

November 25, 2022

Hon. Kelly Regan, MLA
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts
c/o Legislative Committees Office
1700 Granville St.
2nd Floor, One Government Place
P.O. Box 2630
Halifax, NS B3J 3P7

Received LCO
November 25, 2022

Dear Ms. Regan,

We are responding to correspondence dated November 23, 2022, from the Legislative Committees Clerk for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Committee requested the Department of Health and Wellness and Nova Scotia Health provide a response to the following questions:

Q1. Currently, what is the average wait time for a child in the IWK Emergency Room to be seen?

Between October 1, 2022 and November 23, 2022, the average wait time from arrival to be seen by a physician at the IWK ED was 338 minutes.

Q2. What is the average wait time for Emergency Rooms across Nova Scotia?

Emergency department wait times vary greatly day to day as noted by Dr. Tanya Munroe to the committee. We have included as a separate attachment (Appendix A) a table displaying annual and year-to-date data.

The Care Coordination Centre at the QEII will add a new emergency department-specific function in early 2023 that will enhance the information available on the care progression of patients through the ED, and flag any barriers to care like DI, Lab, consults or disposition in order to improve flow.

We are currently working toward being able to publish predicted emergency department wait times currently on the NSH public website. This should be available for five of the largest EDs by the end of year with more sites to be added.

Q3. In the last month, how many hours were ERs closed across Nova Scotia?

Attached to this letter, (Appendix B) is a document that provides data for the last three complete fiscal years. There is a review process to ensure accuracy of this data, so validated information for the most recent month is not yet available.

Q4. How many notices of overcapacity have come to the public for Emergency Rooms over the last month?

One notice.

<https://www.nshealth.ca/news/overcrowding-qeii-health-sciences-centre-nov-8>.

Q5. How many notices have been put out encouraging people not to visit the emergency room because of it being over-stretched or understaffed over the last month?

While one notice was issued last month, the notice says: "Please do not hesitate to visit the QEII emergency department if you are experiencing an emergency. Anyone with urgent medical needs should call 911."

The purpose of the message is to advise of longer than usual wait times and options for care for those who do not have emergency needs.

Q6. When was [this season's flu] vaccine first made available?

On October 17, Government announced that Nova Scotians could book an appointment for an influenza vaccine with appointments beginning October 22. Please see the public announcement at [Influenza Vaccine Now Available in Nova Scotia - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#).

Q7. Deputy Lagassé to follow up with respect to the sufficiency of COVID Child Booster appointments.

Since the briefing with Dr. Strang and Dr. Lynk, we have experienced a surge in bookings and we are actively working to add more appointments to the booking site to address the demand. As of Nov. 23, there were 500 appointments available for children aged 5-11 in the HRM area.

The team is continually monitoring for gaps or increased demand and works with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia to offer more vaccine in that area. New appointments are being added to CanImmunize and we recommend people check every few days for new appointments in their area.

Q8. Provide the updated figure on what we are spending with Maple and what portion of it is for the Virtual Emergency Nova Scotia program. Is the \$500,000 still the same number or has it changed and is there a difference between the \$500,000 first amount that was reported in April?

There are two separate contracts with Maple providing virtual health services. Nova Scotians on the Need a Family Practice Registry can get free, online medical appointments through Virtual Care Nova Scotia. The Virtual Care Nova Scotia contract with Maple is \$2 million per year.

Virtual Emergency NS is a virtual care option delivered by emergency department physicians and staff for Nova Scotians visiting the emergency department with health concerns that can be appropriately treated through a virtual visit. The overall budget for Virtual Emergency NS is \$1.25M for this year. This includes the cost of the Maple platform, as well as compensation for the Nova Scotia Health healthcare providers offering the services. It is to be noted this solution was developed by Colchester Regional ER Physician, Dr. Jan Sommers on her own time in an effort to find innovative ways to provide care to Nova Scotians.

Q9. What is the average cost of an ER visit using Maple? Is the department able to provide a cost comparison between an in-person appointment at an ER and a virtual care emergency appointment?

We do not have per visit cost associated with Virtual Emergency NS so far, but this will form part of the evaluation as we continue the pilot. To date, there have been approximately 850 patients seen by Virtual Emergency NS.

Q10. Can you provide any updates on the interest in incentives for emergency room physicians? Is the government creating special financial incentives specific to emergency medicine physicians, emergency room nurses and nurse practitioners?

While there are no incentives exclusively for the recruitment of ED physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners, Nova Scotia provides incentives for doctors who commit to working in rural parts of the province for five years.

The new Primary Care Physician Incentive Program encourages doctors to establish a family practice in rural communities. Doctors who qualify can earn up to \$125,000 in incentives – \$25,000 when they sign the agreement to provide service in a rural community and \$20,000 per year for the next five years.

Q11. Are there any newly recruited physicians working in emergency rooms now?

From April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, there were 19 new physicians for emergency medicine. Since April 2022, there have been 4 new physicians for emergency medicine.

It's important to note that there may be more physicians than noted above who were recruited during this time period and work in EDs, as there are often family medicine positions with an option to do emergency. Many physicians add emergency work as part of their practice.

Q12. How many unvaccinated health care workers are not working right now?

At Nova Scotia Health 127 permanent employees in the nursing, health care and support staff categories are on unpaid administrative leave due to incomplete or unreported vaccination status, which represents 0.5% of NSHA employees.

At the IWK, 7 permanent employees are on unpaid administrative leave due to incomplete or unreported vaccination status.

Q13. How many Spring 2022 nursing graduates have now been offered and accepted a job in the province?

Nova Scotia Health hired a total of 344 Graduate RN students and 117 Graduate LPN students through the formal graduate intake since December 2021. The majority of hires were in permanent, full-time positions.

We had 245 spring 2022 grads apply to work with Nova Scotia Health during our previous intake.

- We hired 163 into Supernumerary positions.
 - Central 79
 - Eastern 37
 - Northern 25
 - Western 18
- We hired 37 to core vacancies
- 36 declined our offers – 12 accepted positions with the IWK & 5 relocated out of province
- 9 applicants did not return our calls or emails

The IWK hired 31 Graduate RN students and 4 Graduate LPN students through the formal graduate intake since December 2021. At the time of the RN hires, 2 were hired directly into permanent full-time positions, 5 temporary full-time and 24 casual relief.

As of November 23rd, of the 24 who were originally hired as casual relief, 3 have accepted permanent full-time positions and 8 have accepted temporary full-time positions. Of the 5 Graduate RNs who were originally offered temporary full-time positions, 2 have become permanent.

Thank you for this opportunity to share information with the Committee. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact either of us or our office.

Yours truly,

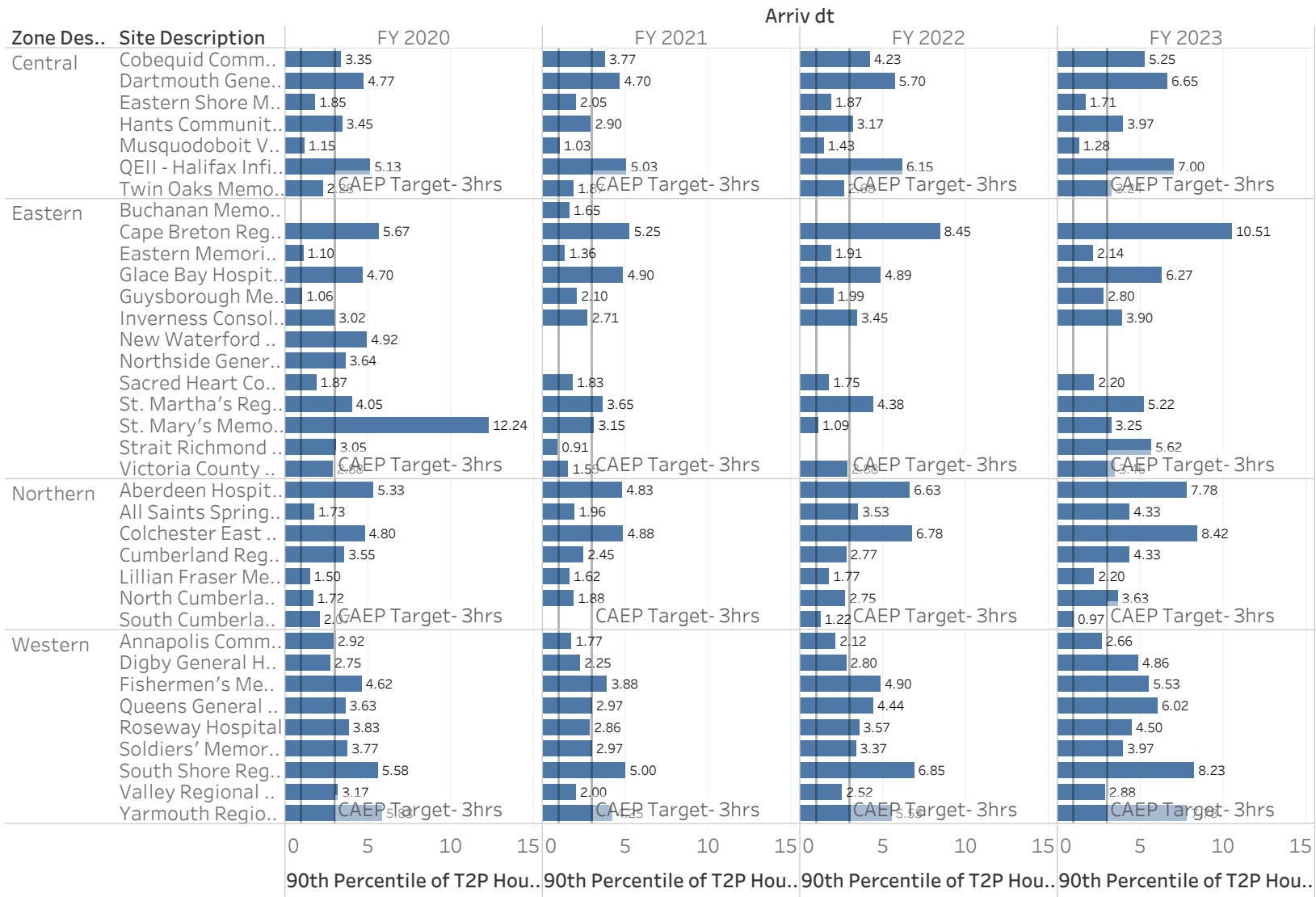
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeannine Lagasse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jeannine Lagasse
Deputy Minister of Department of Health and Wellness; and

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Oldfield". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Karen Oldfield
President and CEO of Nova Scotia Health

Time to Physician Initial Assessment 90th Percentile



Annual ED Closure Hours by ED Level and Reason Group

Zone	ED Description Level	2019-20			Year / Reason (group) 2020-21			2021-22		
		Scheduled Closure	Un-scheduled Closure	Total	Scheduled Closure	Un-scheduled Closure	Total	Scheduled Closure	Un-scheduled Closure	Total
Central	Level 3		26	26		11	11		60	60
	Level 4	4,392	5,909	10,301	4,380	5,034	9,414	4,380	10,237	14,617
	Total	4,392	5,934	10,326	4,380	5,044	9,424	4,380	10,296	14,676
Eastern	Level 3	5,867	4,289	10,156	8,760	1,400	10,160	5,144	2,529	7,673
	Level 4	13,881	6,771	20,652	9,912	4,596	14,508	14,753	7,120	21,873
	Total	19,748	11,059	30,808	18,672	5,996	24,668	19,897	9,648	29,545
Northern	Level 4	1,415	7,831	9,246	20,448		20,448	18,045		18,045
	Total	1,415	7,831	9,246	20,448		20,448	18,045		18,045
Western	Level 3		3,632	3,632		2,159	2,159		9,046	9,046
	Level 4	4,554	2,943	7,497	3,369	257	3,626	3,285	2,209	5,494
	Total	4,554	6,575	11,129	3,369	2,416	5,785	3,285	11,255	14,540
Grand Total		30,110	31,399	61,509	46,869	13,456	60,325	45,607	31,199	76,806