



Creating Opportunity out of Challenge: A Focus on Quality and Sustainability

When government directed the merger of nine district health authorities into one effective April 1 2015, health system leaders in Nova Scotia saw an opportunity to do more than change geographic boundaries and create a smaller administrative structure.

Leaders within the new Nova Scotia Health Authority embraced the change as an opportunity to redesign the health system to improve health and financial outcomes. While putting the people, processes and structures in place to support a new province-wide organization, the executive leadership team, supported by a volunteer Board of Directors, began planning for a different future – focusing on two key strategies:

1. Supporting and developing leaders throughout the organization to think, plan, act and lead differently to achieve better results
2. Engaging Nova Scotians in and outside the health system to be part of the solution

Supporting and developing leaders

In order to create the conditions for the large-scale transformation needed, the executive team focused on developing capacity among leaders throughout the organization to lead their teams and work together to find innovative solutions. They began with their own team – establishing a clear change agenda and defining the goals and strategies needed to drive the transformation.

The team agreed to their leadership approach and regularly evaluated their individual and collective progress and impact. They modeled and promoted systems-thinking and fostered a provincial approach through integration of structures, policies, processes, relationships, communication, and accountability. They adopted a leadership framework to clearly define the expected skills, abilities, and knowledge expected of leaders in the new organization.

Members of the executive team also implemented strategies to engage and develop leaders throughout the organization, reduce barriers to full enactment of their roles, and build capacity for them to manage and lead change.

Executive sponsors and project leads were identified with the mandate to build action plans, manage issues and move initiatives forward. The team clearly defined and communicated priority areas, set targets and monitored and reported on them regularly - dedicating resources to lead the transformation and manage the change in a focused way. They also brought teams together to collaborate and share ideas and best practices.



Engaging Nova Scotians

Leaders understood the importance of collaborating with and engaging Nova Scotians inside and outside of the health system to be part of the solution. They embedded this approach as a strategic priority within the organization.

The executive team created opportunities for employees, physicians, partners and the public to participate in conversations about the challenges and the opportunities for better health and positive change.

Employees and physicians were invited to participate in focus groups and surveys to provide input on communication and change management efforts. There were many opportunities for leaders to come together to share and learn from each other.

The executive team also hosted meetings with leaders outside the health system, including partners in education, community service, justice and business to talk about working together in new ways to create a different picture of health for all Nova Scotians.

An initiative called Talk About Health asked Nova Scotians to engage in conversations about the current health status of the province, the preferred future and the different choices needed in order to achieve better health. Thousands added their voice to the conversation – either in person or through online forums over six months.

Results

The leadership team set out to build a new organization focused on quality, access and sustainability, while reimagining the health system for our province. Results are encouraging.

The merger of nine separate organizations has largely been seamless to the public. There is more teamwork and collaboration across the system and leaders are sharing information, best practices and resources faster and with better results.

Provincial structures are in place for management of corporate services and many community health programs. Planning is well underway with the IWK Health Centre and the Department of Health and Wellness to develop provincial health service plans in several key areas.

Nova Scotians are seeing shorter wait times and improved access in a number of key areas, including continuing care and some diagnostic and surgical services. For example, more than 700 Nova Scotians received hip and knee surgeries and MRI scans in the first year than in the previous year. And these gains are being sustained. After 18 months, there are 84 per cent fewer people waiting for home support and over 50 per cent fewer people waiting for placement in long term care. There have been strategic investments in areas like innovation and research, information technology and infrastructure.



The organization made these improvements while identifying \$70 million in efficiencies and balancing the budget.

The leadership team remains focused on using evidence and engaging employees, physicians, volunteers and Nova Scotians to plan and deliver services that meet the health needs of the population. Lessons learned from the first year of operations are being incorporated into the planning and implementation of new strategies including an organizational development plan, five-year business plan and information technology plan.

By supporting leaders to think, plan, act and lead differently, and engaging Nova Scotians in the change, Nova Scotia Health Authority is seeing significant improvements in access, quality and sustainability of the health system.