

NSCSW Social Policy Framework:

Scoping Statement



Introduction

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers exists to serve and protect Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work. The NSCSW establishes, maintains, and regulates standards of professional practice. Our role is to ensure that Nova Scotians receive the services of skilled and competent social workers who are knowledgeable, ethical, qualified, and accountable to the people who receive social work services. The NSCSW believes the people of Nova Scotia are entitled to receive the highest caliber of care from their social workers. To ensure this we provide membership services to support Registered Social Workers in maintaining the highest standards of professional competency, enabling participation in a broader provincial social work community.

We engage with members, Government, employers, community groups, and citizens to build a stronger social work community, and to advance the social work profession in Nova Scotia. We believe Social workers provide an essential service to support Nova Scotians lead healthier, happier lives. The NSCSW engages with Nova Scotia's social work community in advocating for improvement to social policies, programs, and social justice.

We provide responsive, accountable leadership to ensure the highest standards of social work for Nova Scotians. We work in solidarity with Nova Scotians to advocate for policies that improve social conditions, challenge injustice and value diversity.

Our work is grounded in integrity and professionalism which calls on us to be Respectful:

The College is respectful of the inherent dignity of every individual and strives for cultural humility and social change.

Accessible:

The NSCSW provides communication and services that are accessible province-wide for members, stakeholders, and the public.

Ethical:

The NSCSW follows the established national code of ethics that adheres to the values of the social work profession.

Progressive:

The NSCSW is proactive in reflecting the values of social work, and supports innovation through education, research, and transformative community engagement, for the sake of social justice.

Project Purpose

During the past three decades, we have seen increasing globalization, the rise of neo-liberalism and unprecedented technological change, impacting the labour market. During this time all levels of government have responded with policies resulting in greater inequity, a clawing back of hard won gains and a general retrenchment of the welfare state. These trends have combined to leave the most vulnerable Nova Scotians to carry the greatest burden of these policies. The need for progressive organizations to add to the political dialogue in Nova Scotia is needed because;

- Political discourse has shifted over the decades in that the language and assumptions of a free market economy have worked to expand corporate influence and power. This expansion is creating a climate where challenging dominant discourses and the supporting policies has become increasingly difficult. A more diverse and balanced dialogue will strengthen our position of ensuring an inclusive civil society and strong public sector.
- In this social, economic and political climate described, the NSCSW believes that best practice evidence, informed arguments, existing and proposed policies need to be more deeply examined in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of outcomes related to policy action or inaction.
- This lack of social justice for the most vulnerable in Nova Scotia has created an opportunity for the NSCSW to take action. Through scholarly research, public education and advocacy, NSCSW will promote diverse discussion and pose substantive questions that are central to political dialogue in Nova Scotia.

As an organization, our goal is to provide ways to understand social issues and offer political stances that are in solidarity with the stories of the marginalized. The public and elected officials, need to be made aware that there are alternative social policies that can create meaningful change in this province. As social workers we have the tools, vision and values to support this change. The vision for the NSCSW is to add to the political dialogue in Nova Scotia by engaging the public and elected officials at all levels of government, to influence decision making towards needed change.

The purpose of this project is to build a Social Policy Framework for the NSCSW.

Social policy frameworks are tools that guide complex decision-making, set future positive direction, and identify important intersections that impact intended and unintended outcomes of policy. Policy frameworks are blueprints for achieving goals for our province; a roadmap to improve quality of life through policy.

The vision of the NSCSW is to secure an experienced researcher to develop a Social Policy Framework that reflects our mission and values and can be leveraged by members and the public as a tool to develop and evaluate public policy. Public policy that has been vetted through

a social justice lens before implementation will ensure Nova Scotians have an improved opportunity to reach their full potential with less barriers and improve quality of life.

Developed in consultation with social workers and other stakeholders, the NSCSW Social Policy Framework will be used to support advocacy efforts in protecting the public, promoting health, preventing harm and proactively and reactively address government policy. The Social Policy Framework will be a living document that will guide how the NSCSW will organize and mobilize to ensure Nova Scotians have opportunities for wellbeing and fulfillment.

The NSCSW Social Policy Framework has three main goals:

- To provide a formalized tool that has been constructed with our NSCSW guiding principles and identifies the critical and unique considerations for social policy development in Nova Scotia. This framework will be a tool that we, as social workers and allies, can use to highlight sustainable alternatives to the dominant discourse.
- To coordinate information and activities between NSCSW, community, stakeholders and all levels of government in order to effectively advocate for fundamental changes to our current social structures.
- To influence and guide our decision making in order to prevent and protect the public from harm and promote safe, healthy communities.

Project Scope

The scope of Social Policy Framework should be **written in accessible language** to address the following issues through the theme.

Towards Liberation; Addressing Social, Political and Economic Inequality.

Areas that are to be explored are;

Addressing the Culture of Affluence

The values of the most privileged and affluent in our society continue to be presented as though they apply to everyone but are actually often the values of a few in our society. The ability to control, land resources, labour, culture, language and information for the interest of a few continues to drive inequality within Nova Scotia. Affluence and privilege that is not reflected on creates conditions that oppress others along lines of race, class, gender, ability...etc. Where the culture of affluence is left unchecked and the concerns of the oppressed go unnoticed there is eroded trust, increased anxiety and illness, (and) excessive consumption; this has lasting impacts on a range of social issues (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

To address the culture of affluence the NSCSW Social Policy Framework should:

- a) Examine how affluence and privilege enhance opportunities for some, discriminates against others and erodes community cohesiveness.
 - This section should briefly address the impacts of inequality on social issues like physical health, mental health, drug use, education, justice, social mobility, trust, community life, violence, senior and child well-being.
 - This section should identify the need to build social, economic and political equality as a central pillar of social policy in Nova Scotia.
- b) Support a model for wealth distribution that focuses on income security and equity of opportunities.
 - This section should address how the current mechanisms for wealth distribution are ineffective and are based on dominate narratives around class, race, gender, ability...etc. (I.E. poor people are poor because they don't work hard enough).
 - It should specifically address the racialization and feminization of poverty in Nova Scotia. Included in this section should be the examination of the disproportionate number of women and minorities who face issues of violence, involvement in the criminal justice system and the child welfare system.
 - It should demonstrate that the range of Employment Support and Income Assistances programs in Nova Scotia are inadequate and perpetuate oppressions for marginalized communities along gender and racial lines. Specific attention should also be given to youth unemployment and engagement.
 - It should outline tax policy mechanisms that are needed to build economic equality and that would provide the means to fund social policy priorities like, child care, seniors care, education, post-secondary education and health care.
 - In addition, it should address both federal and provincial government transfers to Child Tax Credits, the Goods and Services Tax credit, Employment Insurance, Income Assistance, and the Affordable Living Tax Credit.
- c) Examine the role of market regulation in relation to income equality.
 - Address the racialization of the Nova Scotian labour market and prominence of precarious work for racialized groups.
 - Address pay equity and the continued barriers that women face towards achieving economic equality.
 - Address the barriers of people with disabilities to access the labour market

- Address the inadequacies of minimum wage and demonstrate the need for a living wage.
- The section should outline the need to expand protect employee pensions.

Towards the Public Good

Social workers are greatly concerned with the issues such as homelessness, poverty, crime, child and spousal abuse, and deteriorating health care and education systems. The NSCSW Social Policy Framework should address the need for social cohesion towards the public good.

To address the need to work towards the Public Good, the NSCSW Social Policy Framework should:

- a) Examine prominence of individualism and its role in disconnecting communities (i.e. organizations and individuals compete for scarce resources).
 - This section should address how privatization of public services and infrastructure erodes social cohesion. It should demonstrate how austerity and managerialism have eroded the autonomy and ethical capacity of public servants, holds social services agencies accountable to their bottom line rather than the social needs of the people who these systems serve. This in turn increases workloads and reduces resources.
 - Address how market forces have created issues of scarcity around housing, food security and health care. It should explore how this has resulted in piecemeal strategies to address social concerns such as foodbanks, inadequate housing subsidies, the opioid crisis and emergency room visits.
 - It should address how access to mental health services, pharmaceutical drugs, child care and senior care services are more available to those who have private benefits; and the impact this has on social cohesion.
- b) Support the role of strong investments into public social systems embedded in the principle of equity.
 - Address the need for greater income support.
 - Address the need for investments into affordable and safe housing.
 - Address the need for Collaborative Community Care to address mental health that puts the service users at the center of decision-making and embraces the social determinates of health as core principles of health care delivery, included in this section is the need for comprehensive pharmacare program.

- Address the need for core investments into child, youth and family services that are embedded in the diverse and cultural needs of the communities where the service is delivered.

Participatory Communities

Democratic participation has declined in recent years. Many people view governments as unresponsive, bureaucratic, and ineffective. Often, they feel alienated from real decision-making. Social workers support reinvigorating government and strengthening participatory democracy. We believe there are instruments and processes that can be used to ensure government accountability, increase meaningful citizen participation in government policy, and advance the common good.

To address the need for participatory communities the NSCSW Social Policy Framework must:

- a) Distinguish the need for collaborative decision-making embedded in an intersectional lens.
 - This section should highlight that social policy that evaluates a social issue on micro level, leads to ineffective policy decisions.
 - This section should highlight that social policy decisions must employ an intersectional lens of the issue and provide a structural analysis of the issue (I.E. children are at risk in Nova Scotia, because the child poverty rate is high, this disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, African Nova Scotian communities and women).
 - This section should demonstrate that when intersectional lens is applied to decision making social policy is strengthened (I.e. the Governments of Canada's Bill c16 which amended the Canadian Human Rights Act to add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination).
- b) Demonstrate the importance of local control of decision making and the impact it has on public trust and social policy.
 - This section should highlight the important role that municipalities can play in addressing complex social issues. Municipalities in Montreal, Toronto and Edmonton have taken a leadership role in coordinating city planning efforts that consider social issues as part of development. Nova Scotia can learn from these progressive and innovative strategies and emulate the successful, and applicable policies.
 - Support and demonstrate the need for diverse communities and their ability to connect and enrich our well-being.

- This section should reflect on the benefit of inclusion and celebration of the different cultural ways of knowing and the richness that this brings to healing, wellness and access. (i.e. Cultural safety within public services would be an example).
- This section should focus on the role that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission should play on decision making. The section should focus on the need to actively reflect on the report and to be implementing its recommendations into social policy decisions.

Transformational Change

Social workers believe that liberation from the effects and the elimination of the causes of oppression are primary to our professional goals. The achievement of human liberation will require far-reaching changes at the structural level and at the level of group and individual interactions. These changes will involve transforming oppressive behavioural patterns and "unlearning" oppressive attitudes and assumptions. Social workers believe that we must work together to recover the buried memories of our socialization, to share our stories and heal the hurts imposed by the conditioning, to act in the present in a humane and caring manner, to rebuild our human connections and to change our world (Sherover-Marcuse, 2015).

To address the need for transformational change the NSCSW Social Policy Framework should:

- a) Critique the role of stop gap policies and their negative long-term outcomes.
 - This section should demonstrate the devaluing of care in our society, paying particular attention to the unpaid work that is still predominantly done by women (childcare, senior care, housework) that has filled the gap of social issues.
 - This section should highlight, that policy options that look at things like minimal increases to income assistance, support for foodbanks and investments in P3 models and are designed as stop-gap, short-term solutions to larger structural problems.
 - This section should critique the role of charity as a model for social service delivery and highlight that charity models are embedded in sympathy to relieve the suffering of others not remove the cause of suffering. These options may work in the short run but are not sustainable over the long term and are embedded in a power dynamic.
- c) Examine the need for collaborative, inclusive advocacy towards transformational change.
 - Address the need for social policy to be developed through the principle of solidarity. This process places empathy at the core of decision-making. Empathy drives an understanding of our shared experience and creates a mutual need to collaborate to address our collective problems and to reconcile and heal together.

- This section should make central the idea that advocacy is central pillar of social service delivery, it should address the need for funding community groups, services and government programs to advocate with service users and should empower all to consistently be working towards change in order to have a strong civil society.
 - It should demonstrate that when organizations are given a mandate for advocacy social policy is improved (I.E. child and youth advocate in other provinces have had extraordinary success at changing social policy for the better).
- d) Demonstrate the need for big ideas that leverage ideas towards transformational change.
- This section should demonstrate that our most effective social policy starts with a big idea. (i.e. CPP, Canada Health Act).

