

Staying the Course





Vision

Safe and healthy people;
Safe and healthy workplaces.

Mission

Working with stakeholders and partners to promote and improve health and safety in health and community services workplaces.

Values

Leadership

We strive for every person to be a leader in health and safety in their workplace, and together be accountable for promoting change to the health and safety culture.

Accountability

We are accountable by making transparent, evidence-based decisions that lead to value-added health and safety outcomes.

Collaboration

We encourage collaboration by engaging and enabling all stakeholders to work together, sharing knowledge and expertise.

Diversity

We recognize diverse needs by building trust, respect and valuing everyone's contribution.

Courage

We support every person to have the courage to make health and safety a priority in the workplace.

Message from the Chair

The events over the last year have been transformative and will leave a lasting mark on Nova Scotians. We have experienced significant heartbreak and bore witness to horrific tragedies, and yet throughout it all, as a community we remained committed to supporting one another and looking out for one another's physical and emotional well-being. After all, those are the characteristics that define us as Nova Scotians – hard working, determined, compassionate and steadfastly loyal.

While we navigated our way through dark times, heroes emerged to shine light; many of those our colleagues on the front lines of the health and community care sectors. We are grateful for their professionalism, commitment and for leading Nova Scotians through the significant challenges faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

At AWARE-NS, we knew that while those on the front lines needed to be focused on the COVID-19 response, we needed to stay the course to make sure workplace health and safety continued, and the gaps in resources and supports were addressed.

I am confident that I can speak for my fellow AWARE-NS Board members in stating unequivocally, that we are proud of what the staff, stakeholders and partners have been able to accomplish, pivoting to meet new, unprecedented workplace challenges head on.

Over the past few years, we have redesigned and refined AWARE-NS programs and services to align with our mandate, strengths, opportunities, and most importantly, evolve to meet the needs of the communities we serve. Our communities have grown and so has our ability to be nimble and adapt quickly to environmental changes or events.

If 2020 has taught us anything, and to be clear, it's taught us a lot, it's that we need to keep our eye on preparing for the future. We need to be ready to meet the health and safety needs of today, and anticipate what resources and training may be required to support our health care workers and infrastructure in the years ahead. To accomplish this, AWARE-NS will need to continue to showcase our leadership and agility in building relationships and advocating for our sector.

In recent years, it has become essential to address our mandate and funding model and we welcomed the Department of Health and Wellness' review of our mandate and services, creating the opportunity to strategically plan ahead.

Our job, this past year and moving forward, is to provide direct support to organizations and employers, putting in place the necessary measures that will reduce the number of occupational injuries and illnesses in Nova Scotia.

I'm proud to be a part of this important work, and am grateful for the strength of the team executing on our strategy every day.



Millie Colbourne
Chair

We need to be ready to meet the health and safety needs of today, and anticipate what resources and training may be required to support our health care workers and infrastructure in the years ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "m. colbourne".

Millie Colbourne, Chair

Message from the Executive Director

Staying the Course. It's a well-known nautical phrase used when facing uneven waters and challenging conditions. It reminds you to stay focused on the task at hand, to remain calm and keep your eyes on the destination.

Reflecting on the last year, what I'm most proud of is that we stayed true to our mandate, despite all of the obstacles. We followed strategy, while being nimble enough to adapt our methods to new and unexpected circumstances.

As a health and safety association, it would be impossible to release our annual report without acknowledging the impact the pandemic has had on our health and community sectors. COVID-19 has affected the places we work, the way we work, and the people we work with. It's difficult to say that there has been any redeeming aspect of the pandemic, but perhaps we can acknowledge that it has allowed the work of those on the front lines of health care to be better acknowledged, understood and appreciated. At the same time, across Canada, risks and injuries to health care and community service workers are increasing at a time when our populations need health care and community service workers the most.

Let this renewed respect we're seeing for health care and community service workers serve as a catalyst for change within our sector, let it translate into a greater willingness to take action and put in place the resources and supports necessary to make our workplaces safer.

For AWARE-NS, the 2020-21 year showcased the agility, tenacity and responsiveness of our organization, our staff, our partners and our broader community to meet new, unprecedented workplace challenges head on. We have always taken pride in our ability to be adaptable in finding new ways to address occupational challenges and deliver core health and safety services. This year tested that ability.

Public Health restrictions and physical distancing measures meant that in-person classroom training was no longer an option. AWARE-NS shifted operations, training offerings and engagements to meet organizational and sector needs. We transitioned to remote and virtual work and program models –developing a new website, moving to a new learning management system, enhancing online learning topics, and focusing on targeted outreach and expansion of core consulting services.

I can't recall another time in our history where occupational health and safety has received so much attention. It's an issue that has now risen to be top-of-mind for organizational leaders as they strive to sustain their organizational services and protect employees, clients, stakeholders and the public.



*Susan Dempsey
Executive Director*

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The **Workplace Safety Action Plan** received renewed momentum from government and our partners, focusing on the continued implementation of the 21 recommendations identified within the *Charting the Course* report. A ground swell of projects and initiatives have been underway against specific metrics and targeted funding by the Departments of Health and Wellness and Community Services supported much needed safety related equipment and training. We were relieved and encouraged to see that Nova Scotia's budget for 2021/22 speaks to the need for this work to continue.

AWARE-NS's close partnership WCB Nova Scotia and the Department of Labor and Advanced Education cannot be understated in designing innovative strategies and delivering on much needed programs and services. We are seeing progress on many fronts, including a reduction in injuries and an increase in awareness and commitment to workplace safety.

It's clear that despite the obstacles that emerged over the past year, our combined efforts show great promise!

As with every other year, I would be remiss to not thank our outstanding Board of Directors for their continued leadership and help. I'm exceptionally proud of the team at AWARE-NS for continuing to show up every day and give 100 percent, shifting to meet the changing needs during the pandemic.

We continue to be your dedicated safety association; ready, willing and able to assist you in safety prevention training, education delivery and awareness building, so that together we can create a stronger culture of workplace safety across Nova Scotia.



Susan Dempsey, Executive Director

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2020 Provincial Health and Social Services Injury Data

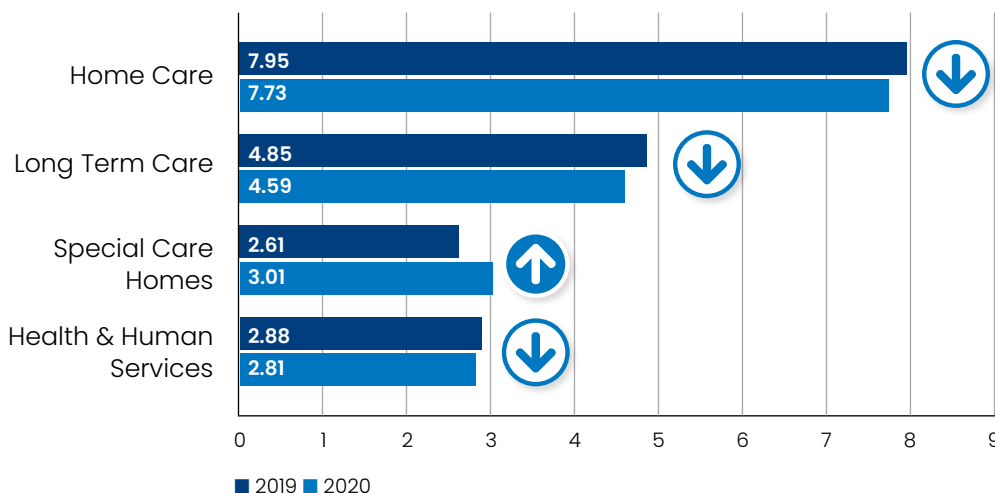
In reviewing the numbers for 2020, there are reasons for both optimism and concern. In general, for Continuing Care and Disability Support Programs we are seeing a reduction in WCB Nova Scotia reported workplace injuries. For the three distinct sectors (Long Term Care (LTC), Home Care (HC) and Special Care Homes (SCH), **we have gone from 2467 total claims in 2019, down to 2383 total claims in 2020**. This has had a positive impact on the overall time loss injury frequency, but also indicates issues that need to be further addressed for Special Care Homes.

IN 2020, THERE WERE

84

FEWER CLAIMS.

TIME LOSS INJURY FREQUENCY



2020 TRENDS

- Home Care is decreasing in both time loss injuries and no time loss claims.
- Long Term Care remains steady for time loss claims and is seeing an increase in no time loss claims, which indicates increased reporting, allowing for better prevention and avoiding reoccurrences.
- Special Care Homes are seeing an increase in time loss claims and a decrease in no time loss claims.
- There are three main injury drivers in these sectors: musculoskeletal injuries (MSI), workplace violence and slips, trips and falls. However, there is an overall trend of these injuries decreasing.



Photo courtesy of VON Canada

Sector	Musculoskeletal Injuries		Workplace Violence Prevention		Slips, Trips & Falls	
	Time loss claims	No time loss claims	Time loss claims	No time loss claims	Time loss claims	No time loss claims
Home Care	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Long Term Care	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓
Special Care Homes	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓

In addition to seeing an increase in claim costs, we are also continuing to see an increase in claim durations; this reiterates the importance of a strong stay at work/return to work program.

Our Guiding Pillars

AWARE-NS has prioritized three pillars to guide our collaborative work in the community.



Provide Leadership to Support a Positive and Sustainable Culture of Health & Safety

Workplace Safety Action Plan

The “Staying the Course” mentality certainly applied to the Workplace Safety Action Plan delivery over the past year. Launched in response to the *Charting the Course* report in 2018, the Action Plan aims to directly target the increased number of injuries, and increased time lost from work, taking place in the home care, long-term care and disability support sectors.

Understandably, as government’s attention needed to be focused on public health and COVID-19 response, we had to recalibrate. The progress we had been making on the various initiatives under the plan slowed down, but was still steady as we continued to develop program requirements for both the safe handling and mobility and workplace violence prevention programs and welcomed a new governance structure in the fall of 2020, under oversight from new managers/consultants with Davis Pier. This new structure included:

- A program management group with co-leads from the Department of Health and Wellness and WCB Nova Scotia;
- A new executive committee with representatives from Department of Health and Wellness, Department of Community Services, Department of Labour and Advanced Education and WCB Nova Scotia;
- New program sponsors – with representatives from the above Departments and WCB Nova Scotia; and
- New program owners – Kevin Orrell, Deputy Minister for Health and Wellness and Stuart MacLean, CEO of WCB Nova Scotia.

This momentum gave our Action Plan Working Group the push we needed to update the Action Plan Project Charter, ensuring a planned approach for developing individual project charters for each of the 21 recommendations as outlined in the *Charting the Course* report are complete, solution focused and approved by the program sponsors.

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While this describes much of the behind the scenes management of project logistics and confirming the program oversight structure, additional tangible action took place throughout the year. These include:

- Final draft program requirements for Safe Handling and Mobility, Workplace Violence Prevention and Stay At Work/Return to Work are with the Departments of Community Services and Health and Wellness, to make sure that the system-level impacts of implementing these two initiatives within the long-term care, home care and disability support program workplaces are fully understood and planned for.
- A number of activities have been undertaken to complete a formal evaluation of the Safe Handling and Mobility training plans with final report due summer 2021.
- New project charters for the Risk Assessment and Management Framework and Equipment Lift and Loan Program are being finalized with other work currently underway including the development of a communications plan and Safety Leadership strategy.

NEXT STEPS:

The Workplace Safety Action Plan is a transformative initiative for our sector. Despite the significant challenges presented by the need for a rapid pandemic response, we've collectively made sure to continue to prioritize the movement on this Plan – recognizing that the need for greater health and safety measures within the long-term care, home care and disability support programs must still be prioritized. These efforts were acknowledged in the Nova Scotia Government's budget 2021-2022 – *A Fair and Prosperous Future: Path to Balance*, which identified the **work being completed under the Action Plan would remain a government priority moving forward.**

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Building Health and Safety Capacity through Programs and Training

Making a Difference in Musculoskeletal Injuries and Prevention

Care workers go to great lengths to protect the safety of their residents and clients. Sometimes, even at the expense of their own health and well-being. Unfortunately, this means that health care workers in Nova Scotia experience the highest rate of work-related injuries and time-loss in the province. This needs to change. We need to make sure that these care workers are able to show their dedication to their role, without putting themselves at risk. When steps are taken to protect the safety of the care worker and the person they are caring for – everyone wins. It means that fewer care workers are injured, and that, of course, means they are at work, providing care to those who need it.

We also know that the best way to protect the safety of both workers and residents is through a Safe Handling and Mobility best practices Program.

AWARE-NS continues to work in partnership with WCB Nova Scotia to support individual organizations in developing and implementing an effective Safe Handling and Mobility (SHM) program, which includes a four-hour SHM/PACE training workshop, conducted by trained peer leaders.

Since 2019, we have seen improvements in injury rates – particularly in the nursing homes and home care sectors. This can certainly be attributed to the targeted focus on high-risk organizations, the commitment shown by these organizations to implement safe client/resident handling and mobility training and techniques, and the Department of Health and Wellness' continued funding for training and purchase of small equipment in home care.

KEY INITIATIVES:

- WCB Nova Scotia and AWARE-NS closely examined the types of supports that will be needed for organizations to continue to progress and stay motivated. We conducted a readiness survey to develop a structured plan for the sustainability of the SHM program.
- AWARE-NS provided support and coaching to the 113 organizations of their SHM Program roll-out.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS

113

SHM SUSTAINABILITY TRAINING:

44

SESSIONS WITH

178

PARTICIPANTS AND

59

ORGANIZATIONS.

(DSP-8, LTC-28, HC-23)



- AWARE-NS and WCB Nova Scotia formed the SHM Sustainability Working Group developing a plan to support organizations to implement and maintain SHM best practices, including SHM Sustainability Leadership Training.
- AWARE-NS led the development of new tools and resources to support education and training including the development of a video series, sponsored by WCB Nova Scotia focusing on safe handling and mobility techniques to be launched in late Spring 2021.



Here at The Cove Guest Home, we offer all staff ongoing training and education about safe mobility and transfers. This includes mandatory education sessions, mandatory self-audits (as well as regular supervisory audits), providing resource binders on every unit, pictograms, and updated logos for every resident. Our education offerings include regular briefings on safe body mechanics, PACE training and how to prevent MSI's. AWARE-NS has been an absolutely exceptional resource.

During 2019 we had 10 claims with three time-loss claims. In 2020, we had six claims with four time-loss claims. So far in 2021, we have had four claims with no time loss. These numbers are a clear indication of how AWARE-NS has supported us, and proof of the ongoing support and resources available to us here at The Cove. — KELLY SMITH, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, THE COVE

Supporting Organizations in Taking Action Against Workplace Violence

Workplace violence (WPV) continues to be a major hazard in health and community care workplaces, but with regular risk assessment and appropriate controls in place, these incidents can be prevented by developing and implementing strategies, tools and resources.

In the Fall of 2020, we began a customized approach on workplace violence risk assessment with select organizations completing 21 WPV risk assessments. The three-pronged project kicked off with a policy, program and training review which evaluated the organizations workplace violence and harassment policy, procedures and training. In assessing the risk of workplace violence, this foundational step is necessary to evaluate what the organization has in place and determine any gaps.

21

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
RISK ASSESSMENTS WERE
COMPLETED.

Safety Management System – Tailored Outreach Program (TOP)

Our approach to positively impacting health and safety performance is supported by principles of engagement, community and collaboration. We continue to find innovative solutions that will support health and safety through diverse programming and services.

Engagement with key stakeholders using a tailored outreach approach allows us to identify and test new ideas, concepts and approaches to deliver on our mandate. This year, we came together through Community of Safe Practice (COSP), targeted engagements and the development of resources and training to celebrate our communities' collective impact and explore how we can continue to work together to strengthen our foundation, inspire change, understand the emerging issues impacting workplace health and safety and bring the importance of occupational health and safety risks through a number of initiatives.

We continue to find innovative solutions that will support health and safety through diverse programming and services.

Our Tailored Outreach Program has been designed to increase an organization's awareness and development of its health and safety program. We start with engagement to gain leadership commitment, conduct a program review and gap analysis, which highlights what's working and what can be improved. We then work closely with the organization to create a custom action plan and provide resources, tools, access to education and training and more. The goal is to build a culture of safety that is embraced by leaders, safety committees and front-line staff. – HEATHER MATTHEWS, OHS MANAGER, AWARE-NS

Improving Safety Compliance in Continuing Care

Launched in 2020, this collaborative initiative between the Department of Labor & Advanced Education (DLAE) Safety Branch and AWARE-NS is intended to enhance safety compliance in the sector through a number of objectives including:

- Increase officer presence in the sector;
- Increase knowledge and compliance with legislation in the sector;
- Build relationships and a culture of safety compliance in the sector; and
- Improve compliance outcomes in the Sector

AWARE-NS and DLAE Officers co-developed a plan to standardize sector-based inspection guidance and tools for long term care, home care and disability support organizations. Inspection processes and tools were developed for long term care with RoseCrest Communities offering to be a pilot site. Key areas of focus include: Internal Responsibility System; Slips, Trips and Falls; Safe Handling and Mobility; Violence in the Workplace; and COVID Preparedness.

AWARE-NS has continued to support the participant organizations with the development of their SMS. As the project moved forward, the plan to expand to other LTC sites was paused as COVID preparedness took priority. Our planning shifted to the Home Support/Care sector.

As we look forward to 2021/22 – our plan is to finalize and pilot the home care and disability support sector guidance, tools and process and re-initiate the LTC inspection process.

Being part of the collaborative Continuing Care/Disability Support Program Initiative with AWARE-NS has been a great opportunity for both myself as an OHS Officer, as well as Labour and Advanced Education. Having the opportunity to interact with a sector that in the past the Division has had limited interactions with has allowed me to increase my knowledge as an Officer and the ability to develop lasting relationships within the sector.

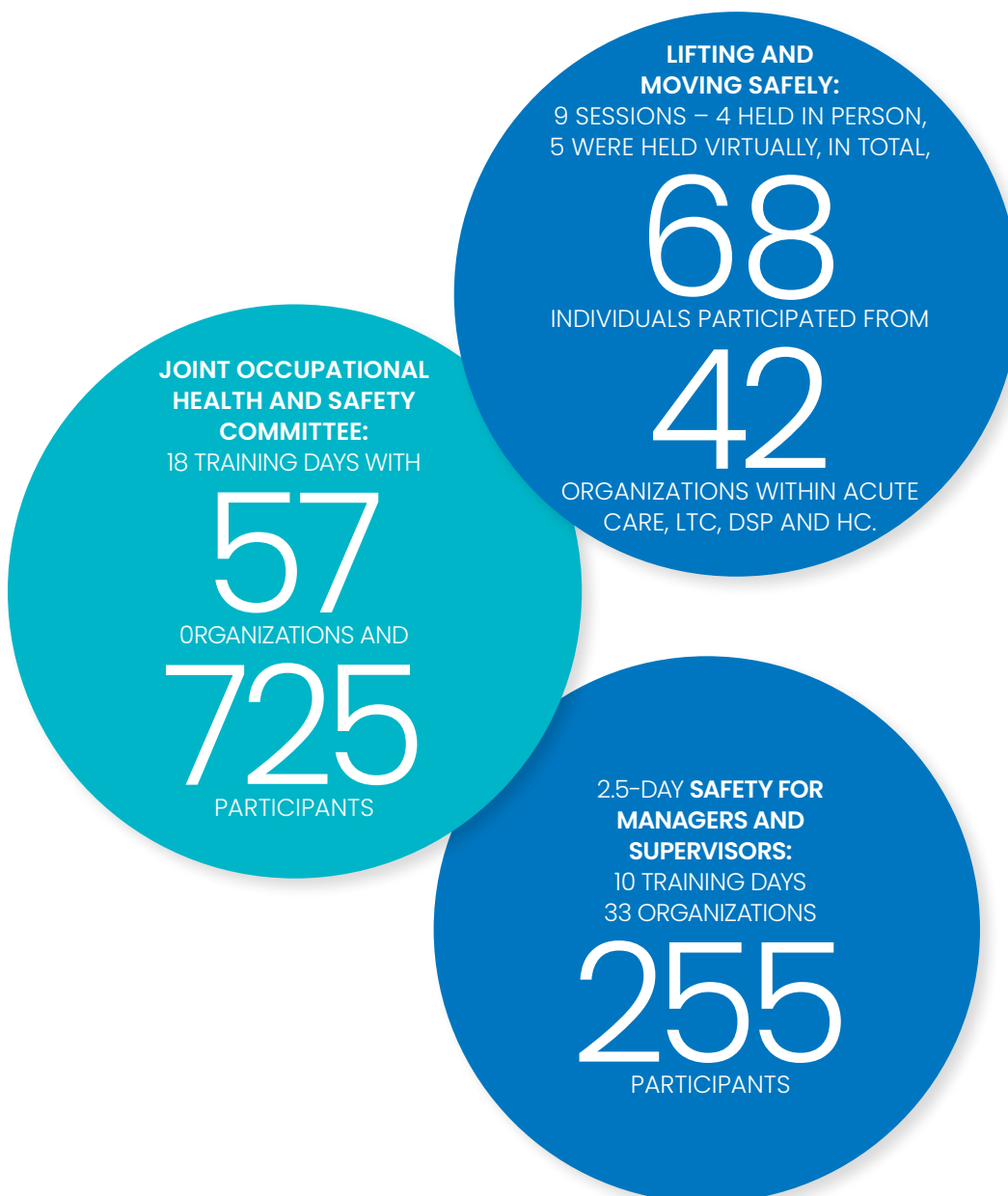
Working with AWARE-NS on this Initiative has demonstrated to me how important great communication and collaboration is to ensure the success of any initiative. I believe that based on the results that have been achieved at this point, our combined hard work has been worth it. – KIMBERLEY GILLIS, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY OFFICER, DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

AND ADVANCED EDUCATION, CENTRAL REGION

Classrooms without Walls

Classrooms, offices and just about everything looked different in 2020. While our stakeholder organizations were focused on internal and the external issues – AWARE-NS stayed the course in delivering on our mandate, but the way we executed on this mandate looked much different.

We continued to offer our core **Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC)**, **Lifting and Moving Safely (LAMS)** and **Safety Leadership Training**, providing customized virtual approaches for learning that typically took place in a formal classroom. While we have understandably seen a reduction in our training numbers due to the pandemic, and the necessary suspension of classroom training, we were able to restart these sessions in September and are pleased with our engagement numbers during the second half of our fiscal year.

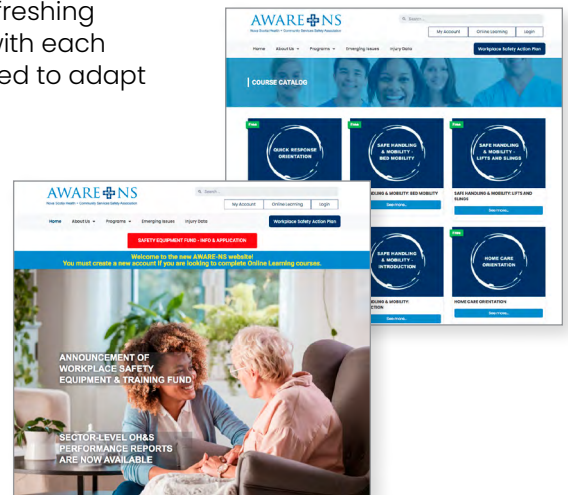


Website Refresh – Building the “Knowledge Hub” allowing for an Increased Uptake for Online Learning

In retrospect, we couldn't have picked a better year to focus on refreshing our online platform. The way we worked, learned and connected with each other changed dramatically over the last year – our website needed to adapt accordingly.

As leaders, employees and individuals, we have all had to adjust to changes in various aspects of our lives in reaction to the pandemic. For AWARE-NS, the emergence of COVID-19 in March 2020 created the need for a new normal. Organizations pivoted in new directions to support the sector as they grappled with exceptional circumstances; this included our team at AWARE-NS, which saw us updating awarens.ca with a new site map, visuals, navigation and learning management system with four new courses, additional tools and resources. For workplaces that needed support in adjusting their own online programming, we were happy to provide assistance.

While these updates provided immediate support to organizations during the pandemic, they will continue to benefit all of us in the years ahead as the way we work will most certainly look different moving forward.



It is a privilege to work with such supportive people that guide our best practice here at the County Agency. The education is easily accessible and updated regularly to reflect “Best practice”. Our staff love the certificates! The learning modules are laid out in a way that appeal to the visual and literal learners. The modules are respectful of time required to complete the education; which is very encouraging to all staff and it is reflected in our staff participation, as we have approximately 98% of our staff with their AWARE-NS courses. The staff at AWARE-NS are outstanding in every way. We are thankful to have their support especially during this pandemic. We are truly so fortunate to have their support. We are working together to provide a safe working environment for our staff.

– KELLI MACDONALD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAPE BRETON COUNTY HOMEMAKERS

Foster and Enhance Relationships and Partnerships

Every year we want to make sure we leave space in our report to thank our partners for their support. **This year, our gratitude is overwhelming.** In a year that brought a significant number of challenges, and saw us navigating complex issues and emotions, our partners never failed to step up to remain focused on the important work at hand. We take a lot of pride in working with these incredible teams to continue to find new ways to address occupational challenges and deliver core health and safety services to our clients. Thank you, to all of our partners, for joining us on this journey.



*Thank you, to all of our partners, for joining us
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Who we are

AWARE-NS Board of Directors

Millie Colbourne – Chair

Member at Large
Consultant

Menna MacIsaac – Vice Chair

Member at Large
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Lorna O’Grady

Facility-Based Long Term Care
Harbour View Hospital

Corey MacKenzie

Home Care/ Home Support
Indigenous Services Canada

Tracy D’Entremont

Front Line Representative
VON Canada

Shannon McLellan

Community-Based Disability Support
Program
Colchester Residential Services Society

Jason MacLean

Labour Representative
NSGEU

Harman Singh

Facility-Based Disability Support Program
Breton Ability Center

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*Workers’ Compensation
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