

**Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin  
MLA Cumberland North**



**Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin  
Députée Cumberland North**

**Nova Scotia Legislature**

January 24, 2022

Hon. Michele Thompson  
Department of Health and Wellness  
1894 Barrington Street  
P.O. Box 488  
Halifax, NS  
B3J 2R8

Dear Minister Michelle Thompson:

Greetings from Cumberland County. I hope you had a safe and enjoyable Holiday Season.

Thank you for your service to the people of Nova Scotia, especially your leadership for the Department of Health and Wellness.

As Member of the Legislative Assembly for Cumberland North, I am always looking for ways to improve the lives of the people I represent. We had spoken in the fall session about a meeting to discuss issues under your department, and I am once again following up on that commitment. I would like a meeting with you to discuss the needs and priorities identified below.

The Capital Plan has not yet been released and budget consultations are underway for all departments and agencies. I see this as an opportune time to communicate some of the needs of Cumberland North. It is a critical time in our province, and it is very important to acknowledge the difference in needs in each community.

I think your department has a unique opportunity to lead the way in creating cooperation and collaboration between our maritime neighbours and advancing our region for our mutual betterment.

I am looking for your assistance to advance priorities related to your department including:

**Maritime Collaboration and Clinical Health Services Plan**

- The pandemic has shone a bright light on the historical integration of our health care systems with New Brunswick. This was highlighted due to the border restrictions during the first 16 months of the pandemic. There is a need to take a strong move to either (a) collaborate more with New Brunswick to improve timely access to care or (b) increase the number of specialists, acute care beds, and medical equipment in Cumberland County and Nova Scotia to ensure that medical care is accessible in NS in a timely manner.

- A Clinical Health Services Plan needs to be developed. I support the Maritime approach due to the small size of our Region and the close proximity of health care services. The IWK Children's Hospital is a shared health care facility and is a good model of the collaboration that is possible between our Maritime provinces.
- Based on the principles of the Canada Health Act, the provinces should be ensuring that health care services are portable between provinces. I am learning of more and more cases of Nova Scotians being negatively affected by what is perceived as violations of the Canada Health Act. This needs to stop as it could impede federal health transfers and more importantly is impacting persons' access to publicly funded health care.

#### **Local Decision Making**

- Local decision-making was a promise of the current government. Centralized decision-making has not produced health outcomes that residents of Nova Scotia deserve or need. Since the change in government in August 2021, we have not seen a shift toward local decision making. The central decision on January 11th to unilaterally cancel day surgeries and elective surgeries province-wide is a prime example of this.

#### **Primary Care Providers**

- The Village of Pugwash and the community of Amherst are in urgent need of primary care providers. There have been several physicians retire and leave for a variety of reasons and they have not been replaced. I am requesting the Office of Health Care Recruitment work directly with these areas to bring much-needed health care personnel.

#### **Cancer Care**

- The Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre is the only Regional Hospital that does not administer systemic chemotherapy to cancer patients. This results in all cancer patients being forced to travel for treatment. Historically, most patients travelled to Moncton (about 45 min), but during the pandemic, patients were forced to travel to Halifax (2 hours). These changes in referral patterns caused and continue to cause significant delays in treatment.

Most primary care providers in Amherst had long-standing relationships with specialists in Moncton. Finding specialists in Halifax that would accept new referrals and then waiting for these appointments causes long delays in treatment.

Based on research, it is known that delays in cancer treatment negatively impact the risk of mortality for cancer patients. A Cancer Care Centre is needed in CCRHCC. The centre could administer chemo, allow for virtual specialist appointments, and have regular screening clinics for melanoma, cervical, prostate as well as educational tools to encourage screening for colon and breast cancer. I have met with department officials and shared these needs on two occasions over the past two years and I am hopeful that this will be planned into the renovation at CCRHCC while the new Emergency Room is built.

#### **Dialysis Care for Cumberland**

- Many patients living in Cumberland have never been able to access Dialysis in Nova Scotia and have traveled three times a week to Moncton. The Department is planning a new dialysis unit to be built at

CCRHCC at the same time as the ER is expanded. Some Cumberland renal patients that travel to Moncton for dialysis are concerned they may not receive the same level of health care at the NS unit. Specifically, they see a Nephrologist each day and all their renal medications are paid for. Patients tell me this is in the range of \$1000-\$1500/month. Please examine these two concerns our Cumberland renal dialysis patients have and work to remove them as barriers to receiving care in our home province of Nova Scotia.

#### **Expansion of the Emergency Department at CCRHCC**

- There are plans in the works for expansion and renovation of the CCRHCC Emergency Department. Since the ER was built in 2001, the ER departments in neighbouring community hospitals have been reduced and this has placed increased demand at CCRHCC. The ER is too small to meet the demands. This is needed now and on behalf of the community, I request this be an urgent priority for government. There is no site line for health care staff to visualize patients in the waiting room. The ER treatment area is too small to safely provide care.

#### **Walking and Scooter accessibility to the CCRHCC**

- When CCRHCC was built in 2001, walking access was promised to the residents of the area. To this date, the province has not provided this. A bridge over the TransCanada Highway (TCH) or a tunnel under the TCH providing access is needed. The infrastructure costs should be paid by the province.

#### **Pharmacare**

- The current practices by Pharmacare in Nova Scotia lead to inefficient communication and disrespect of primary health care professionals. Inefficiencies are caused by slow communication practices of only using Canada Post rather than using email or faxes with medical professionals.

Disrespect is shown to physicians and nurse practitioners by pharmacare staff making decisions to deny medications for patients that are being recommended by medical professionals. Cardiologists with 10 years of medical training are having their medication recommendations denied by persons working in Pharmacare. One can assume that the Pharmacare budgetary restraints are the cause for these decisions. Please change these practices. Delaying the most appropriate medical treatment recommended by qualified medical professionals should not be allowed to continue.

#### **Medical Care Act**

- As a former member of the PC Caucus, I tabled a bill to amend the Medical Act so as to restrict a physician's license if they were found guilty by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of sexual assault on a patient. I tabled the bill once again in the Fall 2021 Session. Patients should be protected from sexual assault. Please consider making the recommended changes to this legislation.

#### **Recruitment of Nurses**

- The hiring practices of Nova Scotia Health must change to become more efficient and effective. Each hospital must have the power to hire the staff they need. Prospective staff should receive personal phone calls from NS Health and not only rely on email and other non-personal approaches to hiring.

### **Education for Nurses**

- Access to education needs to be improved. Currently, only LPNs that studied at NSCC are eligible to take the two-year bridging program to become an RN. All LPNs should be eligible for this education. This has been discussed with your colleague in Advanced Education, Minister Wong.
- The Northern Zone is the only area of the province that has no educational programs for Registered Nurses. I believe this is contributing to the lack of available RNs in our area. Please consider supporting an extension site of the programs at Dalhousie, St. FX, or CBU here in Cumberland County (similar to Yarmouth).

### **Nova Scotian Physicians who obtain medical degree outside of Canada**

- There are many Nova Scotian residents that have studied medicine in other countries, often because they could not get into Dalhousie Medical School. These doctors will stay in Nova Scotia if we can provide a family medicine residency program here. I recommend our government create a rotating internship for these doctors and offer them medical careers here in Nova Scotia

### **Palliative Care**

- CCRHCC does not currently have any designated palliative care beds. The Palliative care team has requested beds to be designated.
- Hospices provide a compassionate and supportive community of staff, volunteers, and donors dedicated to making dying as comfortable and as meaningful as possible at the end of life. The Cumberland County Hospice and Palliative Care Society have a desire to build a hospice for our residents. They have met with the Department of Health & Wellness in the past to request funds for operational expenses. Unfortunately, no funding has been provided to this date. Please consider meeting with board members to discuss how government can financially support a hospice in Cumberland County for the dignity of our aging residents.

### **EHS - Emergency Health Services**

- The people of Cumberland County have too often been placed in situations where there have been no ambulances in the county at a given time. This is due to the vehicles being pulled to other areas of the province. While we appreciate there are province-wide needs, the people of Cumberland should never be put in situations where emergency services are not available in a safe and timely manner. I would like the contract with Medavie reviewed and policy changes made that hold this private company accountable for the responsibility to provide the emergency services under their contract. If they cannot meet these standards, the government must look for another approach.

In addition to this letter, below I have included other topics sent to your fellow member in Cabinet that have subject matter that pertains to your portfolio as Minister of Health and Wellness:

- Acute and Chronic Addiction and Mental Health needs have been shared with Minister Brian Comer. A copy of his letter has been sent to you.
- Seniors and Long Term Care needs have been shared with Minister Barbara Adams and a copy of this letter has been shared with.

All of your Ministerial responsibilities will play an integral part in advancing Nova Scotia and our Maritime Region toward becoming competitive internationally and achieving economic independence in our own country. Nova Scotia will be less reliant on federal transfers as a result.

I formally request a meeting with you to discuss the very critical issues in our health care system. I recognize how complex these individual issues are and I believe the best approach is a collaborative one. Thank you for your leadership as Minister and I look forward to working with you in these important areas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elizabeth" and last name "McCrossin" clearly distinguishable.

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

Cc: Dr. Stephen Ellis, MP Cumberland Colchester; Mayor Murray Scott, Cumberland County; Mayor David Kogon, Town of Amherst