

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is AWARE-NS?**

AWARE-NS is a Nova Scotia association made up of health and community services workers. Our mission is to promote a culture of workplace safety in this sector, which includes caregivers from many professions who work with patients and clients in settings such as hospitals, clinics, private homes, convalescent homes, continuing care facilities, and group homes – to mention just a few.

- **When and why did AWARE-NS come into being?**

AWARE-NS was established in the spring of 2009 with our official launch in March 2010. We were established because of a growing concern about workplace health and safety in our sector.

More than 50,000 people work in community services and health care in the province, and we have a greater risk of physical and psychological workplace injuries than workers in any other field. AWARE-NS was formed out of concern for our occupational health and safety – and, as an extension of this, our ability to provide Nova Scotians with the best services possible. It is a means of affecting change, and taking responsibility for our health and well-being.

- **How serious are the problems AWARE-NS is dealing with?**

Very serious. Every 15 minutes, a workplace injury occurs in Nova Scotia. This means that community services and health workers are injured *even more often*. Since 1987, Canadians in health occupations lost an average of 1.5 times more days due to illness or disability than the average for all other occupations. The numbers are alarming in themselves, and the human costs to workers and their families go even deeper – financial and emotional disruption, for example. Indeed, people sometimes become permanently unable to work in their chosen field. The impact on health care in Nova Scotia is a cause for further concern. When a staff member is off work due to injury or stress, remaining employees come under pressure to assume a greater workload. Also, workers who are suffering from on the job stress or injury cannot do their best possible job of providing outstanding care.

- **What kinds of injuries are involved?**

The list is long because of the complex nature of support provided by workers in our sector, and the diverse environments in which it is carried out. Common injuries and risks include back strain from lifting, physical abuse from patients, exposure to infection and disease, and psychological issues due to high levels of workplace stress.

- **Haven't these injuries and risks always existed?**

Yes, to a certain extent. The nature and complexity of community services and health care has always caused occupational health and safety concerns. But the situation is worsening. Demands on workers are increasing due to various financial and demographic factors, such as the growing needs of an aging population. Work-related injuries and illnesses are on the rise. AWARE-NS has been formed to reverse this trend by taking affirmative, collaborative action.

- **Is change possible?**

Definitely. Other Canadian safety associations have shown improved results through a coordinated approach, the forestry and construction industries in particular. They have achieved solid results through association-driven safety programs, and we expect to do the same.

- **What can AWARE-NS do to create change?**

One of our chief roles, as our name implies, is to raise awareness. This is always the first step. We are also focusing on training and education, research into best safety practices, the facilitation of more effective communication in the workplace, the ensuring of efficient use of resources, and the monitoring of outcomes. We will also work toward promotion of a healthy work/life balance for people in the caring professions. The development and implementation of AWARE-NS programs will lead to safer and healthier workplaces and, as a consequence, improved services for Nova Scotia.

- **Does AWARE-NS work with other organizations in the province?**

Yes. Our mission is to work with stakeholders and partners toward common goals. At AWARE-NS, we work with our members and our partners, and build trust by valuing everyone's contribution and recognizing diverse needs. We hope to inspire everyone to think creatively and become health and safety leaders.