developing and reviewing HSNS standards of care. "He's always been a steadfast advocate," Erin says. "His presence made a difference. We're incredibly grateful."

Looking ahead, the goal is to embed the client voice from the very beginning—not just as a checkpoint, but as a foundation. "If we're building something new, especially in communities like First Nations, for example, it has to be done with their partnership from the start," Erin says. "We're always better off when we build together."

From sharing personal stories to shaping strategic plans, Partners in Care members continue to keep HSNS collaborative, responsive, and truly client-centred every step of the way.

Welcoming our first Patient Advisors to the Board

In 2024, Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) officially welcomed two Patient Advisors to the Board of Directors, deepening our commitment to client voices at the highest level of decision-making.

Patient Advisors are volunteers from our Partners in Care (PIC) committee who bring lived experience and thoughtful insight to strategic discussions. Their role is to participate in Board conversations, provide input on key issues and ensure client perspectives are reflected in decisions.

Our inaugural Patient Advisors to the Board are:



Courtney Douglas

A member of PIC since 2021 and volunteer co-chair since 2024, Courtney brings the perspective of a parent who has received care from HSNS for her son. She's committed to giving back to the organization that supported her family. In addition to her leadership on PIC, Courtney has contributed to the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, Accessibility Committee, the mEDla Club, and the Communications Committee.



Ferne Mardlin-Smith

A member of PIC since 2020, Ferne shares her experience as a stroke survivor who encountered both challenges and successes in her recovery. She's passionate about helping to improve services for other stroke survivors and has contributed to accessibility work on the HSNS website, the informed consent project, the mEDla Club, and education for the Board of Directors.

Their appointment marks an important step in integrating client experience into organizational strategy and ensuring that those we serve help shape the future of care at HSNS.

What new team members are saying about Hearing & Speech

Between December 2024 and April 2025, Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) welcomed new team members across the province who bring fresh insight, personal motivation, and a shared commitment to supporting communication health across the province.

To better understand what draws professionals to join HSNS, we asked recent hires to share their impressions and experiences. Their feedback highlights what makes HSNS a valued place to work: a supportive culture, mission-driven work, learning opportunities, and healthy work-life balance.

The quotes below reflect their authentic voices and lived perspectives. We're proud to share what they had to say, and are grateful for what they bring to our organization every day.

Workplace culture & team environment

"Hearing and Speech has a welcoming and inclusive workplace culture, which fosters my success in the workplace. However, it's the people that drew me in and keep me here. I love our team!"

"On the first day, I was greeted by fellow colleagues and a manager with a warm welcome."

"I had the opportunity to work with HSNS as an intern in the past, and my familiarity drew me to the organization. I loved my placement here and felt welcome to come back! I think having lots of students draws interest to the organization. I appreciate their relationship with Dalhousie's programs."

"My reasoning for joining Hearing and Speech is that I was told by an employee about how much she loved working here because of the work atmosphere, how her coworkers treated her and worked well together, and how supportive management was."

Mission-driven work & community impact

"I wanted to be a part of the provision of publicly funded SLP services in the province."

"Personally, this job was close to home for me and I was eager to support my own community and improve access to public health services for an underserved population."

"What attracted me to apply for a position at HSNS was the opportunity to work in the public sector with both an adult and pediatric population. The ability to work with children, identify hearing loss early, and implement timely interventions can be incredibly meaningful for families and professionally rewarding. HSNS offers a broad scope of practice, opportunities for specialization and professional growth, and the chance to collaborate with an experienced multi-disciplinary team."

Work-life balance & flexibility

"The flexibility in the work schedule appealed to me."

"I do wish I had known about this job opportunity sooner. I would have loved to take advantage of the great work life balance sooner."

"I discovered this job opportunity because my daughter is newly diagnosed with hearing loss. During one of her appointments, I spoke with the audiologist about my search for an 8am-4pm job to better accommodate her hearing appointments and 3 kids to be part of the memories, not hearing about the stories afterwards. She (Andrea) recommended that I consider looking at the job posting at Hearing and Speech. I am very thankful for her suggestion. I genuinely love this opportunity to grow, learn and help others. I see how both doing newborn hearing screening and assisting the audiologist and speech therapists will give me valuable experiences that will allow me to contribute to the community while also developing my own skills to use personally."

Professional development & learning

"I appreciate the mentorship and continuing education opportunities that are provided/ supported by the organization."

"I was aware I would have lots of support and opportunities early on in the position (e.g., access to mentorship and observation of experts in particular clinical areas). This component actually exceeded my expectations!"

"What first drew me to applying for a position with Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia were the many opportunities for professional growth through continuing education, the varied caseload/work duties, and having a benefits package that started on date of employment."

Compensation & job security

"The security of a full-time permanent position as a new graduate was very hard to beat."

"HSNS offers a competitive salary as well as benefits and pension plans."

"At the time of the posting, I was looking for a job that had better pay, benefits and a pension plan. The cost of living is going up and I was looking for a company that had a pension plan down the road for when I retire, so I could retire comfortably."

Recruitment & application experience

"The application process was easy and straightforward with no hoops to jump through!"



Advancing reconciliation and anti-systemic racism at Hearing & Speech



Left to right: Mark Landy (Board Chair), Houston Barnaby (Balsam Inc.), and Anne Mason-Browne (CEO)

The Board of Directors at Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) is committed to meaningful action on reconciliation and to addressing systemic racism in all areas of the organization's work. Recognizing the structural inequities that exist in healthcare systems, the Board formally adopted the HSNS Anti-Systemic Racism Plan and Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) as key organizational priorities in 2024-25.

These plans align with Nova Scotia's Diversity and Inclusion Framework, Health Equity Standards, and Accreditation Canada's cultural safety requirements, and provide a foundation for ongoing progress across HSNS.

To embed these commitments into governance and daily operations, the Board has taken several important steps. Anti-racism is now a standing item on Board meeting agendas, with regular progress updates reviewed and discussed. Board members have also taken part in continued education

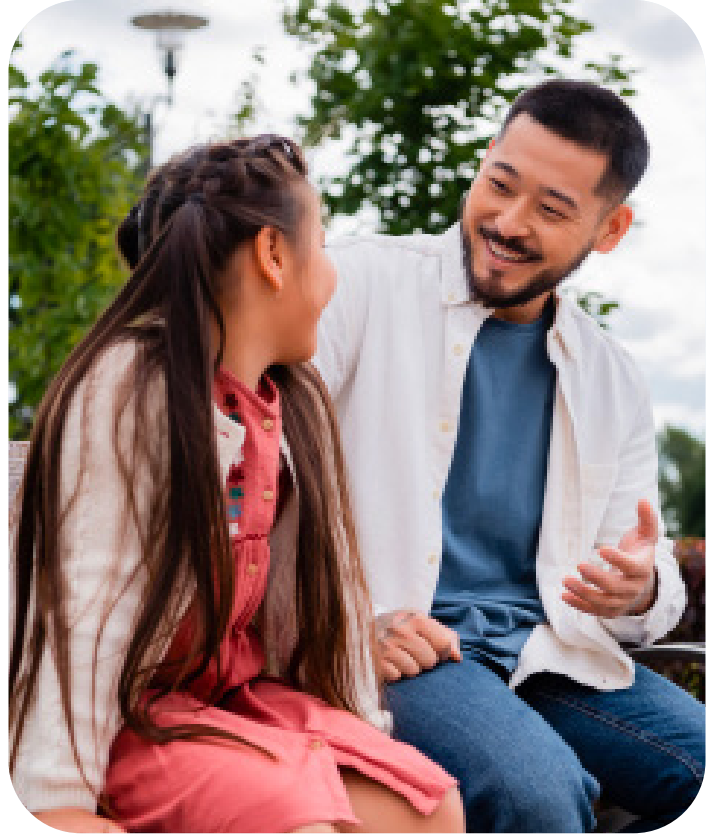
focused on cultural safety, Indigenous history, and inclusive governance—including a dedicated reconciliation and Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, Accessibility (EDIRA) workshop hosted by Houston Barnaby of Balsam Inc.

HSNS is committed to transparent, accountable progress. This includes reviewing policies, collecting race-based data, adopting inclusive hiring practices, and building partnerships with Indigenous communities such as Eskasoni and Sipekne'katik. The Board continues to support initiatives that promote culturally safe care, accessible services, and greater representation across the organization.

By listening, learning, and leading with intention, the HSNS Board is dedicated to ensuring all Nova Scotians receive hearing and speech services that are equitable, inclusive, and grounded in respect.

Client/patient & family experience survey 2024

Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) is committed to ensuring that clients receive high-quality, safe, and accessible services, and that their perspectives help shape how those services are delivered. One of the ways we gather this feedback is through the annual HSNS client experience survey, which helps us understand how clients feel about the quality, accessibility, and safety of the care they received.



In 2024, the survey was open from October to November with 700 responses, representing 2.76% of all HSNS clients seen that year.

While the data reflects some of the ongoing challenges facing healthcare across Nova Scotia, it also highlights where we're making a difference and where we can grow. We've carried these insights forward with renewed focus and a clear engagement plan, and we remain committed to transparency and accountability as we work to improve outcomes.

Here are some of the 2024 survey highlights:

Clients shared high satisfaction with service delivery and its impact:

100%

of clients reported they were satisfied with the quality of care they received

95%

of clients felt HSNS services helped them better understand their hearing

88%

noticed improved skills through speech-language pathology services

98%

said they learned helpful new skills or knowledge during their visits

96%

felt they received the information they needed about next steps or end of care

HSNS clients continue to report feeling respected and safe throughout their care experience:

98%

felt HSNS was
a safe space to
receive services

100%

felt they were
treated with
respect

99%

felt staff acted
on concerns or
complaints

Clients also told us they felt listened to and involved in decisions about their care:

99%

felt involved in
decisions about
their care

100%

felt staff listened
and answered
their questions

98%

felt they were able
to receive services
in a way that
worked for them

100%

felt HSNS
considered their
culture and/or
primary language

Of the 487 comments received, **83% were positive**. Clients described:

Caring, helpful,
respectful,
kind, and
knowledgeable
staff

Services that
felt welcoming,
safe, and
accessible

Excellent
results,
including
learning
important
information

Key areas for improvement included:



Reducing
wait times

Increasing
flexibility in how
clients access
services (e.g.,
in person or
virtual)

Performance Indicators

Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) provides high-quality audiology services to all Nova Scotians and speech-language pathology services to preschool children, home-schooled children and adults. HSNS is accredited by Accreditation Canada and provides services from 37 clinics in 25 communities throughout Nova Scotia. Our Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists, licensed with the provincial regulatory college, received over 27,000 referrals from individuals, families, healthcare providers, educators and other professionals in the past year. Most services are provided at no cost to Nova Scotia residents with a valid health card.



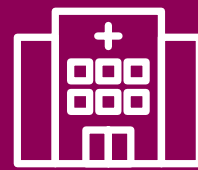
59%

of patient visits aged 16 years and younger



46%

of visits took place outside of HRM



30%

of visits were with hospital inpatients



7,734

infants had their hearing screened



352

clients with cochlear implants were in active care



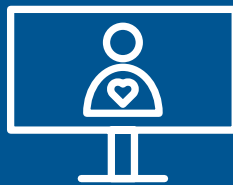
932

children with autism were in active care



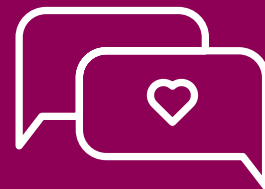
27,369

Nova Scotians received services



5,212

visits were delivered virtually



58,425

total patient visits

Thank you to our partners

Collaboration is at the heart of how we serve Nova Scotians. Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia (HSNS) is deeply grateful for the many organizations, departments, communities, and individuals who partner with us to deliver accessible, inclusive, and client-centred care. These partnerships help us expand reach, improve outcomes, and respond more effectively to the needs of those we serve.

Thank you to the following organizations and collaborators for their partnership and support:

- Accreditation Canada
- Accessibility Directorate
- Aptitude Digital
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Autism Nova Scotia
- Balsam
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Nova Scotia Chapter
- CNIB Foundation (Nova Scotia)
- Dalhousie University School of Communication Sciences and Disorders
- Department of Cybersecurity and Digital Solutions
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Department of Health and Wellness
- Department of Mental Health and Addictions
- Department of Public Works (ILFP)
- Etuaptmumk W'loti
- Eskasoni Health Centre
- Getting Everyone Online
- Health Association Nova Scotia
- Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia Partners in Care
- Hearing & Speech Nova Scotia Staff
- Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
- Interpretive & Language Services
- IWK Health
- Jordan's Principle Program Coordinators
- Nova Scotia College of Social Workers
- Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services
- Nova Scotia Government Employees Union
- Nova Scotia Health
- Nova Scotia Health Ethics Network
- Nova Scotia Public Libraries and other community hubs
- One Person One Record
- Réseau santé Nouvelle-Écosse
- Tajikeimik
- The Nova Scotia College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists
- The Provincial Preschool Autism Service
- YourHealthNS App Standing Committee



Not pictured: Mr. Jon Frost, Dr. Magdalena Kujath, Mr. Matt MacLeah, Ms. Adline Noronha, Ms. Courtney Douglas

2024-25 Board of Directors

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Riverport, NS

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Vice Chair
Sydney, NS

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Secretary-Treasurer
Dartmouth, NS

Ms. Anne Mason-Browne

CEO
Halifax, NS

Mr. Chirag Bhangale

Halifax, NS

Mr. Jon Frost

Halifax, NS

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Wolfville, NS

Dr. Anuroop Kaur

Halifax, NS

Dr. Michael Kieft

Halifax, NS

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Kentville, NS

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Baddeck, NS

Ms. Adline Noronha

Halifax, NS

Ms. Vickie Sullivan

Halifax, NS

Ms. Emma Vossen

Halifax, NS

Ferne Mardlin-Smith

Patient Advisor to the
Board

Courtney Douglas

Patient Advisor to the
Board

We are a volunteer board of directors and are always looking for new members. If you are interested, please contact us at info@nshsc.nshealth.ca or visit our website at www.hearingandspeech.ca.

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2025

	Operating Fund	Fund 1 (Emergency)	Fund 2 (Innovation)	2025	2024
ASSETS					
CURRENT					
Cash	\$ 4,377,917	\$ 26,346	\$ -	\$ 4,404,263	\$ 3,353,616
Accounts receivable	1,526,716	437	461	1,527,614	1,439,222
Interfund receivables	32,830	3,274	7,700	43,804	41,716
Prepaid expenses	85,860	-	-	85,860	116,992
	6,023,323	30,057	8,161	6,061,541	4,951,546
CAPITAL ASSETS	711,112	-	-	711,112	541,571
MARKETABLE SECURITIES	-	794,809	625,656	1,420,465	1,316,670
	\$ 6,734,435	\$ 824,866	\$ 633,817	\$ 8,193,118	6,809,787
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS					
CURRENT					
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 656,399	\$ -	\$ 1,817	\$ 658,216	\$ 408,816
Interfund payables	10,974	32,830	-	43,804	41,716
Deferred revenue	1,975,365	-	-	1,975,365	540,530
	2,642,738	32,830	1,817	\$ 2,677,385	\$ 991,062
DEFERRED CONTRIBUTIONS - CAPITAL ASSETS	2,491,156	-	-	2,491,156	2,696,624
SPECIAL PURPOSE FUNDS	241,031	-	-	241,031	450,281
	5,374,925	32,830	1,817	5,409,572	4,137,967
FUND BALANCES	1,359,510	792,036	632,000	2,783,546	2,671,820
	6,734,435	824,866	633,817	8,193,118	6,809,787

**LEASE COMMITMENTS
ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD**



Director



Director

Statement of Revenues and Expenditures

Year Ended March 31, 2025

	Operating Fund	Fund 1 (Emergency)	Fund 2 (Innovation)	2025	2024
REVENUE					
Department of Health	\$ 15,876,422	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 15,876,422	\$ 13,600,965
Department of Health – EIBI	1,477,030	-	-	1,477,030	1,575,397
IWK-PPAS	1,102,896	-	-	1,102,896	1,167,551
Contract Revenue	9,357	-	-	9,357	10,274
Out of Province	204,165	-	-	204,165	180,723
Miscellaneous Income	30,107	-	-	30,107	39,894
Investment Income (loss)	-	88,220	42,206	130,426	119,538
Recoveries	24,864	-	-	24,864	31,220
	18,724,841	88,220	42,206	18,855,267	16,725,562
EXPENDITURES					
Administrative expenses	2,547,025	-	-	2,547,025	1,241,750
Autism program	897,229	-	-	897,229	944,474
Core hearing and speech services	10,410,003	-	-	10,410,003	9,517,797
EIBI	1,477,030	-	-	1,477,030	1,575,397
Operational	2,042,240	-	-	2,042,240	1,927,104
PPAS	1,102,546	-	-	1,102,546	1,167,551
Investment fees	-	10,832	6,608	17,440	15,322
Scholarships	-	1,060	-	1,060	1,060
	18,476,073	11,892	6,608	18,494,573	16,390,455
EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENDITURES FROM OPERATIONS					
	248,768	76,328	35,598	360,694	335,107
OTHER EXPENDITURES					
Amortization of capital assets	248,968	-	-	248,968	234,253
EXCESS (Deficiency) OF REVENUE OVER EXPENDITURES					
	\$ (200)	\$ 76,328	\$ 35,598	\$ 111,726	\$ 100,854

Statement of Changes in Net Assets

March 31, 2025

	Operating Fund	Fund 1 (Emergency)	Fund 2 (Innovation)	2025	2024
FUND BALANCES - BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$ 1,359,710	\$ 715,708	\$ 596,402	\$ 2,671,820	\$ 2,570,965
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenditures	(200)	76,328	35,598	111,726	100,855
FUND BALANCES - END OF YEAR	1,359,510	792,036	632,000	2,783,546	2,671,820

Statement of Cash Flows

Year Ended March 31, 2023

	2025	2024
OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Excess of revenue over expenditures	\$ 111,726	\$ 100,854
Items not affecting cash:		
Amortization of capital assets	248,968	234,253
Amortization of deferred capital contributions	(205,468)	(121,766)
Realized gain on sale of marketable securities	(14,773)	(24,111)
Unrealized loss (gain) on marketable securities	(71,053)	(32,662)
	69,400	156,568
Changes in non-cash working capital:		
Accounts receivable	(88,391)	740,184
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	249,399	(125,775)
Deferred revenue	1,434,835	540,530
Prepaid expenses	31,132	(38,388)
	1,626,975	1,116,551
Cash flow from (used by) operating activities	1,696,375	1,273,119
INVESTING ACTIVITIES		
Purchase of capital assets	(418,508)	(478,728)
Proceeds from sale of marketable securities	69,558	95,092
Purchase of marketable securities	(87,528)	(140,709)
Cash flow used by investing activities	(436,478)	(524,345)
FINANCING ACTIVITIES		
Special purpose fund receipts	1,316,369	839,720
Special purpose fund expenses	(1,525,619)	(2,544,720)
Deferred capital contributions	-	1,598,920
Cash flow from (used by) financing activities	(209,250)	(106,080)
INCREASE IN CASH FLOW	1,050,647	642,694
Cash - beginning of year	3,353,616	2,710,921
CASH - END OF YEAR	\$ 4,404,263	\$ 3,353,615

Full 2024-25 [audited Financial Statements](#) can be viewed on our website.

