

# Workplace Safety Action Plan

## for Nova Scotia's Health and Community Services Sectors



### **Good Morning:**

On behalf of the **Project Team and Steering Committee**, I would like to provide an update to you, members of the **Advisory Committee** and the **Working Groups**, on our progress in development of the Workplace Safety Action Plan.

As 2017 comes to a close, I wanted to first and foremost thank you all for your valuable input and guidance in helping to bring the importance of safety in health and community services into focus.

To update you on the status of the action plan development, the Project Team and Steering Committee met throughout the fall, developing the Action Plan Report. While it seems like time has ticked along throughout this phase, we have been receiving positive support, practical feedback, and strategic advice from the Project Sponsors in developing the strongest report possible. We have been working with the recommendations from the working groups to ensure there is clarity on the issues and opportunities in the major areas of focus. And we expect to submit the Report to government in the new year. We will continue to reach out to you with updates regarding the next steps as we move through the process.

In the meantime, there continues to be great safety initiatives underway in building safer workplaces within the sector by all stakeholders - everyone is playing a key role!

Building safety culture and working to prevent injuries in our workplaces has never been more important than it is today. We know that by taking action and focusing attention to health and safety, change is possible. It has happened before. In 2009, Nova Scotia's health and community services sector was experiencing a crisis regarding the rapid increase in the number and cost of work related injuries and illness. If nothing changed, it was estimated WCB premiums paid by the sectors would exceed \$85 million by 2013. But, thanks for the focus on health and safety and return-to-work by the sectors, the creation of AWARE-NS, and support from WCB Nova Scotia, significant improvements were made in reducing the number of injuries and claim costs. Contrary to those earlier estimates, premiums in 2013 for the sectors totaled \$55 million - over \$30 million less than anticipated.

As we look to 2018, we know both the injury rate and the cost of injuries is on the rise. The health and community services sectors are once again facing increases in premiums, from \$62 million in 2017 to \$63.5 million in 2018. This increase is largely due to costs in the long-term care and home care sectors.

Safety for all must be made a priority. There are significant opportunities for change, and strong leadership is needed now more than ever in organizations to empower workers to make safety-minded decisions - to only complete a task if it can be done safely. Creating a culture where workers are included in the conversation about safety with senior leaders, supported to ask for assistance with a lift, report a broken piece of equipment for repair, or raise safety issues to their manager for action is essential for change.

Whether you participated in one of the five working groups or provided strategic counsel to the project team through Advisory Committee, we wouldn't have come as far as we did without your guidance, support, and hard work. Throughout this process, we have been inspired by your dedication and your resiliency. We are now moving from simply knowing about safety, to caring about safety, and there is much to be hopeful for as we move forward.

Have a safe and happy holiday season!

Susan Dempsey  
Project Lead and AWARE-NS Executive Director