



Creating a **Safer and Stronger** Tomorrow



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# Message from the Chair and Executive Director

It is difficult to recall when healthcare dominated conversations more than it does today. Whether it's on local news programs, seen across social media platforms, or in a discussion among friends, it seems everyone is focused on what feels to be a broken system. At AWARE-NS, we recognize how fundamental communication, partnership, and meaningful collaboration are to begin to rebuild and repair, together. But after 13 years of operation, we know that to ensure sustainable positive change, there needs to be a sustainable investment in people. We want what Nova Scotia wants, a strong, educated and healthy healthcare workforce who return home safe and well after every shift. We have been, and continue to be, committed to this cause.

AWARE-NS is proud to be recognized as a leader in health and safety for the health and community services sectors in the province – continually demonstrating our value, delivering high-quality OHS services, organizational support and training across Nova Scotia with a very small team of highly-skilled staff.

The pandemic has been transformative in highlighting long-standing issues in the working conditions of essential workers, including the need for effective infection prevention and control practices, adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), mental health support, and a significant prevalence of workplace violence. These factors directly impact the province's capacity to recruit and retain essential workers from an already finite health human resource supply. Additionally, the pandemic caused us to acknowledge that worker safety and client safety are not competing priorities, but two essential elements in building a safety culture.

**Put more simply, workers need safe work environments to provide safe care, and healthy communities need a healthy workforce.**

Our organization has seen steady growth in safety engagement levels by employers. This commitment is reflected in their actions to develop their safety management plans, investing in equipment, staff training and education for injury prevention, and prioritizing safer work

environments. We are seeing the impact of this engagement through reduced injuries; reduced WCB related costs; and fewer employees away from the workplace.

A collective effort is needed to continue to move the needle forward. We have seen the evidence – when senior executive leaders make safety a top priority, managers and supervisors follow suit; change happens and safety culture will flourish to frontline care and service.

The improvements are welcomed, but we know that more work remains and a sustainable and long-term investment is required to see that work through. Our partners in the community tell us that the pandemic response has highlighted many occupational health and safety gaps within their organizations, but they remain steadfastly committed to filling those gaps and enhancing their internal health and safety measures. This increased focus has led to an unprecedented demand for AWARE-NS products and services – including safety program audits, information, training and support – making the decision to reduce services not only very difficult, but borderline irresponsible.

This past year, we developed and launched a new strategic plan called, **Our Way Forward**. This report represents and reflects the calls-to-action from workers and employers in the sectors we serve, and in response outlines a roadmap that with adequate investments, innovative approaches, sector solidarity and system-wide partnerships, will allow us to meaningfully build momentum – **CREATING A SAFER AND STRONGER TOMORROW.**



*Corey MacKenzie*  
Corey MacKenzie, Chair



*Susan Dempsey*  
Susan Dempsey,  
Executive Director





## ***Our Way Forward*** AWARE-NS Strategic Plan 2023–2028

In January, AWARE-NS' Board and staff embarked on a strategic planning process to shape the organization's direction for the coming years.

Organizations are challenged to keep pace with developing and maintaining their own OHS program, however, we know that long-term care, home care and disability support organizations remain committed to safety. This commitment requires support from AWARE-NS, and the resources and training we are equipped to provide. The challenge continues to be meeting this demand with our limited resources.

The plan makes clear that the highest level of risk for AWARE-NS is the absence of a long-term sustainable funding model and plan. This highlighted how AWARE-NS' long history of year-to-year funding has challenged our ability to develop and implement a long-term strategy that can have a direct and sustainable impact on improving safety outcomes in the sectors we support.

AWARE-NS' role in fostering safer working environments and healthy and safe workers keeps us motivated. The past few years remind us that change is constant, but our organization's vision remains strong. We know and understand the business case for occupational health and safety – and how organizations can be overwhelmed in its absence, when the threat of illness or insecurity can affect workers' performance, livelihoods and personal lives.

More than ever, the significance of workplace health and safety is clear. Organizational leaders and their staff have the desire to keep safety top-of-mind, but we also know that many are struggling to maintain their OHS programs while addressing today's health system pressures and workforce struggles.

The following strategic directions reinforce this notion and aim to inspire partners, staff and stakeholders to further elevate the profile of health and safety and ensure it's here to stay.

***“ We stand for something bigger than just training and resources. We remain focused and more motivated than ever to advance safe working environments and healthy workers in Nova Scotia. This is what drives us.”***

*Susan Dempsey, Executive Director*



### The Vision

Safe and healthy people; safe and healthy workplaces.



### The Mission

Advance workplace health and safety in health and community services sectors throughout Nova Scotia via collaboration, leadership, knowledge exchange and innovation.



### Our Values

- Commitment to Excellence
- Accountability
- Responsive and Flexible
- Respect
- Inclusion
- Collaborative



### The 4 Strategic Directions

- Leadership and Culture
- Brand Awareness, Organizational Growth and Sustainability
- Programs, Services and Resources
- Partnerships and Relationships

As we progress through the next five years, there will be many factors and changes that will undoubtedly influence Nova Scotia’s health and community services organizations and where they choose to focus their time and resources. **Our Way Forward: 2023-2028**, aims to advance the important role health and safety has and confirm it remains a top priority for organizational leaders and all workplace parties.

Our team remains dedicated and ready to serve. We will reinvest our efforts in outcome-focused initiatives and programs that generate value, shape the way we work, and make health and safety effortless for our stakeholders and partners. The continued hope is that this work will result in achieving the goal of a substantial reduction of workplace injuries and illnesses in Nova Scotia.

**FOUR KEY ENABLERS** were identified to help achieve the successful implementation of the strategy plan:

- 1 **Leadership** from the Board of AWARE-NS and partner organizations.
- 2 **Resources** - including human, financial and physical.
- 3 **Accountability** in the form of monitoring and measuring success through the stated objectives.
- 4 **Communication** with our partners and community that is consistent, authentic and effective.



# You Talked – We Heard

The strategic planning process was dependent on engaging meaningfully with our partners across the health and community services sectors throughout Nova Scotia. To accomplish this, we held 12 sessions with sector leaders representing long-term care, home care and disability support program sectors.

## The major themes to emerge included:

- Ensure the growth and sustainability of AWARE-NS – an organization that is seen as a valued partner, providing credible and consistent knowledge and expertise.
- Do more to increase awareness on OHS, while empowering leaders across organizations to instill a stronger health and safety culture.
- Continue to enhance and expand AWARE-NS' training programs and products, which are seen as a strength of the organization, to include more on core topics and adding in a focus on psychological health and safety.
- Amplify the benefits of safety program audits, which are seen as an effective tool for identifying current state, road map development and measuring progress.
- Build on the strong partnership we have locally, and nationally.

We also conducted an online survey that had 650 respondents representing front-line employees, managers, senior leadership, and industry partners to gain feedback on our program services; what is working, how we can do better and identify new needs. Some key highlights included:

Over **65%** said there has been a **POSITIVE CHANGE** in their organization's workplace health and safety.

**84%** said they were **MORE CONFIDENT** to support workplace health and safety because of AWARE-NS training and services.

**84%** felt the training and services offered by AWARE-NS **WILL HELP IMPROVE** worker health and safety in the long term.

**89%** **WOULD RECOMMEND AWARE-NS** to another organization.

The three top training areas identified by all three sectors were:

- **MENTAL HEALTH/STRESS MANAGEMENT,**
- **MSI Prevention,** and
- **WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION**





# Workplace Safety Initiatives – 2022-23 Priorities

Workplace Safety Initiatives were identified for implementation in 2022-23 to align with the Nova Scotia Government's direction of ensuring a safe work environment with practices that prevent workplace injuries and support timely returns post-injury.

AWARE-NS, a key partner with WCB Nova Scotia, and the Departments of Seniors and Long-Term Care, and Community Services, is working with other stakeholders to advance the 2022-23 priorities:



Supports for safety programs and training: Leadership training tools, with staff backfills to support participation



Support for continued implementation of existing programs including Safe Handling and Mobility and Workplace Violence Prevention



Implementation of a Home Care (HC) Lift Loan Program



Supports for the Stay at Work/Return to Work program



Funding for Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) to the sectors



# Supports for Safety Programing and Training:

## Safety Leadership Engagement

It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of executive level safety leadership to an organization’s health and safety program, safety culture, and, ultimately the organization’s health and safety performance.

Senior executives (CEOs, Administrators, Executive Directors) and Boards of Directors need to demonstrate their commitment to the health and safety of their staff and those they care for by actively creating the environment and culture in which the organization’s health and safety program can thrive. Leaders need to state that they are committed to health and safety for all, and they need to visibly demonstrate it.

The **SAFERi Safety Leadership Framework** has been created to provide senior leaders with guidance and effective safety leadership practices that will help them become a true SAFERi Leader.

The **SAFERi Safety Leadership Framework** (**S**: Speak, **A**: Act, **F**: Focus, **E**: Engage, **R**: Recognize, **i**: Identify and manage Risk), provides a framework for senior leaders to follow to enhance and improve their safety leadership.



## Safety Training Competencies

As part of a safety training analysis completed through the Workplace Safety Initiatives (WSI), AWARE-NS played a lead role in identifying and developing **safety training competencies** as priority areas to strengthen workplace safety across the continuing care and disability support sectors. These **nine core competencies** set the framework and the direction for workplace safety and will continue to be foundational to AWARE-NS programs and training:

### 9 Core Safety Training Competencies

 <p><b>Occupational Health &amp; Safety Legislation</b> Knowledge of policies, rights to staff, responsibilities, acts and regulations related to worker safety and inspections in the workplace</p>	 <p><b>Psychological Health &amp; Safety</b> Knowledge and understanding of workplace factors and how they contribute to a psychologically healthy and safe workplace to instill resiliency and support and promote a healthy workplace culture</p>	 <p><b>Emergency Preparedness</b> Knowledge of practices, procedures, and systems to ensure staff and client/resident are kept safe in potential emergency situations</p>
 <p><b>Hazard Recognition, Assessment, Control/Mitigation</b> Knowledge in this area will support the understanding of how to recognize, assess, controls, mitigation, and evaluate hazards in the workplace</p>	 <p><b>Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention</b> Knowledge of policies, practices, and procedures related to MSI. This includes Safe Handling &amp; Mobility and Lifting and Moving Safely to prevent risks</p>	 <p><b>Stay at Work / Return to Work</b> Knowledge and awareness of policies, practices, and responsibilities to help keep staff safe and help injured/ill staff (both physical &amp; mental health) return to work in a safe and timely manner</p>
 <p><b>Workplace Violence</b> Knowledge that supports the prevention and de-escalation of potential workplace violence or aggression</p>	 <p><b>Safety Management System</b> Knowledge and understanding of the importance of having a SMS, what a good management system looks like, and what components are needed to elicit the right behaviors and motivations</p>	 <p><b>Joint Occupational Health &amp; Safety Committee and Representative</b> Knowledge and awareness of JOHSC and Representative functions to ensure management support JOHSC responsibilities and requirements</p>



## Supports for **Continued Implementation and Existing Programs**

### Preventing Musculoskeletal Injuries remains a priority of AWARE-NS through two key programs:

AWARE-NS is helping to create 'safety for all' workplace culture through the **Safe Handling and Mobility (SHM)** and **Lifting and Moving Safely (LAMS)** programs.

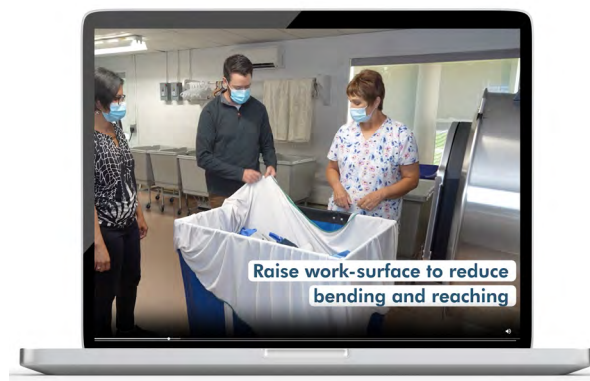
Through these efforts we have seen a positive trend over the last three years. Prevalence of time loss MSI claims have continued to decrease – particularly in the nursing homes and home care sectors. This can be partially attributed to the implementation of safe handling and mobility best practices and training, targeting high-needs organizations in promoting OHS best practices, and government support to enable staff training and the purchase of aids and equipment to lift and move safely.

#### **Lifting and Moving Safely (LAMS) Video Series:**

Through the support of WCB Nova Scotia, AWARE-NS co-developed a video series to support the training and education of frontline support service workers. Four scenario-based videos focused on lifting and lowering, pushing and pulling, repetitive actions and home care environment will be available on AWARE-NS Online Learning for organizations to integrate within their own LMS systems.



**Lifting and Moving Safely (LAMS)**, launched in 2021, strives to create awareness of MSI hazards associated among support service workers in health and community services work environments.



Launched in 2017- the **Safe Handling and Mobility (SHM)** program, is based on current research using best practice tools, training, and supports to prevent and reduce injuries associated with client handling, repositioning and mobilization.

## Safety Equipment to **Support Quality Care and Worker Safety**

In 2021, Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care announced a \$1,485,000 safety equipment fund for home care and long term care organizations. In 2022, AWARE-NS developed an evaluation framework to assess key processes and determined the following outcomes:

### **OUTCOME 1: Increased awareness about, and access to, safety equipment within Home Care and Long-Term Care**

142 organizations or **88%**  
of home care and long-term care  
**APPLIED FOR SAFETY EQUIPMENT.**

**89%** said the program  
**HELPED TO BUILD UNDERSTANDING**  
about the importance of safety equipment  
for worker and client health and safety.

**93%** indicated that the program  
helped to address gaps that  
**IMPROVED THEIR ACCESS**  
to safety equipment.

**“** Staff recognize the importance of tools and equipment to aid them in their work tasks. **”**

### **OUTCOME 2: Satisfaction with the funding program**

**89%** indicated a score of eight or higher and 50% indicated 10. The ratings illustrate **VERY HIGH LEVELS OF SATISFACTION** with the program.







**OUTCOME 3: Increased use of safety equipment within Home Care and Long-Term Care**

**89%** agreed the **EQUIPMENT** purchased through the funding program is being **EFFECTIVELY USED** by staff.

**Outcome 4: Increased focus on safety within organizations**

**95%** of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the investment will help their organization **IMPROVE WORKER HEALTH AND SAFETY.**

**“** We set up a safe handling committee to identify and monitor equipment needs. This program will increase the safety of both our staff and residents. **”**



# Enhancing Safety + Building Safety Culture

AWARE-NS remains the trusted source for OHS resources, offering education, training, consultation and support to help organizations foster a safety culture – moving beyond compliance to a proactive safety agenda through key programs.

## Workplace Violence Prevention

Workplace violence within health and community services settings continues to be a significant issue that can result in physical, psychological, interpersonal and financial harms for health care workers.



To help directly address workplace violence, AWARE-NS held *How to Build your Workplace Violence Prevention Program (WVP)* workshop series in seven Nova Scotia communities. Departments of Seniors and Long-Term Care and Community Services are providing valuable targeted funding to train organizational leaders in implementing workplace violence prevention program practices. AWARE-NS also conducted 18 organizational workplace violence prevention risk assessments supporting organizations in program development, as well as offering customized *Code White Train the Trainer*, in addition to other tools and resources.

## Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC)

This training provides JOHSC members with the necessary education and training required under the NS OHS Act and provide a guideline to establish and maintain a productive and effective JOHS Committee.



## Safety Leadership for Supervisors and Managers

These sessions integrate leadership skills with the practical application of the Safety Management System (SMS), and an understanding of the key roles, responsibilities and accountabilities leaders have for health and safety in their organizations. It provides the tools and resources required to help with the development of a proactive Occupational Health and Safety Management System, and supports leadership values that positively impact a safe work culture.



### The Workplace Violence Prevention Program Framework



#### Program Review

- Conduct perception survey



#### Leadership and Assessment

- Leadership commitment
- Conduct WPV risk assessment



#### Policies and Procedures

- Develop policy, processes and practice



#### Report, Investigate and Document

- Reporting and Investigation
- Root cause analysis



#### Education and Awareness

- Train the Trainer
- WPV Program
- Code White



#### Workplace Bullying/ Domestic Violence

- Best practices development, tools and resources

## Safety Management System

Through a tailored outreach approach, as well as responding to formal requests, AWARE-NS conducted seven safety program reviews and seven comprehensive safety audits which guided organizations through road map development and implementation. Our work continues!



## AWARE-NS Online Learning

This trusted resource makes sure that health care workers have access to the health and safety training they need, while allowing them to learn safely and remotely. We currently offer 36 different courses, adding new content each year. All courses are also available to organizations for their own learning management systems.

## Self-Care for the Healthcare Worker

The results from 2023 AWARE-NS stakeholder survey indicate the Self-Care Program is of high value in helping workers recognize levels of stress and burnout.



Stakeholders have asked for more programs, tools and resources to help support psychological health in the workplace.

PHOTO CREDIT: BRETON ABILITY CENTRE



# Improving Safety Compliance in Continuing Care – Netting Positive Outcomes

As we moved into year three, AWARE-NS and Department of Labor, Skills and Immigration (DLSI) continued our work together to enhance safety compliance throughout long-term care, home care and disability support sectors.

In 2021, the DLSI Safety Officers completed the home care quality improvement inspections. With knowledge and experience gained, the tools and approach were tailored to the long-term care sector. DLSI Officer training and quality inspections began in summer 2022, completing over 50 reviews.

## Some Key Outcomes and Impacts

Department of Labor, Skills and Immigration (DLSI)	AWARE-NS	Home Care and Long-Term Care Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LSI presence in the LTC and HC sector</li> <li>• LSI Officer understanding of health and community services work environments and challenges</li> <li>• Best practice inspection guidelines, tools and processes</li> <li>• Communication processes</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Promoted importance of up to date safety programs and compliance</li> <li>• Transformative work with sector stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted LSI Officers training</li> <li>• Increased requests for safety audits and safety program reviews</li> <li>• Increased requests for WPV risk assessments</li> <li>• Increased participation for JOHSC training</li> <li>• Increased requests for psychological health &amp; safety training and tools</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive engagement and experience with LSI Officer</li> <li>• Increased awareness and understanding of OHS Legislation</li> <li>• Safety program awareness and road map to compliance</li> <li>• Influence injury prevention, time loss incidents and overall WCB rates</li> <li>• Influence vision for a 'Safety for All' workplace culture</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> </ul>

**“ Our work together, grounded in evidence-based decision making, has been nothing but transformative.”**

*Eve Webster, Senior Director, Compliance and Inspections Services, Department of Labour Skills and Immigration*



# Thanks and Gratitude

## Celebrating Award Recipients

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) awarded Jonathan Gillis the **2022 Dick Martin Scholarship Award** in recognition for his outstanding essay on the psychosocial hazards health care workers face today. Jonathan has been pursuing his Occupational Health and Safety Diploma from the University of New Brunswick and willingly shares his knowledge and ideas. We are exceptionally proud of Jonathan's dedicated efforts; he represents the future of health and safety.



Jonathan Gillis, OHS Coordinator receiving the 2022 Dick Martin Scholarship Award with Janet Mannella, VP CCOHS.

The Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration's Recognition Committee nominated the members of The Continuing Care/Disability Support Program Working Group with the **Deputy Minister and Minister's Award of Excellence**. These awards recognize colleagues who have used their expertise, knowledge and innovative ideas to achieve outstanding results. Heather Matthews, OHS Manager, one of the award recipients, has been an exceptional representative for AWARE-NS, playing a vital role in championing the initiatives led by the working group. This award celebrates personal growth, the commitment to quality and represents the power of collaboration.



Heather Matthews, OHS Manager with Deputy Minister Labour, Skills and Immigration, Ava Czaplalaya.

## Gratitude for our Team

*We are continually thankful for the tireless efforts of our team each and every day. They are passionate about their work, and the people they aim to serve.*

## AWARE-NS Staff

### Executive Director

Susan Dempsey

### Administrative Coordinator

Darcy MacCallum

### Occupational Health and Safety Manager

Heather Matthews

### Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator

Kenzie Fraser

### Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator

Alan Baretta

### Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator

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