

AWARE + NS

Nova Scotia Health +
Community Services Safety Association

ANNUAL ²⁰ REPORT ²⁴

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Introduction



This year has been marked by significant achievements, new partnerships, and innovative solutions that enhance workplace safety. From transformative training programs and our inaugural Fall Tour to a full-scale digital overhaul and progressive policy updates, we've laid a stronger foundation for a resilient, future-ready workforce.

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to equipping organizations with the tools and knowledge necessary to prevent workplace incidents and promote a proactive safety culture. We are proud to share this annual report, highlighting the milestones, challenges, and collective impact of AWARE-NS's initiatives.

Together, we are shaping a safer, healthier future for all Nova Scotians.

Message from our leaders

Dear friends, supporters, and partners,

As we reflect on the 2024-25 fiscal year, we are filled with gratitude and pride for the strides our organization has made in advancing occupational health and safety for healthcare workers in the Disability Support, Long Term Care, and Home Care sectors across Nova Scotia. In a time when the demands on these sectors continue to grow and new legislation is introduced, the safety and well-being of those on the front lines, and beyond, remain more critical than ever.

This year, the AWARE-NS team managed and provided Safety Training to over 20,000 participants. These efforts have not only empowered healthcare professionals with the knowledge and tools they need to protect themselves, and those they support, but have also fostered a culture of safety, combined with continuous learning and improvement, in workplaces that are often under immense pressure.

The OHS Advisor team of four professionals is comprised of occupational health and safety experts with an OHS Master's degree; Certification as an Occupational Health and Safety Professional; and high-achieving completion of UNB and NSCC OHS programs. The 2025-26 Board of Directors, representing all facets of our work, has a full slate of dedicated members. We acknowledge the dedication of these OHS Advisors, the Executive Assistant / Administrative Coordinator, contracted services, and the Board of Directors whose expertise, work ethic, and compassion are the backbone of AWARE-NS.

In 2024-25, some of the initiatives we are especially proud of are the establishment of operational digital solutions; policy and procedure development; a new efficient and effective team structure; the optimization of financial procedures; and the completion of significant internal cross-training to ensure sustainability, fiscal accountability, and operational efficiency. Through partner engagement with our funders, WCBNS, HANS, LSI's Safety Branch, and many professional associations, AWARE-NS has expanded our reach and deepened our impact.

Backfill reimbursement uptake, to support our programming, has increased, and we developed a system of backfill reimbursement for Psychological Health and Wellness training opportunities. Meaningful data is captured through our digital evaluations; the Client Relations Management platform; and the renewed digital registration pages. None of this would be possible without the unwavering support of our funders and community partners. Your belief in our mission fuels our work and inspires us to push boundaries.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to innovation, collaboration, advocacy, and up-to-date safety practices. We will continue to listen to the voices of the sectors and partners; respond to emerging challenges; and champion policies that prioritize safety and dignity in the workplace. Please watch for exciting updates ahead.

On behalf of AWARE-NS, thank you for your hard work, dedication, and standing with us. Together, we are building a safer, healthier future for all Nova Scotians. Here's to another successful year ahead.

Yours in safety,



Dawn Pickering & Lorna O'Grady



Pictured: Dawn Pickering, AWARE-NS Executive Director (Left), & Lorna O'Grady, AWARE-NS Board of Directors Chair (Right)



VALUES



COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE



COLLABORATIVE



RESPECT



RESPONSIVE AND FLEXIBLE



INCLUSION



ACCOUNTABILITY

MISSION

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

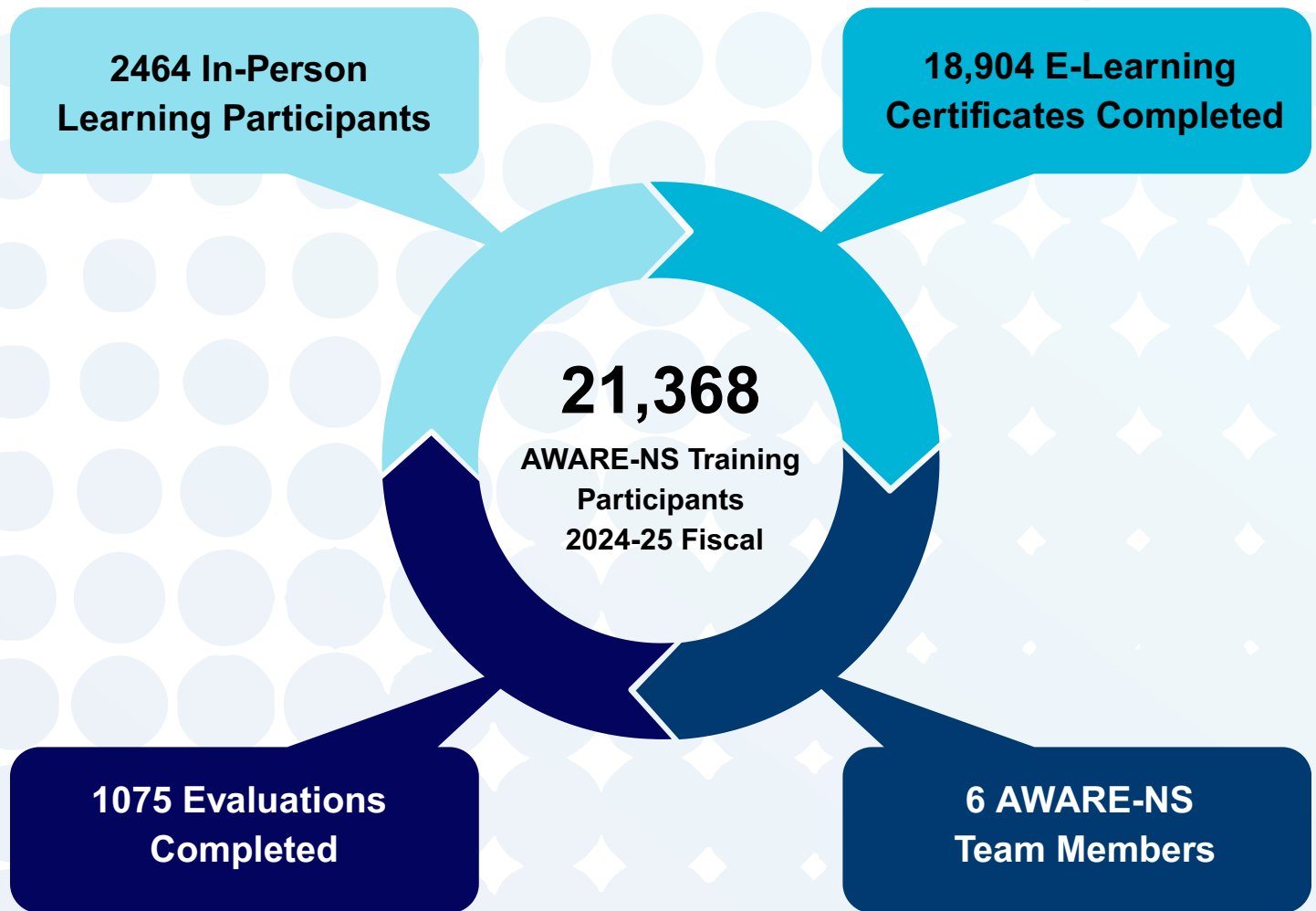
***Safe & Healthy People;
Safe & Healthy Workplaces***

Safety creates connection, inspires culture, & empowers action for our sector members



Thank you to our Sector Members

for your outstanding commitment to safety



Turning Action into Impact

“The injury rate in the province’s largest sector – health care and social services – improved by 30 percent through innovative prevention work and strategic partnerships with AWARE-NS, the Nova Scotia Government, and employers. In high-demand areas like long-term care and home care, injury rates are now at all-time lows.”

- WCB Nova Scotia Release: Impact of Injury Report for 2024



Board of Directors 2024-2025 Slate

The AWARE-NS Board of Directors brings together leaders from Nova Scotia's health and community services sectors, ensuring workplace safety remains a top priority.

Name	Title	Board Seat Representative
Lorna O'Grady	Resident Care Manager Harbour View Hospital Nursing Home	Board Chair Facility Based Long Term Care
Shannon McLellan	Executive Director Colchester Residential Services Society	Vice Board Chair/Treasurer Disability Support Program Community Based
Juaniti Ranni	Rehabilitation Services Manager Harbour View Hospital	Secretary Frontline Worker
Jill Smith	Provincial Director Occupational Health, Safety and Wellness NS Health	Acute Care
Bernadette Lake	Organizational Effectiveness Specialist / HSPNET Lead Agency Health Association Nova Scotia	Member - at - Large
Joanna Osborne	Director of Food Service Windsor Elms Village	Member - at - Large
Amanda Washington	Continuing Care Associate Victorian Order of Nurses	Home Care / Home Support
Joyce d'Entremont	Chief Executive Officer Mountains and Meadows	Disability Support Program Facility Based
Matt Ross	Director, Employer Performance Workers Compensation Board of Nova Scotia	Ex-Officio
Nan McFadgen	President Canadian Union of Public Employees	Labour



AWARE-NS Team

The AWARE-NS team is a dedicated group of administrative and occupational health and safety professionals committed to building a culture of safety for care providers across Nova Scotia through leadership, training, and collaboration.



DAWN PICKERING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



ALAN BARETTA
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISOR &
TEAM LEAD



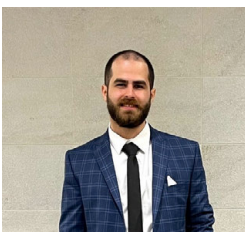
BETH BARCZYK
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISOR



RACHEL BYRNE
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT - ADMINISTRATIVE
COORDINATOR



JONATHAN MURLEY
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISOR



MOHAMMADREZA JANNATI
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY ADVISOR

Our Way Forward

AWARE-NS 2023-2028 Strategic

The AWARE-NS Strategic Plan for 2023–2028 aims to enhance workplace health and safety in Nova Scotia’s health and community services sectors. Key goals include securing sustainable funding, strengthening collaboration and leadership, and expanding knowledge exchange and innovation. The plan emphasizes maintaining effective safety programs and elevating the profile of workplace health and safety for long-term impact.

AWARE-NS’s 4 Strategic Pillars:

01—————

Partnerships & Relationships

New and strengthened partnerships to advance workplace health and safety

02—————

Leadership & Culture

A culture that supports workplace health and safety through leadership, accountability, and innovation.

03—————

Brand Awareness, Organizational Growth & Sustainability

AWARE-NS is valued and resourced to advance workplace health and safety, ensuring its growth and sustainability

04—————

Programs, Services & Resources

Increased awareness, knowledge, skills, confidence, and practices to support workplace health and safety



Partnerships & Collaboration



Funders

- Department of Seniors & Long-Term Care
- Department of Opportunity & Social Development

Supporters

- Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration Safety Branch
- Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia

Collaborators

- Health and Community Care Workforce Sector Council
- Health Association of Nova Scotia
- Safety Services Nova Scotia

Connections

DANS	FishSafe NS
NSCLO	NASHH
CCANS	HC Network
NSNHA	

AWARE-NS appreciates its partners and collaborators for their dedication, expertise, and shared commitment to advancing workplace health and safety across Nova Scotia

2024-25 Operational Plan

Guided by the strategic plan, the AWARE-NS Team developed the 2024-25 Operational Plan, setting the stage for a year of transformative progress. With a clear vision and actionable goals, the plan served as a roadmap, guiding the organization in its mission to enhance workplace safety and health across Nova Scotia.



Driving Innovation, Strengthening Workforce, and Elevating Workplace Safety

Key Accomplishments

The 2024-25 Fiscal year has been a transformative period for AWARE-NS, marked by strategic advancements across multiple areas. The organization successfully restructured its team, enhancing efficiency and collaboration, while implementing key digital solutions and launching its CRM-LMS system to streamline operations. The development and administration of Psychological Health and Safety backfill process, along with the filling of an OHS Advisor position strengthened workplace support. Governance improvements were achieved through board process development. HR support was effectively utilized, contributing to enhanced employee well-being, and engagement with partners and collaborators reached new heights. The organization made significant strides in core protections, policy, and procedure development, alongside professional development initiatives for all staff.

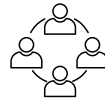
Accounting and financial management processes were optimized for greater efficiency and integrated decision-making. These accomplishments reflect AWARE-NS's ongoing commitment to fostering a safer, more effective work environment.



Digital Solutions



Policy and Procedure Streamlining



Team Building



Significant Partner Engagement

Opportunities

- Revised and sustainable funding model
- Expanding the reach of our expertise
- Exploring different models of safety program delivery

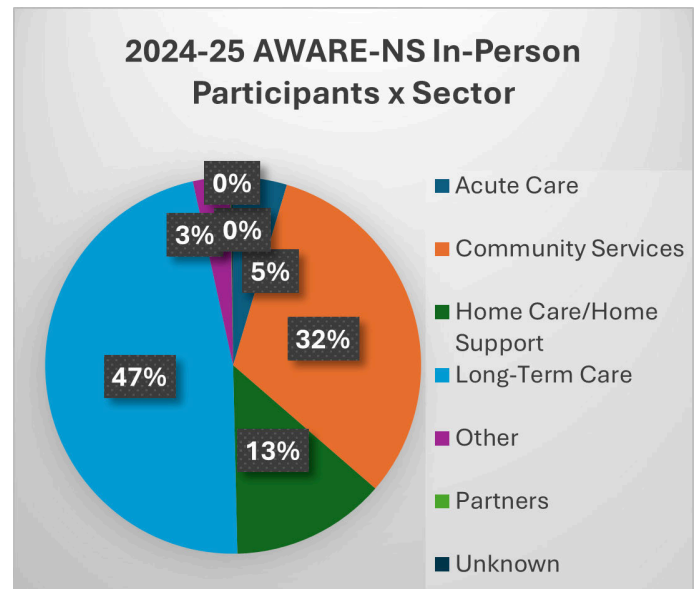
Challenges

- Year to year funding model
- Disability Support Programs, Long Term Care Facilities, and Home Care Agencies pressure:
 - Time
 - Backfill Staff availability
 - Staff Turn-Over
 - Competing Pressures

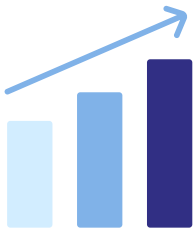
Programmatic Overview

In June 2024, AWARE-NS launched the LMS-CRM, marking a massive digital overhaul in participation and program record keeping. Digitalization allowed for AWARE-NS to obtain valid, concrete, and impactful data to share with our funders and partners. This also included offering more of our programming virtually.

This fiscal year, there was a significant increase in the number of participants accessing AWARE-NS resources, compared to previous years.

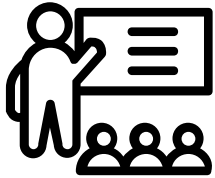


NOTABLE TRENDS



In anticipation of the upcoming workplace harassment legislation, AWARE-NS experienced a notable increase in enrolment for our Preventing Bullying and Harassment program. This surge reflects a growing awareness across the sector of the urgent need to foster respectful, inclusive, and psychologically safe work environments. We were especially encouraged to see so many organizations demonstrating a proactive commitment to mental health by prioritizing both their own well-being and that of their teams.

THE SECTORS AND SAFETY



The pie chart above illustrates the number of participants from each sector training with AWARE-NS synchronously. Historically, members from Long-Term Care have been the majority of participants. We are pleased to report we are seeing more Community Services participants joining our training, almost meeting LTC participation numbers.

PROVINCIAL ZONES



Throughout this fiscal year, participant data revealed a relatively balanced distribution of attendance across all provincial zones. However, one distinct trend emerged. The Central Zone demonstrated a significantly higher engagement in virtual training compared to the other three regions.

E-LEARNING AND VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

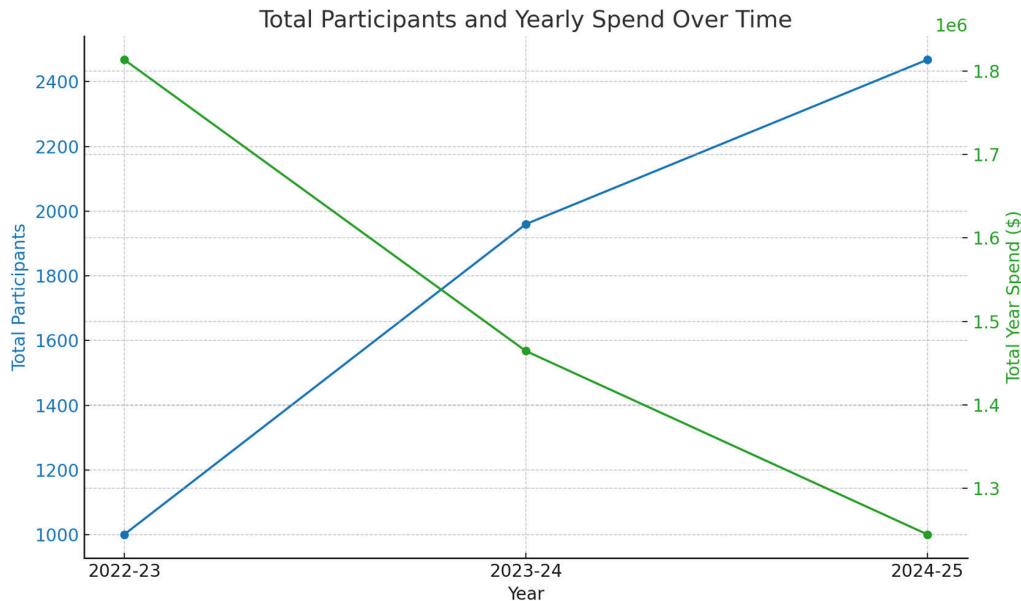


AWARE-NS made it a strategic priority this fiscal year to expand our virtual programming offerings. Virtual training provides flexibility and accessibility, allowing learners to engage with high-quality content from any location. It also supports consistent knowledge delivery and fosters broader participation across the province.



AWARE-NS Budget vs. Program Participation

The quantitative data graph below illustrates a significant increase in the number of participants accessing our programming versus overall organization expenditures.



The AWARE-NS Year End financials indicate a surplus which was accomplished through:

- Strong spending and financial regulations
- Significant new efficiencies
- Offering of virtual programming
- Robust accountabilities and justification controls
- Internal staff competencies replacing the need for external short-term contracts

Surplus and overall AWARE-NS funds are being allocated with greater prudence, accountability, and strategic intent to support AWARE-NS throughout the upcoming fiscal year—fostering organizational growth, advancing program redevelopment, and sustaining operational efficiencies.

Safety Training Backfill Report

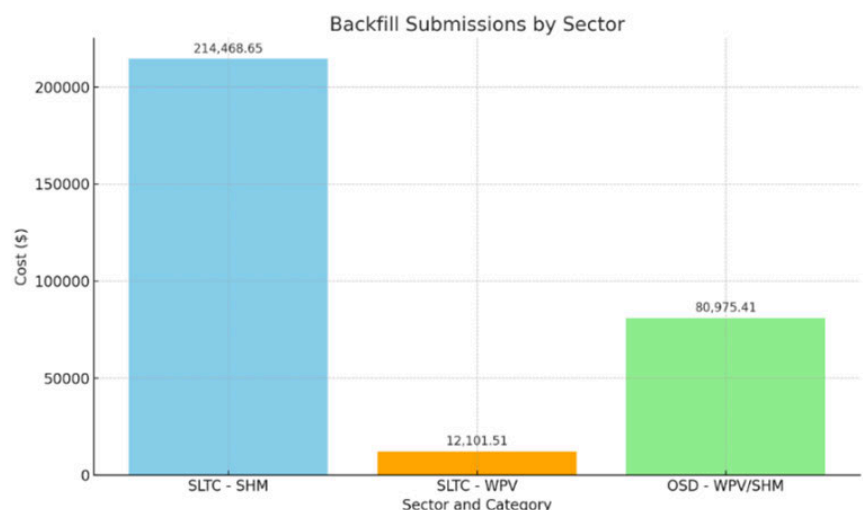
AWARE-NS administers and distributes safety training backfill funds on behalf of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care and Department of Opportunity and Social Development to sector organizations.

Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care incurred the highest total backfill costs, amounting to \$226,570.16, while Department of Opportunity and Social Development sector members claimed \$80,975.41. Approximately 67% of the allocated funds have been reimbursed.

At the end of fiscal, AWARE-NS received \$2,487.73 in PH&S Education Claims, with further submissions expected ahead of the June 30th deadline.

Finally, to boost Backfill awareness and usage, AWARE-NS launched its first-ever Fall Tour this year—bringing both sectors together to collaborate, share resources, and learn. The result? A resounding success.

The graph below illustrates the distribution of Safety Training Claim backfill reimbursements for the 2024-25 fiscal year.



Evaluations at a glance

In August of 2024, AWARE-NS transitioned their evaluation reporting process from traditional paper forms handed out during program sessions to a streamlined digital system. This shift not only reduced administrative overhead and paper waste but also enabled real-time data collection and analysis.

Importantly, the survey results now provide valuable insights that help AWARE-NS tailor programming to better meet sector-specific needs and identify emerging trends. This data-driven approach supports the development of new initiatives where demand is growing, ensuring programs remain relevant, responsive, and impactful.

Anonymous responses are automatically compiled, allowing for quicker insights, easier trend tracking, and secure storage of participant feedback. It has improved accessibility and convenience for both facilitators and participants, enhancing the overall efficiency and impact of their evaluation efforts.



99%

of Evaluation Participants found
AWARE-NS Programming beneficial to
their role and effective in increasing their
Safety Knowledge!

Feedback Highlights

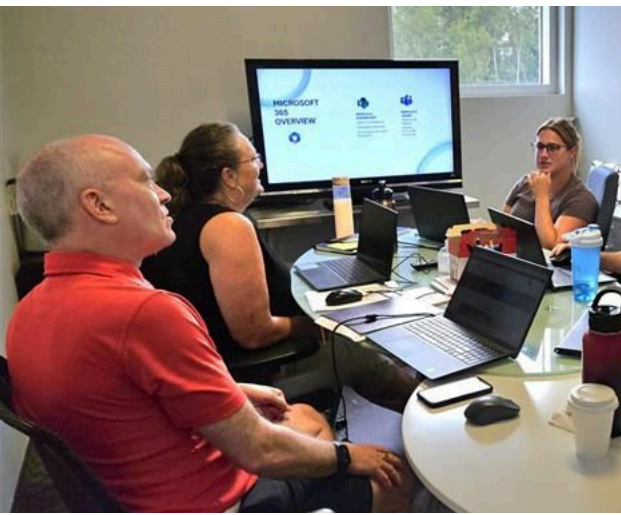
*I feel this type of course
is beneficial to all staff
and should be offered in
mandatory training
when one is hired and
for all current staff.
Education is prevention*

*Beth was a great
instructor! Very upbeat
and involved with the
group, using relatable
content and conversation
to increase our
understanding and add to
our perspective in the
subject!*

*Thank you for likely
the most impactful
learning session I
have ever attended!
None of us in that
room will forget the
lesson.*



Out & About with AWARE-NS



Next Steps

AWARE-NS Operational Plan 2025-26

In March 2025, the AWARE-NS team came together for a collaborative planning session to shape our operational roadmap for the upcoming fiscal year. Guided by our strategic directions, the team studied the pertinent OHS research literature and considered current sector trends, evolving operational requirements, available data, and the insights gained through ongoing partner engagement. As a result of this comprehensive approach, three major priorities have emerged on the horizon for this year:

01 — **Complete Program Revamp and Review**

AWARE-NS recognized the need to refresh and modernize our program offerings. We've initiated a comprehensive renewal of our resources to ensure they remain current, relevant, and aligned with best practices. To lead this effort, we welcomed a dedicated OHS Content and Administrative Support team member, who will play a key role in revitalizing our materials and enhancing the overall learning experience for our stakeholders.

02 — **AWARE-NS Website Rebuild**

This initiative will enhance accessibility, improve navigation, and deliver a more user-friendly experience across all devices. By modernizing our digital presence, we aim to ensure our resources are easier to find, more engaging, and aligned with current safety standards. The updated site will also support new features, including enhanced course registration and streamlined access to learning materials.

03 — **Sector Member and Partner Survey**

This fiscal year, AWARE-NS will conduct a survey to sector members and partners as a vital source of insight. The Survey will support alignment with the real-world needs of those we serve. It will provide a direct line of feedback that informs our programs, strategies, and outreach efforts. By identifying trends, challenges, and areas for improvement, we will make data-driven decisions that lead to meaningful impact and this will demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement and transparent, responsive service.



Conclusion

As AWARE-NS reflects on the past fiscal year, we are grateful for the support of our funders. Together, we have achieved substantial progress in our mission, as well as supporting the safety of the DSP, LTC and HC sector leaders and staff. As we look to the year ahead, we are inspired by the opportunities to create a wider safety culture.

2024-25 Operational Plan

Key Points

- Digital Revolution Completed
- Policy, Procedure and Process streamlined

Financial Overview

Key Points

- Efficiencies and Accountability
- Participation Up, Spending Down

Safety Training Backfill

Key Points

- SLTC Participants claimed majority of Backfill
- PHS Education Claims Launched
- Inaugural Fall Tour well received

Evaluations

Key Points

- Digital Evaluations launched in August
- AWARE-NS Programming continues to be an important part of Safety Culture

“Put your sunglasses on, the future of AWARE-NS is bright!”

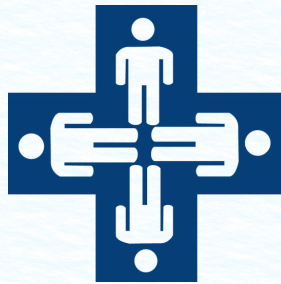
-Lorna O’Grady, AWARE-NS Board of Directors Chair

Acknowledgements

AWARE-NS is a small and mighty team, however we could not continue our mission without our dedicated contracted professionals. We extend our sincere gratitude to:

Yvette and Thomas Thibodeau, Darryl Hein and the XM Media Team, Roy Mestdagh, Patrick Hartling, Global Storm IT, and HR Covered.

Thank you for supporting AWARE-NS in advancing workplace safety across Nova Scotia. Your commitment, collaboration, and shared vision have been instrumental in fostering a safer, healthier environment for all. Together, we continue to make meaningful strides toward a culture where safety is not just a priority—but a fundamental value.



We thank you for your continued support.

We would like to thank Jonathan Gillis for his dedication and contributions to AWARE-NS. Your commitment to advancing our mission made lasting impact.

Contact

127 Chain Lake Drive
Halifax, NS
B3S 1B3
902.832.3868

www.awarens.ca
info@awarens.ca

