2018-2023 Strategic Plan Review
A Critical Evaluation of Our Systems

2024-2027 Strategic Plan
Navigating Towards Safe(R) Social Work Practice

May 2024

NSCSW | NOVA SCOTIA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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Who We Are

The **Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW)** exists to serve and protect Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work. 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.

Land Acknowledgment

The NSCSW is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, whose inherent rights were recognized in the Peace and Friendship Treaties that were signed from 1725 to 1779. This series of treaties did not surrender Indigenous land, resources or sovereignty to the British Empire, but instead established rules for an ongoing relationship between nations. The treaties were later reaffirmed by Canada in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and remain active to this day.

The NSCSW joins our members and our communities in the labour of reconciliation, and we are grateful to live and work together as treaty people in Mi'kma'ki.

Reflection & Repair

Decolonizing ourselves and our practice includes learning to recognize the ways in which we are each affected by the various systems within which we live and work. Each of us, depending upon our social location and intersectional positionally, may be simultaneously privileged and oppressed.

For example, all of us with non-Indigenous origins continue to benefit from being able to live on unceded Mi'kmaw land. But this privilege is tempered by the fact that many Black Nova Scotians have ancestors who were uprooted from their homelands in Africa and brought to Mi'kma'ki against their will. And every generation since their arrival has also seen waves of newcomers seeking refuge after being displaced by imperialist violence and its consequent disasters.

Our origins intersect with other elements of our identities to create the social context of our lived experience. Race and gender interact with class, age, dis(Ability), ethnicity, and more.

Developing deep and nuanced understanding of how our positionality affects the work we do, as well as naming and confronting the larger systemic forces at play (e.g. white supremacy, colonialism, neoliberalism) is essential to ensuring safer practice.

Introduction

As we prepare for the next stage of our journey at the NSCSW, our council's primary focus lies in rejuvenating our strategic plan. This process is not to be taken lightly; it demands a deep and clear understanding of the wider political and societal context we function within, to ensure that NSCSW can fulfil the mandate established in Nova Scotia's *Social Workers Act*.

Our political and societal context shapes our methods, our interactions, and ultimately the outcomes of our work. It's crucial that we are adaptable to these external influences while remaining true to our principles and mandate, to ensure the highest quality of social work service delivery and solid regulatory performance.

Moreover, this broader understanding directly affects the NSCSW's capacity for effective and proactive oversight of social work practices. It is our duty to not only monitor but also guide these practices, ensuring they align with our mission to protect the public interest. We must be prepared to adjust our responses to evolving societal political landscapes as necessary to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our society can enact their rights and access the care they need.

As regulators and social workers, our primary responsibility is to ensure public safety. This involves several key facets that we must always consider.

Firstly, as regulators, we must assure compliance with professional standards and ethical guidelines within the social work field. This involves enhancing regulatory program and policies to ensure proactive practices to ensure that practitioners in our jurisdiction have the support and capacity to adhere to these standards. By doing so, we can help to prevent misconduct that could potentially harm the public.

Secondly, as social workers, our role is to work towards social justice for individuals, families, and communities who are the most vulnerable in our society. This requires us to work in solidarity to identifying real and perceived risks to safety and well-being, and taking appropriate action to mitigate these risks, through regulation and advocacy. This involves working closely with service users, communities, other organizations, agencies, and professionals, to coordinate responses and interventions to public policy issues that impact the care of the most vulnerable.

Moreover, we must also strive to promote a culture of safety within society. This involves advocating for policies and legislation that prioritize public safety, as well as educating the public about their right to access ethical services.

Finally, our responsibilities also involve continually improving our own practices and procedures to enhance public safety. This involves keeping up-to-date with the latest research and developments in our field, seeking feedback from the communities we serve, and implementing changes based on these insights.

Regular and rigorous evaluation of crucial systems and organizations is fundamental to enhancing public safety. Such evaluations, however, must not be confined to an insular perspective; instead, they should consider the wider political landscape in which these systems function.

Considering the ongoing calls to dismantle white supremacy and privilege within our health and social care systems, and the systemic violence manifested through anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism, anti-trans rhetoric and Islamophobia, we must ensure that our strategic planning process is comprehensive and cognizant of these issues.

In essence, our role as regulators and social workers goes beyond simply working towards compliance. We have a duty to actively contribute to creating a safer society for all.

The Role of Health & Social Service Regulators

Health and social service regulators play an increasingly important role in fostering trust between the public and the services they receive. Regulators continue to bridge the gap between the public, professionals, and the systems they work within, even in the face of poor public policy that has contributed to the decay of quality public services.

Trust, Inequality & the Erosion of Public Confidence

Trust in our public institutions has diminished. This decline is closely tied to rising inequality. Over the past three decades, income disparities have grown significantly, further marginalizing vulnerable and racialized communities. Austerity policies and increasing corporate influence have led to a prominence of top-down bureaucratic systems, fostering a culture of managerialism that prioritizes efficiency over human connection.

The continued shift of responsibility for social risks from the state to the individual has also contributed to the erosion of public trust. As people are increasingly expected to manage and regulate their own issues, health and social care systems have become more individualized and pathologizing, failing to address the social and political contexts in which people live.

As we move forward with our strategic planning process, these considerations must guide our discussions and decisions. It is our ethical responsibility to foster an environment that works towards a more equitable and inclusive society that upholds public trust.

Critiques of Regulation

The current socio-political environment has sparked questions regarding the effectiveness of self-regulating professions. A multitude of reports and studies have expressed doubt about the efficacy of regulatory bodies, suggesting a need for a critical re-examination of our current regulatory methodology.

These studies propose that regulators should clearly define their goals towards protecting the public interest, increase public involvement, focus on actual and perceived risks, and take proactive measures to mitigate these risks; this underlines the growing demand for regulatory reform in Canada. However, it's crucial to note some of these widespread calls for reform appear to be driven by neoliberal assumptions and theories.

Historically, professional self-regulation has been viewed as a regulatory agreement between the state and the public. The state would grant special privileges to certain professions provided they acted in the public interest. Some scholars argue that the perceived failure of self-regulating professions to serve the public interest has instigated regulatory change. However, other research suggests that regulatory changes are more linked to evolving conceptualizations of the public interest.

During the 1960s and 1970s, when state discourses tied the public interest with human rights, there was a greater alignment between professional interests and the public interest. Currently, with an increasingly business-focused definition of the public interest, alternative regulatory forms are being explored. The common definition of the public interest is shifting away from *service quality* and towards *open markets and competition*. This emphasis seems incompatible with professional self-regulation, and it appears that the consequent shift in how public interest is perceived is contributing to the decline of self-regulating professions.

Defining what is meant by the public interest is crucial to evaluating the effectiveness of the regulatory body. While regulators share common mandates —such as protecting the public interest, maintaining confidence in self-regulation, and upholding integrity within various professions— the definition of 'public interest' remains nebulous and rarely defined. Key questions for regulators include: who determines what is in the public interest? and who is excluded from this determination? These questions are linked to the need to have more connection to the people who are affected by the services being delivered.

The NSCSW frames the concept of public interest primarily through the lens of public safety. Decisions made by the NSCSW, as well as the activities and programs we initiate, must contribute to the safer provision of social work services. This encompasses a comprehensive approach that includes examining systems as well as understanding how individuals —both practitioners and service users— are influenced and molded by their social, economic, and political environments.

A Structural Lens for Regulatory Reform

Regulatory reform should be viewed through a structural lens. This approach allows us to consider the broader implications of public policy. It's an important perspective that helps us understand how decisions are made and who they ultimately serve.

The current dominant political paradigm is neo-liberalism; when employed in public policy, this paradigm unfortunately pits workers against the people they are serving. It diverts attention from broader challenges in the delivery of health and social services, in the very areas where many risks lie. Furthermore, it centralizes power to a small group of decision-makers who seem determined to shape conceptions of the public interest based on marketplace values and entrenched systems of white supremacy.

This structural lens illuminates how current trends in self-regulation aim to shift responsibility onto the individual. Professionals are held personally accountable for broader issues such as high caseloads, moral distress, burnout, lack of mentorship, supervision, and training, scarcity of resources to meet client needs, and erosion of professional autonomy and judgment. Meanwhile, regulation is used as a tool of social control to encourage conformity to neo-liberal values.

The Supreme Court of Canada has emphasized the importance of the proper regulation of our learned professions. The primary purpose of establishing self-governing professions is to protect the public by ensuring only qualified and competent individuals are permitted to practice, and that members of the profession conform to appropriate standards of professional conduct. Individual accountability is essential, but it must be contextualized within the broader political landscape: the erosion of public health and social services, class divide, and declining public trust.

Our democracy is under strain, and this affects both trust and public safety. We've seen a surge in corporate influence on politics, a decline in equality-seeking civil society organizations, and increasing disillusionment among citizens with their governments and services. The form our political system takes directly affects the application of government policies and processes. Decisions that may seem fiscally sound and help achieve short-term fiscal policy goals can have disastrous effects on social well-being in the long term. It's essential that organizations consider whether their policies are maintaining or deepening systemic inequality and oppression.

The current political climate continues to see a trend towards retrenchment of democratic processes, where decision-making powers impacting the public interest are left to a few individuals who may not necessarily act in the public interest, especially the interests of vulnerable and marginalized populations. But to ensure meaningful, inclusive, and effective health policy, communities need the capacity to engage with and shape public policy. At this critical juncture in our history, we must work to strengthen democratic processes rather than weaken them.

Historic Changes in the *Social Workers Act*

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers has undergone significant changes in recent years. The most notable shift occurred in 2016 when the former Nova Scotia *Association* of Social Workers statutorily divested itself of its association role. This marked a pivotal moment in the history of the NSCSW as it transitioned from serving both its members interests and the public to focusing solely on the public interest.

The NSCSW's mandate is to regulate the practice of social work in Nova Scotia and protect the public interest. It achieves this through registration, licensing, adherence to ethics, and holding registrants to account for upholding professional standards of practice. These processes ensure that only qualified and competent individuals are permitted to practice social work in Nova Scotia and that they conform to appropriate standards of professional conduct.

Also, the NSCSW promotes the profession of social work with the goal of educating the public about the profession's ethics and standards, and enhancing safe and ethical practice. Advocacy efforts by the NSCSW are directed towards enhancing public safety. This approach marked an opportunity to simply ensure compliance with standards and ethics of the profession, but to focus on the political, economic and social conditions that impact the safer delivery of social work.

The historic shift in the NSCSW's mandate represented a broader trend in professional regulation towards prioritizing public interest. Over the last five years the NSCSW has strengthened its programs and policies and has remained steadfast in its commitment to protect and serve the public through the regulation of social work practice in Nova Scotia and advocacy in the public interest.

2018-2023 Strategic Plan Review

Context & Intent

The NSCSW strategic plan for 2018-2023 was developed in response to various challenges affecting public safety and the professional identity of social workers. NSCSW unveiled this plan after extensive consultations with social workers and civil society organizations.

A key risk identified during the development of that plan was a perceived lack of credibility of the former Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers due to negative perceptions of the former organization. Simultaneously, the profession itself grappled with an eroding sense of identity among social workers.

In response, the NSCSW prioritized revitalizing its relationship with its members. The College aimed to foster these relationships through continuous engagement, online feedback mechanisms, and active participation in social advocacy. The strategic plan was designed to demonstrate the College's commitment to delivering its mandate through demonstrating an application of the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in its own actions.

Trust is a cornerstone of all forms of governance, particularly those that involve self-regulation. When members trust their governing body, they are more likely to adhere to professional standards, participate in professional development activities, and contribute to the collective voice of the profession. The strategic plan therefore focused on fostering trust between the NSCSW, the public and its members, leading to the chosen title of: ***Our Foundation for Growth***.

The strategic plan also addressed the pressing issue of an eroding professional identity among social workers. Factors such as role ambiguity, heavy workloads, lack of supportive supervision, and challenging work environments had all contributed to this erosion. If left unaddressed, professional identity erosion leads to *ethical drift* —a gradual shift away from ethical norms of practice— which compromises service quality and undermines public trust.

To counteract this, the NSCSW engaged in a multi-faceted approach. This included promoting a strong understanding of professional values and ethics, enhancing supportive mentorship, advocating for safer work environments, and encouraging ongoing professional development and self-reflection. In addition, the strategy included educating the public about social work, highlighting the achievements and roles of social workers, and strengthening the complaints and discipline process.

In addition a significant strategy focused on increasing the College's media presence to respond proactively to major social issues, build trust with the public and members, and demonstrate our commitment to addressing risks in providing social work services, by advocating for the social and economic policies required.

Transparency, accountability, and credibility were underscored as crucial elements in the NSCSW's approach to addressing targeted problems in regulation and advocacy. This strategic plan laid the foundation for a renewed focus on public safety and the professional identity of social workers, embodying the College's commitment to its mandate and its members.

Right-touch Regulation

The NSCSW's first strategic plan was also committed to implementing *right-touch regulation*. This approach advocates for a balanced, risk-based regulatory system that is as minimally intrusive as necessary to achieve its goals.

Right-touch regulation emphasizes effective risk identification and management, and relies on decision-making processes that are informed by evidence. The approach strives to maintain a balance, protecting public safety and trust without stifling innovation or placing unnecessary burdens on the profession. It also promotes flexibility, allowing for adaptation to evolving circumstances and exploring alternative mechanisms to manage risk.

The essence of the right-touch regulation approach is equilibrium. It's about ensuring public safety and maintaining public trust without suppressing innovation or imposing unnecessary burdens. This approach encourages regulators to continually reassess and refine their strategies, promoting efficiency and effectiveness in achieving regulatory objectives.

Research has shown that the most significant risks to social work practice are structural challenges. These include moral distress among practitioners, overwhelming workloads, inadequate funding, and the devaluation of the profession. Furthermore, there is insufficient support for social care, pointing to the need for comprehensive solutions. These complex challenges require holistic solutions, including policy changes and increased investment in social work. The NSCSW believes that advocating for social policies leading to social justice aligns with the right-touch regulatory approach. Such advocacy aims to manage risk for service users, ensuring they receive the highest quality of social work services.

This right-touch regulation approach is a strategic method to ensure that the social work profession remains accountable, adaptable, and focused on providing the best possible services to the public. It underscores the NSCSW's commitment to balancing public safety with professional development and innovation.

NSCSW pursued several initiatives to foster trust, define professional identity, and mitigate risk, including:

- Refining regulatory policies to ensure expectations are more comprehensive, understood, effective & fair.
- Improving technology for more streamlined procedures and communication.
- Enhancing public education about the social work profession through increased media presence.
- Actively participating in relevant policy initiatives that are crucial to the public interest.
- Upholding transparency and accountability in all actions.
- Showcasing the achievements of social workers.

Major Initiatives

Candidacy Mentorship

The Candidacy Mentorship Program (CMP), initiated in 1993 and revised in 2019, positioned candidacy as a secondary assessment of a social worker's competence. The program pairs new social work graduates or those returning to practice with experienced practitioners for professional development and secondary assessment. It aims to support and assess candidates as they integrate knowledge, apply skills, and implement ethical principles. Candidates are required to complete 2500 hours of social work practice within five years, guided by the NSCSW Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. Support is provided through dedicated staff, and a CMP website launched in 2019.

Professional Development

Recognizing that constant learning is key to maintaining and boosting the requisite skills and knowledge within the social work profession, NSCSW committed to the continuous professional enhancement of its members.

The NSCSW developed a wide-ranging annual program of professional development events, including an annual conference that takes place concurrently with our Annual General Meeting in May. The purpose of these sessions is to facilitate social workers in staying abreast with the most recent theories, practices, and regulatory standards.

In 2022, there was a significant revamp of the NSCSW's professional development regulations and standards. This was aligned with the updated accreditation standards from the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators and trends in complaints that indicated an increasing risk of moral distress and injury. These changes were undertaken to further enhance the quality of social work practice.

Right-touch Regulation

The NSCSW adopted a "right-touch" regulatory approach, aiming for a balanced, risk-based regulation system in line with the Standards of Good Regulation produced by the Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network.

This approach emphasizes minimal intrusion, adaptability to changing circumstances, and exploring alternative mechanisms for risk management.

Addressing Structural Challenges in Social Work

The NSCSW recognizes that structural challenges pose significant risks to the delivery of social work practice. These challenges include moral distress among practitioners, overwhelming workloads, inadequate funding for social services, and devaluation of the profession. Comprehensive solutions involving policy changes and increased investment in the social service sector are required to address these issues. The NSCSW strategy advocated for social policies leading to social justice, aligning with a right-touch regulatory approach. This commitment involves policy alterations and increased investment in the social work sector.

Goal outcomes

We regulate the profession by ensuring the highest standards of professional and ethical social work practice for the people of Nova Scotia

Goal:	Nova Scotians see the candidacy program as a strong & relevant approach to regulation.
Output:	1. The candidacy program was redefined, redeveloped, and launched in 2018. 2. All compliance activities related to the candidacy program were successfully completed. 3. A preliminary review and evaluation of the Candidacy Mentorship Program was conducted to assess its effectiveness and relevance.
Outcome:	1. It remains unclear how Nova Scotians perceives the Candidacy Mentorship Program (CMP). 2. The CMP, since its launch, has seen an increase in compliance from 48% to 85%, indicating a positive reception and adherence to the program. 3. The program's impact has been measured as a secondary assessment, demonstrating its broader effects on the practice of social work. • The CMP has significantly enhanced the critical thinking skills of candidates, with 68% reporting improvement in their ethical decision-making abilities. • On average 60% of candidates have effectively engaged in discussions on handling matters of confidentiality and consent better, showing the program's effectiveness in addressing key ethical issues. • Through the CMP, 56% of candidates have managed to tackle ethical dilemmas, showcasing the program's role in problem-solving. • The program has boosted the confidence of 52% of candidates, who reported discovering their professional voice through mentorship meetings. • Reports indicate that the CMP has successfully implemented moral distress prevention strategies in 64% of cases. • The program has encouraged dialogue on self-advocacy and the establishment/maintenance of professional boundaries, as evidenced in 60% of reports. • Social Worker Candidates have been involved in 38% of all received complaints. Among these, 20% led to remediation. 80% of the implicated candidates were not actively participating in the CMP, suggesting a correlation between active participation in the program and lower complaint rates.

Outcome:	(continued) • Candidates actively involved in the CMP were more likely to have complaints dismissed, underscoring the program's effectiveness in ensuring public safety and accountability.

Goal:	**The NSCSW has removed barriers to labour mobility between provinces.**
Output:	1. NSCSW has taken significant steps towards complying with the Fair Registration Practices Act (FRPA). 2. In accordance with the FRPA, NSCSW has outlined an action plan that details the measures they are committed to working towards. 3. NSCSW has implemented and developed a new policy manual in line with the FRPA's requirements. This policy manual ensures the registration practices of NSCSW are compliant with the Act. 4. NSCSW has introduced a new telepractice policy to facilitate mobility. This policy allows social workers to practice their profession remotely, making it easier for them to serve clients across different geographical locations. 5. NSCSW has made efforts to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Atlantic provinces. This MOU aimed to strengthen cooperation and mutual recognition among the social work regulators. 6. NSCSW conducted a thorough review of its private practice regulations. NSCSW identified and took measures to reduce barriers to entering private practice for social workers. This action aims to increase labour mobility for clinical social workers across Canada 7. NSCSW shifted its focus towards the regulation of clinical social work practice, which is more aligned with other jurisdictions. This step involves setting and enforcing standards for clinical social work to ensure quality care for clients.
Outcome:	1. NSCSW has successfully removed barriers to labour mobility, as part of its strategic objectives. 2. This achievement has led to a steady increase in Labour Mobility Applicants over the years: • 2017: 59 applications • 2018: 89 applications • 2019: 126 applications • 2020: 29 applications (despite onset of pandemic) • 2021: 78 applications • 2022: 61 applications, along with 183 requests to approve interprovincial telepractice • 2023: 64 applications, and 149 requests to approve interprovincial telepractice 3. Furthermore, NSCSW has successfully met the compliance requirements of the Fair Registration Practices Act (FRPA).

Goal:	**Members bring the spirit of the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics to life.**
Output:	1. The NSCSW invested heavily in the Candidacy Mentorship Program, designed to support the development and integration of the spirit of the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice into the professional lives of social workers. 2. NSCSW demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the continuous professional enhancement of its members, recognizing that constant learning is key to maintaining and boosting the requisite skills and knowledge within the social work profession. 3. As part of our mission to protect the public, NSCSW organized a wide-ranging annual program of professional development events, including an annual conference that took place concurrently with their Annual General Meeting in May. These sessions were designed to facilitate social workers in staying abreast with the most recent theories, practices, and regulatory standards. 4. In 2022, NSCSW revamped its professional development regulations and standards. This was aligned with the updated accreditation standards from the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators and trends in complaints that indicated an increasing risk of moral distress and injury. These changes were undertaken to further enhance the quality of social work practice and keep up with evolving societal needs and professional norms. 5. NSCSW provided increased ethical consultation to members and issued practice guidelines related to documentation and Medical Assistance in Dying.
Outcome:	1. The Candidacy Mentorship Program has demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing the risk of complaints and integrating standards and ethics into practice. 2. A quality assurance assessment conducted on 2022 professional development reports found that NSCSW members demonstrated a high level of engagement in critical reflection activities. • NSCSW members have successfully integrated their learning into their practice to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals and communities they serve. • Registered Social Workers in private practice or associate status demonstrated near-total compliance with professional development requirements. • Members actively participated in varied professional development activities, many of which were offered by NSCSW. 3. Over the past three years there has been an increase in the number of complaints received by the College. However, as membership has grown, there has been a gradual decrease in the rate of complaints when considered against the number of registrants. In 2020, the complaints represented 1.7% of the College's members, which dropped to 1.4% in 2021, and further decreased to 1.2% in 2022.

We are a recognized leader in advocacy and social justice working to protect Nova Scotians

Goal:	**Nova Scotians see the NSCSW as a credible source for critical analysis and innovative solutions to social justice issues.**
Output:	1. The NSCSW created a Social Policy Framework which was leveraged this to evaluate government policies, providing us with valuable insights into how these platforms align with the broader social needs and concerns. 2. The NSCSW used the framework to inform and be responsive to media coverage related to these issues. 3. We implemented a social media strategy to share our positions more effectively with the public. This strategy aimed to increase awareness about the professional identity of social workers and what it stands for.
Outcome:	1. Throughout 2018-2023, we saw increasing reach and engagement on our social media platforms. This growth was due to our strategic approach to boost visibility of profession and its professional identity through media interviews, op-eds, and partnership activities, especially on key issues like child welfare, child poverty, and mental health. 2. NSCSW placed 12 op-eds in the Chronicle Herald on various topics, including budget scrutiny, mental health during the pandemic, racial inequality, and tackling racism. 3. Livestreamed advocacy events, such as our *Big Ideas in Mental Health* panel series, created space for vital discourse aligned with the College's values and policy positions. Publishing these recordings on the NSCSW YouTube page and sharing them on other social platforms prolonged the impact of these conversations. 4. Media engagement has led to journalists frequently reaching out to our staff for insights on current events and issues of strategic interest to the College. 5. Our advocacy efforts and outreach initiatives have significantly increased our visibility and our reputation for relevant, thoughtful commentary on current events. We have successfully amplified our voice on key social issues and have seen a consistent growth in media hits. Here are some selected highlights from 2023 alone: • January: Our expertise was sought for insights on the government's plan to address emergency department challenges woes, changes to the Canada Child Benefit, and the pressing issue of staff shortages in child welfare. • February: NSCSW's stance on the government's plan for free therapy sessions was highlighted, emphasizing the urgent need for social workers in Nova Scotia. • March: Our alternative budget release caught significant attention, with focus on health care, inequality and climate change. Critiques of the N.S. budget's lack of support for income assistance and housing crisis were also featured. • April: The media spotlighted our commentary on gender-based violence and mental health support for victims of the N.S. mass shooting.

Outcome:	(continued) • May: Our viewpoints on the lingering impacts of violence and the need for mental health funding in areas affected by mass shootings were aired. • June-August: The media featured our position on the necessity of updating school policies for the protection of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and the limitations of virtual mental health care in rural regions. • October-November: Our continuous push for an independent office of the Child and Youth Commission and the inclusion of private mental health practitioners in the public health system were highlighted. • December: The anticipated guidance changes for teachers on supporting gender-diverse students was a key discussion point.
Goal:	**Government actively engages the NSCSW to inform policies and legislation that impact social justice and social planning.**
Output:	1. NSCSW has completed a comprehensive research paper on mental health care, outlining key issues and proposed solutions for improving mental health services in Nova Scotia. Following the completion of this paper, NSCSW focused on implementing the strategy outlined in the paper. This involves engaging with policymakers, healthcare providers, and the public to advocate for the changes recommended in the paper. The goal is to improve mental health outcomes for all Nova Scotians. 2. NSCSW has executed a child protection strategy that prioritized the safety and well-being of children in Nova Scotia. This involved advocating for policies that strengthen child protection services, improve foster care, and support families at risk. The execution of this strategy involved collaborating with government agencies, social service providers, and community organizations to ensure its effective implementation. 3. NSCSW advanced the work of the Nova Scotia Coalition for Community Well-Being. This coalition seeks to improve overall community well-being through initiatives that address poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. NSCSW's role involves advocating for policies that promote community well-being, facilitating collaboration among coalition members, and raising public awareness about the coalition's goals towards public safety and well-being. 4. NSCSW has formed a strategic alliance with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Nova Scotia (CCPA_NS) to advocate for changes in Nova Scotia's political economy. This alliance aimed to promote economic policies that are more equitable, sustainable, and conducive to social welfare. Through this partnership, NSCSW and CCPA_NS engage in joint advocacy efforts, share resources, and collaborate on research and policy development.
Outcome:	1. NSCSW's advocacy has led to collaboration with the government, resulting in a commitment to establish a Child and Youth Commission. This achievement underscores NSCSW's dedication to protecting the rights and welfare of children and youth in Nova Scotia. 2. NSCSW has been instrumental in governments development of a comprehensive framework that focuses on the well-being of children and youth. This initiative aims to provide a holistic approach to support the development and well-being of young people in the province. 3. NSCSW's efforts have also led to the implementation of a Family Stability Support Program. This program is designed to provide support and resources to families, helping them maintain stability and overcome challenges.

Outcome:	(continued) 4. NSCSW has ensured that the Office of Mental Health and Addiction prioritizes the social determinants of health. This perspective recognizes that factors like socioeconomic status, education, and neighbourhood environment can significantly affect health outcomes. 5. NSCSW has facilitated collaboration between Nova Scotia Health (NSH) and IWK Health Centre on the integration of clinical social work. This collaboration aims to streamline services and improve patient care. 6. NSCSW was instrumental in amending Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act to include environmental racism. This change demonstrates NSCSW's commitment to addressing systemic issues affecting marginalized communities. 7. NSCSW's involvement with NSACCW has led to significant achievements like securing rental control in Nova Scotia. This initiative helps protect renters from excessive price increases and contributes to affordable housing in the province, which is crucial to the safety, health and well-being of Nova Scotians. 8. The Executive Director Registrar of the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW) has been mentioned in the Nova Scotia Legislature Hansard 24 times. This indicates that the Executive Director/Registrar has had a significant presence in legislative discussions, underscoring the Colleges in shaping policy and social work practice in Nova Scotia. Furthermore, the NSCSW itself has been cited in the Hansard 40 times. This frequency of mention highlights the organization's active involvement in legislative matters and its influence in advocating for social justice, mental health, and community well-being within the province.

Goal:	**Work towards the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.**
Output:	1. NSCSW has developed a significant social media campaign focusing on the Canadian Association of Social Workers' (CASW) apology concerning residential schools. This initiative aims to raise awareness and initiate conversations about this historical injustice and social works involvement. 2. NSCSW has actively participated in the redevelopment of the CASW Code of Ethics. The objective is to incorporate the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) into the new National Code of Ethics, promoting ethical practice that acknowledges and addresses past injustices against Indigenous peoples. 3. The NSCSW has collaborated with the Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR) to develop an anti-racist regulation framework. This framework aims to guide social work practice and policy in a direction that actively counters racism. 4. NSCSW has worked towards decolonization by establishing a committee to explore the decolonization of social work. This approach ensures that the process of decolonization is tangible, and accountable. 5. NSCSW has made it mandatory for all social workers to complete education on truth and reconciliation as part of their professional development standards. These standards, updated in 2022, reflect the NSCSW's commitment to integrating the principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations into social work practice.
Outcome:	1. The NSCSW has successfully integrated the principles and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) into the new National Code of Ethics. This integration is a significant step towards acknowledging and addressing past injustices against Indigenous peoples.

Outcome:	(continued) 2. NSCSW has been invited to present on reconciliation as part of the Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network. This invitation underscores the organization's role as a leading voice in advancing reconciliation within the health professions. 3. The NSCSW has established a close working relationship with Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services (MFCS), which has resulted in MFCS implementing policies for social worker well-being; these policy changes demonstrated trust in the College to advance reconciliation. 4. The NSCSW has been invited to partner with the Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative's child welfare initiative Maw-Kleyu'kik Knijannaq (MKK), which means *keeping our children together*. The overall goal of this partnership is to establish a Mi'kmaw child and family services body governed by Mi'kmaw law and policy, offering culturally appropriate family support services.

Nova Scotians value social work knowledge, experience and training

Goal:	**Social workers are influencers in positions of leadership.**
Output:	1. NSCSW has successfully delivered leadership training seminars for social workers on how to lead change in large systems. This seminar provided participants with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively lead transformational change within their organizations. 2. Through our awards program, the NSCSW has showcased the incredible work of social work leaders. This program not only recognizes hardworking professionals but also inspires others in the field to strive for excellence in their practice. 3. In honour of African Heritage Month and Indigenous History Month the NSCSW ran campaigns highlighting the importance of contributions from these communities. These campaigns aimed to educate the public and celebrate the diverse cultures that enrich our society.
Outcome:	1. Social workers in Nova Scotia have successfully secured positions of influence and leadership, demonstrating the value and impact of their profession. The representation of social workers within leadership roles in the Nova Scotia Health and the IWK Health Centre, particularly as Directors of Mental Health and Addictions, is a testament to their expertise and commitment. 2. Furthermore, their presence around the executive table in the Department of Community Services and within the Office of Mental Health and Addictions underscores their integral role in shaping and implementing key policies and initiatives. 3. NSCSW database demonstrates that there are currently 101 social workers in Director positions, 15 identified as Leaders, and 93 serving as Managers. This distribution not only highlights the diversity of roles that social workers occupy but also emphasizes their capacity for leadership. 4. While the success of these individuals can certainly be attributed to their personal competencies and skills, it's important to acknowledge the collective effort that has gone into affirming the role of the social work lens within these structures. This collective affirmation has played a significant part in ensuring that social workers are recognized as vital contributors to the health and wellbeing of Nova Scotians.

Goal:	**Nova Scotians are aware of the diversity of social work practice.**
Output:	1. A job bank website and program have been successfully developed, providing a centralized location for job postings related to the field of social work. 2. *Connection* Magazine has been utilized as a platform to promote the wide range of social work practice. It has showcased success stories, best practices, and innovative approaches within the field, contributing to increased awareness and understanding of social work.
Outcome:	1. Publications and media like *Connection* Magazine and YouTube videos have contributed to public awareness on topics related to social justice, mental health, and implications of diversity in social work practice. 2. Data from 2021 and 2022 show diversity in social work practice across various sectors, such as child welfare, mental health, justice, community not-for-profit, government, and more. This diversity is reflected in both the areas of practice and the number of members involved in each sector.

Goal:	**Employers recruit Registered Social Workers for their essential social work lens grounded in human rights, equity and social justice.**
Output:	1. The annual digital campaign for National Social Work Month has been developed and implemented in collaboration with CASW. This campaign has been designed to engage the public, organizations, and members in recognizing and understanding the critical role that social work plays in society. Key features of the campaign include: • A theme for each year's National Social Work Month. • The use of various digital platforms, including emails, social media posts, and a dedicated landing page, to spotlight individual social workers. • Encouraging social workers to share short messages and videos online that help explain what they do. 2. An employer engagement strategy has been implemented to underscore their importance in addressing societal issues. This strategy includes professional development opportunities, recognition programs, and initiatives to improve communication and collaboration among social workers.
Outcome:	1. There appears to be a strong demand for social workers in Nova Scotia, with numerous job postings available across various platforms such as Indeed, the Province of Nova Scotia Health and Human Services, ZipRecruiter, NSCSW Employment listings, LinkedIn, Workopolis, and Job Bank Canada. 2. It can be inferred that employers in Nova Scotia value social workers who bring an essential social work lens grounded in human rights, equity, and social justice. This is consistent with the principles and values upheld by the social work profession and the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers. 3. Moreover, some job postings specify the need for Registered Social Workers, indicating the importance of professional registration and adherence to professional standards and ethics in social work practice.

Goal:	Social Workers are engaged in meaningful and rewarding work, that makes a difference to the social conditions in Nova Scotia.
Output:	1. Using various channels such as *Connection,* blogs, and media outreach, NSCSW has shared stories that frame the impactful work of social workers in Nova Scotia. Showcasing their meaningful and rewarding work highlights how social workers contribute to improving the social conditions in the region.
Outcome:	1. NSCSW has identified a concerning trend in the social work sector. While the total number of registrants continues to increase, data reveals that an increasing number of social workers are leaving traditional roles to pursue private practice. This shift is indicated by an upward trend in private practice registrants and a downward trend in Registered Social Worker (RSW) registrants as a percentage of membership. Moreover, those who remain in public service are taking longer periods of leave. 2. This suggests that social workers may have doubts that public systems effectively engage them in meaningful and rewarding work that makes a difference to the social conditions in Nova Scotia, or they may have encountered challenges with their working conditions (e.g. clarity of role, support for workers with personal caregiving commitments, workplace safety, workload management, organizational policies that provide structural support for ethical practice, interpersonal conflict, etc.) that threatened the sustainability of their work in those systems.

We are a centre for social work resources, professional development, ethical consultations, and research, and act as the collective voice for social work

Goal:	Members are supported by the College throughout their career.
Output:	1. Executed all scheduled events efficiently, ensuring they are delivered on time and within budget. 2. Conducted post-event evaluations to assess the effectiveness of each session. Use these insights to determine and improve future event programming. 3. Developed comprehensive new training modules, with a particular focus on promoting anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices. 4. Formulated a policy manual for Professional Development (PD) delivery to streamline processes and ensure consistency. 5. Built an Ethical Consultation program at NSCSW to facilitate discussions on ethical practices and dilemmas in social work. 6. Implemented a robust advocacy strategy to support and promote private practice within the field of social work.
Outcome:	1. In 2023, our events attracted a high attendance of 2800 people, indicating a strong interest and engagement in our offerings

Outcome:	2. We've had attendees from diverse locations such as South Africa, the UK, and across Canada, showcasing our global reach and the international relevance of our work. 3. Our YouTube engagement has steadily increased since we established the channel in 2021. In 2023 we reorganized the channel to aid social workers in finding content related to topics related to the College's strategic priorities, particularly the five professional development topics now mandatory for all registrants of NSCSW. Views on YouTube last year increased by 83% to 14.1K, and watch time increased by 70% to 2.7K hours, underscoring the effectiveness of our content strategy and the value our videos provide to viewers. The five most viewed videos in 2023 were: • Flower Power • The Ethics & Politics of Burnout • Ethical Social Work During the Holidays • Intro to Working with Indigenous Persons (first in Michelle Peters' series) • Big Ideas: Protecting the Well-being of 2SLGBTQIA+ Kids These videos were not only popular among our members but also watched by social workers in other jurisdictions, including the rest of Canada, the US, Poland, and South Africa.
Goal:	**Members contribute to social work's collective voice.**
Output:	1. The NSCSW developed a strategy for social workers to comment on the news of the day by contributing to *Connection* and the NSCSW blog. This strategy was designed to encourage and facilitate active engagement of social workers in current events and public discourse. 2. The NSCSW has worked to grow its committees to ensure they are operating at full capacity with committee member appointments. This strategy focused on strengthening the internal organizational structure of the NSCSW. 3. The NSCSW has identified the need to evaluate the College's strategic plan during and after implementation. This involved assessing the progress made towards achieving the strategic goals and making necessary adjustments based on this evaluation.
Outcome:	1. Social workers have been actively participating in public discourse through the Connection platform and blog. The *Connection* magazine now features an average of 3.5 different social work voices per issue across its 12 issues, providing ample opportunities for social workers to engage with and influence current events. 2. Through concerted efforts to grow and strengthen its committees, the NSCSW has successfully achieved full capacity in committee member appointments. Over 100 volunteers are now operating under clear terms of reference and objectives that align with the statutory mandate of the college, enhancing the internal organizational structure of the NSCSW. 3. The NSCSW's initiative to evaluate the halfway points of its strategic plan demonstrated significant progress towards achieving the strategic goals. The college's decision-making processes have evolved to include more input from the public and memberships in key areas such as clinical regulation. Multiple evaluations of governance and operations over the past five years have continuously improved these processes.

Goal:	NSCSW works to enhance social worker well-being.
Output:	1. NSCSW has actively worked to promote the well-being of social workers through advocacy and system changes, particularly in areas of child welfare and mental health. Their efforts have included the development and presentation of policy papers, as well as meetings with officials aimed at fostering support for social worker wellness. 2. NSCSW has made strides in enhancing the well-being of social workers by establishing mandatory professional development requirements. Each member of the NSCSW is required to complete at least one hour of training annually on vicarious trauma, fostering a greater awareness and understanding of this critical issue within the profession.
Outcome:	1. As a result of NSCSW's advocacy, Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services has implemented a wellness coordinator position. This role aids in debriefing complex cases and proactively monitors the mental health of child welfare workers. 2. However, despite this positive step, NSCSW has observed an increase in moral distress within the profession, evidenced by higher rates of resignations and sick time within the Department of Community Services. The NSCSW continues to address these challenges to improve the overall well-being and retention of social workers.

Goal:	NSCSW works to build conditions for social work success
Output:	1. NSCSW has been consistently engaging with members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) to establish political goals that align with the ethical delivery of social work services. 2. NSCSW is actively building engagements with unions and employers to address the needs of social workers for professional development.
Outcome:	1. Despite high moral distress among social workers, progress has been made through NSCSW and NSGEU's efforts. As a result of public campaigns, the Department of Community Services (DCS), agreed to advocate for all child welfare social workers in the presumptive benefits for PTSD, broadening the definition of "front-line or emergency-response worker". Actions to manage workload, such as creating casual social worker pools, establishing caseload maximums, and modifying after-hour duties, are being considered. A commitment for the alert feature in the database and new hire OHS training are also being improved to address safety and risk issues. These steps aim to improve the working conditions for social workers and enhance service quality within DCS. 2. NSCSW advocated for and was consulted on the development of a comprehensive practice framework that defines the vision, values, guiding principles, and standards for achieving the best outcomes for children, youth, and families. The framework produced by DCS emphasizes pro-equity, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive principles, focusing on prevention, support, and family preservation. The framework will guide Child and Family Wellbeing staff, partners, and community service providers, asserting that the safety and well-being of a child, youth, family, and community is a shared responsibility. This outcome showcases NSCSW's successful influence in shaping DCS policy and practice conditions for social work success.

Goal:	Social workers from marginalized communities in both urban and rural settings are engaged with the NSCSW and their voice is represented within the organization.
Output:	1. A recruitment practice for the Board of Examiners and Council has been implemented. This practice ensured that appointments to Board and recruitment of council promoting a diverse and inclusive leadership team that truly represents our community. 2. The NSCSW has successfully established various communities of practice around specific issues and diversity. These communities serve as a platform for social workers to connect, share knowledge, discuss challenges, and collaborate on solutions. This initiative has enhanced the professional network among social workers, fostering a supportive environment that promotes learning and development in the field.
Outcome:	1. Although the Council continues to remain relatively homogenous, there has been a significant shift towards greater diversity within our committees and the Board. This progress indicates a positive trend towards inclusivity and representation in these key decision-making bodies, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to promoting diversity at all levels of our organization. This work will continues

We are responsible, accountable and transparent

Goal:	Nova Scotians value and trust the NSCSW.
Output:	1. NSCSW implemented a reorganization of staff in consultation with both staff and the Council to ensure the efficient delivery of programs. 2. The Council and BOE have been trained on regulation and bring a critical voice and lens to practice, enhancing the overall quality of our work and decision-making processes. 3. The NSCSW continues to uphold fiscal integrity, ensuring responsible and transparent management of our financial resources. 4. Governance policy has been enacted.
Outcome:	1.The upsurge in complaints to the College signals an increase in trust, reflecting confidence by the public in the regulator's capacity to efficiently handle and resolve issues. 2. The increase in complaints also suggests a belief in the system's ability to ensure accountability among those who breach rules or standards. 3. Frequent commentary relaying of NSCSW's efforts by media outlets exemplify the broader community's trust in the organization's work and commitment to maintaining high standards in social work practice.

Goal:	Demonstrated accountability as a regulatory body.
Output:	1. The Standards of Good Regulation have been applied and evaluated in the Annual Report, ensuring a consistent framework for assessing our performance. 2. Data from the Fair Registration Practices Act (FRPA) is shared with the council. This initiative underlines our commitment to demonstrating the accountability of the Board of Examiners. 3. NSCSW continues to lead in regulatory practices within Nova Scotia, thanks to its strategic connection with the Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network. This leadership role emphasizes our commitment to best practices and collaboration within the regulatory landscape.
Outcome:	1. See *Standards of Good Regulation* section later in this document.

Goal:	Clear autonomy of regulatory function and membership services.
Output:	1. A governance policy and orientation are in place to clearly understand and articulate the distinct yet complementary roles of the Board of Examiners and Council. This framework ensures that each entity is aware of its responsibilities, promoting efficient and effective collaboration.
Outcome:	1. As a result of the implemented governance policy and orientation, both the Board of Examiners and Council can speak with confidence about their distinct yet complementary roles. This understanding enhances communication and collaboration between the two entities, promoting more effective governance

Standards of Good Regulation

Standard	Output	Outcome
#1 - The regulator maintains accurate and accessible information that is public about its registrants, regulatory requirements, guidance, processes and decisions	NSCSW maintains an updated website and registry with comprehensive information about its registrants, regulatory requirements, guidance, processes, and decisions	The public has access to accurate and easily understandable information. This transparency fosters trust and allows individuals to make informed decisions.
#2 - The regulator is clear about its purpose and ensures that policies are applied appropriately across all its functions.	Governance policy states ends and executive limitations, operating plan provides path for achievement, regular reports are submitted by the Executive Director/Registrar (ED/R), Regulatory and Candidacy Manager, and the Professional Practice and Advocacy Consultant. These reports focus on the execution of policies and updates from various committee towards the ends of the NSCSW.	Policies are consistently applied across all functions, ensuring fairness and efficiency. These regular reports also enable ongoing evaluation and potential improvement of operational procedure.
#3 - The regulator values diversity and ensures that its registrants, their patients/clients, and others who interact with the regulator do not experience barriers or otherwise be disadvantaged.	NSCSW actively advocates for diversity via its website and newsletters and in the public. This is done by issuing statements of support and outlining specific actions towards anti-racist regulation, reconciliation, and governance mandates. Additionally, all social workers are required to complete training on truth and reconciliation, anti-racism, and bias.	Both the social work profession and the NSCSW are diligently working to create an environment that is inclusive and free from barriers. This effort aims to ensure everyone involved feels valued, respected, and equally treated.

Standard	Output	Outcome
#4 - The regulator consults with and works with employers, regulators, government, and other stakeholders across all its functions to identify and manage risks to the public regarding its registrants.	NSCSW has implemented various measures to manage regulatory risks. These include developing policies for trauma-specific therapy, addressing issues of sexual misconduct, introducing a fitness to practice policy, implementing medical assistance in dying (MAiD) guidelines, redeveloping its continuing education and quality assurance program, regulating clinical social work, and advocating for structural issues impacting care. NSCSW collaborates with government, employers, and the general public in these efforts.	Through these measures, NSCSW ensures that social workers are competent and ethical in their practice, service users receive quality services, and potential risks to the public are minimized. These actions have also led to improvements in mental healthcare provision and access, and have addressed critical societal issues like housing, poverty, and child welfare.
#5 - The regulator reports on its performance and addresses concerns identified about it and considers the implications of relevant public reports about health and social care regulatory issues.	NSCSW produces annual reports that detail its performance and address identified concerns. It also considers relevant public reports about healthcare regulatory issues.	By reporting on its performance continuous improvements and concerns are identified and addressed. The consideration of public reports ensues that NSCSW's operations align with broader healthcare regulatory issues.
#6 - The regulator's governing Council/Board demonstrates good governance practices.	The governing Council/Board of the NSCSW demonstrates good governance practices through the use of focus groups, surveys, newsletters, and website updates to maintain and review core governance documents such as bylaws, policies, procedures, and committee terms of reference.	This thorough approach ensures that the NSCSW operates effectively and meets its statutory obligations. It also fosters transparency, enhances decision-making processes, and promotes professional identity within the organization. The clear distinction of roles between the Council and the BOE ensures efficient handling of strategic oversight and operational matters.

Standard	Output	Outcome
#7 - The regulator's governing Council/Board has appropriate oversight of operations.	Staff and committee reports encompassing all strategic objectives are regularly submitted to the council. These objectives include matters related to candidacy, complaints, and Board of Examiners.	Regular submission of reports and the assessment of the council's agenda ensure transparency and effective execution of strategic objectives. This active oversight leads to smooth operations, ensuring that NSCSW fulfills its mandate and provides quality service to its registrants and the public.
#8 - The regulator maintains up-to-date standards that are regularly reviewed and prioritize patient/client centered care and safety.	The NSCSW maintains current standards that are regularly reviewed. These standards prioritize patient/client-centered care and safety. Significant efforts have been made to enhance client care, including the development of new standards for clinical social work and professional development, as well as standards to address sexual misconduct.	These up-to-date and regularly reviewed standards ensure that client care is continuously improved and remains at the forefront of NSCSW's operations. The implementation of these enhanced standards has led to safer and more effective social work practices.
#9 - The regulator provides guidance to help registrants apply the standards and addresses new and developing areas of risk in practice.	The NSCSW offers extensive guidance to assist registrants in applying the standards. This includes providing an ethical decision-making tool, resources for ethics training, consultations on ethical matters, and a professional standards committee that uses a collective process to address ethical issues.	This guidance helps registrants understand and apply the standards effectively, which leads to better risk management in practice. This approach also contributes to improved ethical conduct among registrants.

Standard	Output	Outcome
#10 - The regulator encourages quality of practice through continuing competence requirements to support registrants in meeting standards of practice.	The NSCSW promotes quality of practice through continuing competence requirements. They have established a quality assurance program aimed at evaluating how learning is applied to reduce risks to the public. This process involves social workers documenting their reflections on how they have incorporated professional development into their practice. A quality assurance procedure was developed in 2021, with education provided to members in 2022, and piloted by staff in 2023. Quality assurance is scheduled to be completed annually going forward.	These measures encourage ongoing professional development among registrants, leading to improved standards of practice. The quality assurance procedure ensures that these standards are being met, contributing to the overall quality of social work practice, and reducing risks to the public.
#11 - The regulator has a transparent mechanism for assuring that the academic programs it authorizes meet the regulator's requirements.	The NSCSW mechanism is reflected in the accreditation standards set by CASWE. However, there are some limitations. While NSCSW can provide input on CASWE accreditation standards, they do not have voting rights. Moreover, there is a need to ensure that practice standards are met in academic programs.	This standard ensures that authorized academic programs meet NSCSW's requirements, leading to a high standard of education for potential social workers. However, the lack of voting rights and the need for better alignment with practice standards indicate areas for improvement in this process.
#12 - The regulator maintains and publishes an accurate register of those who meet its requirements including any restrictions on their practice.	The NSCSW maintains and publishes an accurate register of those who meet its requirements, including any restrictions on their practice..	The maintenance of an accurate register ensures transparency and provides the public with reliable information about Registered Social Workers and Social Worker Candidates. This contributes to enhanced trust in the profession and ensures that only qualified individuals are practicing.

Standard	Output	Outcome
#13 - The regulator's processes for registration, including appeals, are transparent, objective, fairly and procedurally fair, with decisions clearly explained in writing.	The NSCSW processes for registration, including appeals, are transparent, objective, and procedurally fair, with decisions clearly explained in writing, process and procedures are outlined in policy.	This transparent and objective process ensures that all registrants are treated fairly and that decisions are well-justified and understandable. This bolsters confidence in the registration process and enhances the credibility of the NSCSW. This has resulted in very low appeals.
#14 - The regulator manages risk of harm to the public and of damage to public confidence in the profession related to non-registrants using a protected title or practicing without a license.	The NSCSW manages risks associated with non-registrants using a protected title or practicing without a license. Evidence has been of instances where the NSCSW intervened to uphold this standard on the NSCSW's discipline page. This is done based on complaints to the NSCSW.	While more action needs to taken, past actions protect the integrity of the profession and prevent potential harm to the public from unqualified practitioners. They also strengthen public confidence in the profession.
#15 - The regulator enables anyone to raise a concern about a registrant.	There are visuals on the NSCSW website and online reporting process. Relationship with Halifax Public Library has also been developed to assist service users who may need additional support	This openness allows for the identification and addressing of potential issues, contributing to enhanced accountability of registrants, and improved public trust in the profession.
#16 -This openness allows for the identification and addressing of potential issues, contributing to enhanced accountability of registrants, and improved public trust in the profession.	The NSCSW has committed significant resources to improve its complaints process. A policy advocating for a fair and transparent regulatory approach was formulated, and comprehensive training was provided to staff and the Board of Examiners In response to feedback, a Complaint Navigator role was introduced for cases involving allegations of sexual misconduct.	These measures ensure a fair, transparent, and timely handling of complaints, leading to improved public confidence in the profession. The introduction of the Complaint Navigator role provides additional support to those making serious allegations, further enhancing the effectiveness of the complaints process.

Standard	Output	Outcome
#17 - The regulator ensures that all decisions are made in accordance with its processes, are consistent and fair, take account of the statutory objectives, the regulator's practice standards, and the relevant case law and prioritize patient/client safety.The regulator's processes for registration, including appeals, are transparent, objective, fairly and procedurally fair, with decisions clearly explained in writing.	The NSCSW ensures that all decisions are made in accordance with its processes, are consistent and fair, take account of the statutory objectives, the College's practice standards, and the relevant case law, and prioritizes patient/client safety.	This rigorous decision-making process ensures fairness and consistency in all actions taken by the NSCSW. It prioritizes safety, upholds the organization's statutory objectives and practice standards, and respects relevant case law. This contributes to increased trust in the NSCSW and enhances the credibility of its decisions
#18 - The regulator identifies and prioritizes all cases that suggest a serious risk to the safety of patients/clients and implements interim orders where appropriate.	The NSCSW identifies and prioritizes all cases that suggest a serious risk to the safety of patients/clients and implements interim orders where appropriate. An example of this is the case where interim restrictions were imposed upon receiving complaints of significant risk to the public.	By promptly identifying and addressing serious cases, the NSCSW ensures the immediate safeguarding of service user safety. This proactive approach helps prevent potential harm to the public and reinforces the NSCSW's commitment to protecting the welfare of service users.
#19 - The regulator assures all parties to a complaint including other regulators and organizations within the relevant legal frameworks are kept updated on the progress of their case and supported to participate effectively in the process.	The NSCSW assures all parties to a complaint, including other regulators and organizations within the relevant legal frameworks, are kept updated on the progress of their case and supported to participate effectively in the process. We incorporate a trauma-informed care approach in handling cases of professional misconduct and send letters to inform complainants about the choices available to them.	This approach ensures all parties involved in a complaint are adequately informed and supported. The use of trauma-informed care principles ensures a sensitive and empathetic approach to handling cases, particularly those involving trauma, which can promote healing and recovery for affected individuals. This ensures a more humane and effective complaint resolution process, enhancing the NSCSW's reputation for fairness and compassion.

Areas of Success

The NSCSW has had core areas of success in the implementation of our strategic plan. We have been diligently working towards our goals and are pleased to share our accomplishments. These achievements reflect our commitment to improving regulatory outcomes, enhancing advocacy and public engagement, creating effective professional development initiatives, and implementing an impactful Candidacy Mentorship Program. Here is an overview of our successes in these key areas.

Improved Regulatory Outcomes

The NSCSW has made significant strides in enhancing its regulatory outcomes, as evidenced by the disciplinary actions undertaken and the positive feedback from 68% of surveyed members indicating they felt the NSCSW was achieving its strategic goals. This progress is due to systematic enhancements and process improvements, including a new database system that has simplified registration and renewal processes, and well-received updates to existing policies.

Strong Advocacy & Public Engagement

Our advocacy initiatives, such as the establishment of the Social Policy Framework and child welfare advocacy efforts, have garnered favourable feedback. Consistent visibility of our Executive Director/Registrar in media and public discourse reflects our commitment to upholding and leading with the core values of our profession.

Effective Professional Development Initiatives

Our professional development initiatives have received positive responses from members, who appreciate our commitment to justice and equity in Nova Scotia. The quality assurance review highlighted the successful integration of learning into their practice, with many members relying on the College's offerings due to their relevance and quality.

Impactful Candidacy Mentorship Program (CMP)

The CMP has been a crucial instrument for social workers in Nova Scotia, fostering professional identity and providing invaluable mentorship during the transition from student to practitioner. The program has boosted critical thinking skills, understanding of ethical boundaries, confidence, and prevention strategies for moral distress. It has also encouraged discussions on self-advocacy and the establishment/maintenance of professional boundaries. Candidates active in the program were more likely to have complaints dismissed, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in ensuring public safety and accountability.

Areas for Enhancement

The NSCSW is dedicated to continual improvement and growth. As part of our commitment, we have identified key areas for development that will guide our future actions. These areas include clarifying our organizational mandate and role, enhancing the links between advocacy and professional development to greater safety, diversifying our council, expanding outreach and support, and incorporating clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and measurement methods. Here is a detailed look at some possible core areas of focus and our proposed strategies for improvement:

Clarifying Organizational Mandate & Role

The NSCSW is predominantly perceived as a professional association with regulatory functions, leading to some confusion among members about the organization's primary mandate and roles.

There is a need to improve communication and clarify how the NSCSW operates as a regulatory body, with a broad set of tools to enhance the safe and ethical delivery of social work practice. This can be done through targeted messaging and educational initiatives that clearly explain the NSCSW's integrated mandate.

Linking Advocacy & Professional Development to Risk Mitigation

Currently, the connection between the NSCSW's advocacy initiatives, professional development opportunities, and public safety is not clearly articulated. This has led to a lack of understanding among partners and members about how these activities contribute to protecting the public and maintaining professional standards.

To address this, the NSCSW should develop materials and enhance communication that specifically highlight how its advocacy and professional development efforts tie into risk mitigation.

Diversifying the NSCSW Council & Committees

The NSCSW Council is currently homogeneous and does not include public members. This can makes it challenging for the public to perceive the NSCSW as serving the public interest.

To counter this perception, the NSCSW should take steps to diversify its Council and consider including social work service users and other public stakeholders in its governance structure.

Expanding Outreach & Support

The NSCSW's mandate is extensive, but there has been a lack of resources dedicated to outreach initiatives targeting marginalized communities and new social workers. Additionally, support for candidacy mentors has been insufficient.

To rectify this, the NSCSW needs to allocate more resources towards these areas and develop comprehensive outreach and support strategies. This would help ensure that all communities are represented and supported within the profession.

Incorporating Clear KPIs & Measurement Methods:

The NSCSW's 2018-2023 strategic plan was aspirational in nature, which is crucial for setting forth a vision and defining long-term goals. However, it lacked clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and methods for measuring progress towards these goals. KPIs are essential for tracking success and identifying areas that need improvement; they offer a quantifiable way to evaluate the effectiveness of various initiatives and strategies.

Our Next Strategic Plan

Guiding Beacons

The development of the next strategic plan for the NSCSW must consider several fundamental reports that have shaped the landscape of social work in recent years. These reports provide valuable insights and recommendations that can guide our strategic goals and objectives.

- *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada; Calls to Action*: These 94 calls to action provide a roadmap for reconciliation via transformative changes in all aspects of Canadian society, including social work.

- *Reclaiming Power and Place; The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*: This report provides critical insight into systemic issues affecting Indigenous women and girls, which is crucial for developing culturally sensitive social work practices.

- *Journey to Light; A Different Way Forward*: The findings from the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry highlight the need for systemic change within institutions and the importance of addressing racial discrimination and trauma-informed care in social work.

- *Turning the Tide Together; The Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission*: This report provides key recommendations on public safety, mental health support, and community resilience that should be integrated into regulatory and social work practices.

- *Creating the future we all deserve: A social policy framework for Nova Scotia*: This framework outlines the essential components of a fair and equitable society, providing a guide for social workers to advocate for social justice and policy change.

- *Repositioning Social Work Practice in Mental Health in Nova Scotia*: This report underscores the vital role of social workers in mental health services and the need for a shift towards more holistic, client-centered approaches.

- *Building an Ecosystem to Realize Children's Rights and Support Family Well-Being in Nova Scotia*: This report emphasizes the importance of fostering strong, resilient communities and the role of social workers in facilitating this process.

- *Regulated Health Professions Act*: The Regulated Health Professions Act, which recently received Royal Assent, is seen by government as a necessary step to protect public interest and uphold the integrity of health professions.

Lastly, the findings from the College's Complaints Committee and Candidacy review should inform our strategic goals, ensuring that we continue to uphold the highest professional standards and ethics in our practice. Each of these documents serves as a beacon, guiding our path towards a future where social work is an integral part of building a just, equitable, and inclusive society.

Section C-19 of *Turning the Tide Together*

Section C-19 of the Mass Casualty Commission's report underscores the invaluable role that service providers hold in fostering community safety, particularly in preventing gender-based violence. The report highlights the enhanced responsibility that those who provide direct services to the public bear, especially those in the education, healthcare, and justice sectors. These individuals are uniquely positioned to initiate challenging conversations and navigate paths to help and intervention.

To effectively fulfill this role, these individuals should be equipped with the necessary training and resources enabling them to identify warning signs of intimate partner violence and intervene effectively, following up in ways that promote community safety. The report suggests that this training should be mandated by their respective regulatory bodies and professional associations.

The report also draws attention to the privileges and duties conferred by a license to practice healthcare. This privilege, coupled with status within a community, comes with responsibilities to the public, who rely on licensing systems as a safeguard. However, the report also identifies systemic inadequacies in regulatory board's ability to provide the required oversight for community safety. This is particularly true for groups vulnerable due to socio-economic marginalization and systemic racism.

The current system's limitations are evident as it relies on individual patients to initiate a complaint process. This can impose a significant burden on less-empowered patients and create barriers to reporting, particularly for marginalized service users. To address this, the report suggests promoting community safety and well-being through more proactive monitoring of licensees. The traditional individual complaints-based system is deemed insufficiently proactive. Members of marginalized communities are particularly at risk of being subjected to poor treatment and unethical or illegal behaviour. Therefore, the report emphasizes the need for more effective protection for these communities.

Lastly, the report suggests promoting awareness of the complaints process, the potential for care providers to intentionally harm patients, and tools to prevent harm. It recommends that health professionals post the Code of Ethics and the complaints process in their workplaces for transparency and easy access.

In summary, Section C-19 underscores the importance of equipping service providers with the necessary tools and training to proactively contribute to community safety, especially for vulnerable and marginalized communities.

The Impact of the Regulated Health Professions Act on Expectations for Regulation

The Regulated Health Professions Act, recently receiving Royal Assent, is perceived by government as a necessary measure to protect public interest and uphold the integrity of health professions. However, the implications of this legislation extend beyond its purported benefits. Notably, it poses a significant encroachment on the independence of these professions by dismantling pre-existing self-regulation mechanisms and centralizing powers through government control.

A key provision of the Act pertains to the designation of regulated health professions. Under this new legislation, the power to designate a health profession as regulated with a defined scope of practice (Section 4a) now lies with the government rather than the legislature. The downside to this mandate is that these bodies could be interpreted as extensions of governmental control, thereby threatening the independence of the professions.

The objects of the regulatory body, as outlined in the Act, include public protection and maintaining professional integrity (Section 6). However, the Act does not provide for advocacy or membership support, which could prove detrimental in the long run, as it does not factor in the social and political context that impact professional misconduct and public safety.

The Act also dictates the composition of each board, requiring it to have at least seven but not more than eleven members, with public representatives making up nearly half of the board (Section 7).

The Governor in Council Regulations, as stated in the Act, confer broad powers on the Governor in Council to enact further regulations (Section 13). This could potentially lead to the politicization of professional standards and practices.

In conclusion, while the Regulated Health Professions Act aims to enhance public protection and accountability, it also poses a potential risk to the independence of health professions. It signifies a significant shift from self-regulation to centralized control, which could potentially threaten the vibrancy and dynamism of civil society within the healthcare sector.

The Use of Risk Registry

The creation of a risk register is a critical process within professional regulatory bodies. This tool is instrumental in risk management, providing a structured approach to identify, assess, and monitor potential risks that could impact the organization's effectiveness and credibility.

Risk identification is a primary function of a risk register. It helps regulatory bodies recognize potential threats in their operations or within the professions they oversee. These risks can span a broad spectrum, from operational issues like data breaches to reputational risks such as misconduct by licensed professionals. Following the identification of potential risks, the risk register plays a vital role in risk assessment. It facilitates an evaluation of the likelihood and the potential impact of each risk. This assessment process allows for prioritization, enabling organizations to focus their resources on the most significant threats.

The risk register also serves as a framework for risk mitigation. It aids in the development of strategies to manage and reduce risks. These strategies can encompass preventive measures, contingency plans, and response strategies to address the risks if they materialize. Furthermore, a risk register supports continuous risk monitoring. This ongoing review process ensures effective risk management and allows for adjustments in risk mitigation strategies based on changes in the risk landscape.

Transparency and accountability are also enhanced through the use of a risk register. By documenting all identified risks and their corresponding mitigation strategies, it provides evidence of diligent risk management to stakeholders. These stakeholders include the public, government agencies, and professionals within the regulated industries.

A risk register encourages a proactive approach to risk. By identifying and assessing risks in advance, regulatory bodies can anticipate potential issues and take appropriate preventative measures. Additionally, a risk register contributes to enhanced decision-making within the organization. With a comprehensive understanding of risks, informed decisions can be made at all levels. This leads to more effective policies and procedures that protect the integrity of the profession and serve the public interest.

Lastly, a risk register aids in compliance with regulatory requirements. It demonstrates effective risk management, showing that the organization is actively working to identify, assess, and mitigate risks. This can be crucial during audits or inspections.

In conclusion, a risk register is more than just a risk management tool. It is a strategic asset that bolsters the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of professional regulatory bodies. However. it's essential to observe that a culture overly focused on risk can lead to an increase in managerialism and risk aversion. This focus can inadvertently stifle innovative practices and hinder creativity within the organization. When a culture of caution dominates, it can create an environment where individuals are more concerned about avoiding potential pitfalls than exploring new approaches or solutions. This can limit the space for creative thinking, innovation, and ultimately, progress.

However, while managing risks is crucial, it's equally important to frame this process positively. **Instead of a risk registry, we propose reframing it as a *safety* registry**. The term "safety registry" shifts the focus from avoiding negative outcomes (risks) to achieving positive ones (safety). This subtle shift in language can significantly impact the organizational culture by promoting a more proactive and optimistic approach.

A safety registry would still identify potential hazards, but its primary focus would be on creating safe conditions for service delivery and innovation. It would highlight the measures taken to ensure safety rather than dwelling solely on the potential for things to go wrong. This shift towards a 'safety-first' perspective encourages a culture of care and responsibility rather than fear and avoidance.

By focusing on the positive outcome, we wish to achieve —*safety*— we can create a more empowering environment that values creativity and innovation while still maintaining rigorous standards of care and responsibility. This approach aligns more closely with our overarching goal of enhancing social work services and the well-being of the communities we serve.

Assessed Risk in the Delivery of Social Work Practice

Micro Level Risks

In a thematic review of past complaints, the College has identified risks associated with the delivery of micro social work practice. Micro social work practice refers to direct interaction with individuals and families, which often entails complex and sensitive situations.

The identified risks centre around several key areas. First, there's the potential for **breaches of confidentiality**. Given the personal nature of information shared in these interactions, there's a risk of unauthorized disclosure, whether intentional or accidental.

Second, there's the possibility of **boundary violations**. In social work practice, maintaining professional boundaries can be challenging due to the close, personal nature of relationships between social workers and service users. This could potentially lead to inappropriate relationships or conflicts of interest.

Third, there's the risk of **inappropriate or ineffective interventions**. Without proper supervision and ongoing training, social workers may employ strategies that are not research-based or do not align with the client's needs and circumstances. This could potentially harm the client and undermine the effectiveness of the intervention.

Fourth, there's the risk of **burnout** among social workers. The intense emotional nature of social work practice can lead to high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, impacting the quality of care provided to clients.

Fifth, there's the risk of **cultural insensitivity and unconscious bias**. Without adequate training and awareness, social workers may unintentionally disrespect or disregard the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their clients, leading to ineffective service delivery and potential harm to the client.

To mitigate these risks, it is crucial to implement robust policies and procedures, provide regular training and supervision, promote resilience among social workers, and foster organizational cultures that value diversity and cultural safety. By identifying these risks, the College aims to enhance the safety and effectiveness of micro social work practice.

Mezzo Level Risks

We have identified several potential risks at the mezzo level that affect public safety in the delivery of social work practice.

One such area is **employers' understanding of ethical social work practices**, especially as we introduce an updated Code of Ethics. The revised code will necessitate a shift in understanding and application of ethical principles in social work, which, if not properly communicated and understood, could potentially lead to lapses in service delivery and compromise public safety. Therefore, there's a crucial need to enhance employers' comprehension to ensure the new ethical guidelines are effectively integrated into practice.

Moreover, the need to intensify our engagement with **marginalized and racialized communities** has been underscored. Marginalized communities often face systemic barriers that can limit their access to necessary services. If their voices are not adequately heard and their needs not appropriately addressed, it could result in these communities being underserved or not served at all, posing a risk to their well-being and safety.

The challenges posed by **moral distress** and the growing demand for supervision also present significant risks. Moral distress, often resulting from situations where social workers are unable to do what they believe is right due to institutional constraints, can lead to burnout and reduced job satisfaction. This distress, coupled with **inadequate supervision**, can compromise the quality of services provided, directly impacting public safety. Strategies must be developed to counter these risks,

In addition, we recognize the **critical role of supervision and mentorship in social work**. Effective supervision and mentorship not only foster professional growth but also ensure the quality-of-service delivery. Lack of such guidance can lead to ineffective practice, which can negatively impact clients and the public. Hence, our commitment lies in enhancing these aspects of professional development through increased resources for mentorship programs and constructive feedback mechanisms.

By proactively addressing these areas, we aim to enhance safety and ethical practices at the mezzo level. Our initiatives, need to be designed to foster a culture of empathy, integrity, and accountability within social work intended to reinforce public trust and public safety. By doing so, we ensure that social work remains a safe and effective service for all members of the public it serves.

Macro Level Risks

Proactive risk mitigation at a macro level is essential as it involves the identification and resolution of potential risks that could have a substantial impact on social and health sectors. Within the realm of social work, this translates into addressing systemic and structural issues that could potentially undermine the effectiveness and integrity of the profession.

One such risk is the homogeneity of the **medical model**. This model, with its reductionist approach, can restrict our understanding of individuals' experiences by focusing primarily on biological factors. In doing so, it often neglects the comprehensive bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach, which is central to holistic care. Mitigating this risk calls for the widespread integration of this holistic approach into all facets of social work education and practice. This can be achieved through the promotion of multidisciplinary collaboration, the provision of training centred on the bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach, and advocacy for the recognition of this approach in health and social care policies. Such steps help ensure a more comprehensive view of client needs, enhancing public safety through more effective, individualized care.

Another risk stems from **managerialism**; an excessive focus on efficiency can lead to a lack of autonomy for social workers, thereby devaluing the profession. This overemphasis on managerialism can compromise the quality of care and undermine the profession's humanistic values, potentially jeopardizing public safety. To counteract this, it is crucial to promote a culture that appreciates the unique skills and contributions of social workers. This would involve advocating for policies that respect their autonomy, providing support for professional development, and recognizing the value of social work in improving societal wellbeing.

The **undermining of child rights** presents another significant risk. Issues such as insufficient interventions, inadequate protection for 2SLGBTQIA+ children, the prevalence of intimate partner violence, and family separation due to poverty can severely compromise child rights. These issues not only pose immediate risks to the safety and wellbeing of children but also have long-term societal implications. Addressing these risks

requires a multifaceted approach, including strengthening child protection systems, advocating for inclusive policies, enhancing violence prevention programs, and tackling socioeconomic inequalities. Raising awareness about children's rights and promoting their active participation in matters affecting them is also crucial.

In actively addressing these risks at a macro level, we can greatly enhance the safety and integrity of social work practice. This not only protects vulnerable populations but also promotes social justice, aligning with the proactive risk management strategies highlighted in various sources. Through such measures, we can ensure that social work continues to be a safe, effective, and valuable service for all members of the public.

Feedback from Council Committees

Conversations with the Council's committees identified several areas of focus for our upcoming strategic plan.

The identified need for **professional development and support** includes continuing education opportunities, but also encompasses regular peer consultation meetings, the implementation of robust supervision models, and the creation of strategies aimed at preventing burnout. Another integral part of this theme is the development of self-reflection tools designed to assist social workers in their journey towards personal and professional decolonization.

The committees also recognized a need to incorporate **global perspective and international collaboration**. A goal could be to weave a global perspective into our practices, acknowledge and value contributions from international social work communities, and cultivate collaborations with international counterparts.

Another critical aspect identified was tackling systemic issues such as **racism, discrimination, and bias**. There needs to be a clear commitment to prioritizing the challenge of addressing anti-Black racism, boosting engagement with BIPOC communities, and formulating policies that actively reduce intersectional bias.

It was recommended that we include concerted efforts towards **decolonization and Indigenization** of social work. This involves enhancing our understanding of Peace and Friendship Treaties and embracing Indigenous and Afrocentric perspectives in our work. A shift in focus, from *decolonizing* to *Indigenizing*, was strongly recommended, as well as expanding committee membership to include community-invested individuals, dismantling oppressive policies. and urging social work students and professionals to invest time in Indigenous communities to foster understanding and relationships.

Another key focus area is fostering **community engagement & connection**. Our aim is to nurture connections among social workers, engage with diverse communities, establish dialogue forums, and sustain virtual communities of practice.

Continuous review of guidelines & policies formed another crucial component of focus for the NSCSW's next strategic plan. There was an identified need to revisit and revise the *Repositioning Social Work Practice in Mental Health in Nova Scotia* paper, formulate ethical engagement guidelines with first voices, and actively dismantle regulatory policies towards intersectional regulatory practice.

Education and learning is another pivotal theme, with an emphasis on learning from lived experiences, preparing students to manage trauma and burnout in colonial systems, and creating immersive learning experiences within Indigenous communities. In addition to this there was an identified need to concentrate on **ethical practice and consultation**, with plans to formulate guidelines for various facets of social work, establish a distinct ethics consultation committee, and devise a process for ethically engaging with first voices.

It was made clear that the NSCSW needs to proactively address **burnout and compassion fatigue**, by providing necessary resources and tools, and supporting social workers to tackle systems towards greater safety and integrating insights about these issues into daily practices.
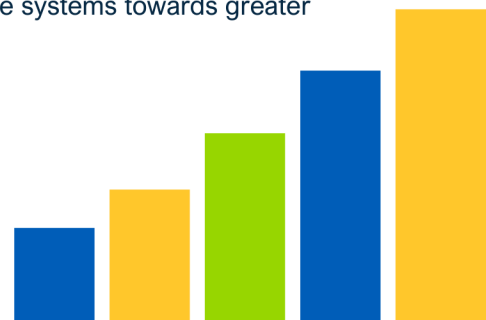
Proposed 2024-2027 Strategic Plan

The NSCSW is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of Nova Scotia's most vulnerable citizens when they access social work services. This mission involves implementing a balanced regulatory approach that creates a culturally safe framework. At the same time, we advocate for social policies that enhance social conditions and justice.

Based on the internal reports and evaluations conducted for our first strategic plan, the following strategic plan was proposed for 2024-2027:

Proposed Commitment 1: Strengthen Regulatory Mandate & Renewal of the Governance Framework

We pledge to renew the governance framework for the social work profession, ensuring an intersectional approach to strengthen regulation.

Outcomes:

- Restructure the council, committee, and staff body to ensure a minimum of 30% representation from individuals who have directly experienced social work services, enhancing the diversity and inclusivity of our organization.

- Design and implement an intersectional framework that considers multiple dimensions of diversity in our regulatory practice to ensure equitable and culturally attentive services.

- Conduct quarterly dialogues with Indigenous social workers and organizations to incorporate indigenous perspectives and practices into social work practice and regulation.

- Integrate Afrocentric social work practices and establish a reparations program specifically aimed at ending anti-black-racism.

- Develop and integrate a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice that reflect our commitment to inclusivity, equity, and justice.

- Proactively integrate and evaluate the clinical social work regulatory framework, and prepare for legislative changes.

Proposed Commitment 2: Cultivation of a Safety Culture

We aim to foster a culture of safety within the NSCSW and the systems where social workers operate.

Outcomes:

- Implement a safety registry to identify potential risks and promote safe delivery of social work practices.

- Revitalize the Candidacy Mentorship Program to better support emerging social workers towards ethical and safe practice.

- Advocate for social policies that enhance social conditions and move us closer towards social justice.

- Establish advocacy campaigns to strengthen the health, wellness, and professional identity of social workers.

Proposed Commitment 3: Meaningful Dialogue

We are dedicated to facilitating meaningful and ongoing dialogue to ensure safety in the delivery of social work.

Outcomes:

- Membership and public have a clear sense of of the role and responsibilities that the NSCSW holds.

- Strengthen relationships with core collaborators and partners to enhance our collective impact in the delivery of social work.

- Develop and facilitate a strategy for active engagement with employers in the social work sector towards safer social work services.

- Actively engage with marginalized communities to understand their unique needs and challenges, and to enhance safe social work services.

Proposed Commitment 4: Responsibility, Accountability & Transparency

We pledge to be responsible, accountable, and transparent in all our operations.

Outcomes:

- Work to build greater trust among vulnerable Nova Scotians by demonstrating transparency, accountability, and commitment to their well-being.

- Demonstrate accountability as a regulatory body by communicating with members on our core mandate and on the achievement of the Standards of Good Regulation, promoting transparency and trust.

Proposal Feedback

During the months of March and April 2024, a comprehensive consultation process was conducted to gather insights for the proposed strategic plan. The consultation involved a diverse range of engagement methods and stakeholders, as outlined below:

- **Focus Groups:** The consultation included both online and in-person focus groups divided into four geographical regions of the province: Central, Western, Eastern, and Northern. A total of 50 participants contributed their perspectives during these sessions.

- **Online Survey:** Insights were also collected through an online survey, with 53 respondents sharing their feedback and opinions on the proposed strategic plan.

- **Key Partnerships:** Meaningful dialogues took place with significant partners, including the Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative, Dalhousie School of Social Work, and Cape Breton University. These collaborations enriched the consultation process and provided valuable perspectives.

These interactions provided means for engaging with the collective voice of our members, partners, and collaborators. Their insights served as a guiding light, directing us towards a strategic path that resonates with our shared vision and values.

What We Heard

Responses to Proposed Commitment 1: Strengthen Regulatory Mandate & Renewal of the Governance Framework

The first proposed commitment of the strategic plan aims to overhaul the governance framework for social work regulation, with an emphasis on equity, inclusivity, and cultural attentiveness, with the aim of improving governance. The feedback included a broad spectrum of views and suggestions aimed at refining the NSCSW's approach to renewing its governance framework and strengthening its regulatory mandate through an intersectional lens.

Representation Within Council/Committee

While a 30% representation target from those with direct social work service experience is favoured for the NSCSW, it's proposed that starting with a 10% benchmark could offer more flexibility. This initial step is seen to gradually increase representation while keeping a primary focus on professional representation. It's emphasized that Indigenous and African Nova Scotian representatives should be actively involved in shaping practices and policies, not merely included as token figures, to ensure their insights genuinely contribute to inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives.

There were comments related to the value of exceeding the 30% minimum representation for individuals with firsthand social work experiences, highlighting how these lived experiences are crucial for developing policies and practices that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all communities. The importance of incorporating first voice perspectives in decision-making processes is recognized, underlining that having these voices heard and integrated is vital for the NSCSW's advocacy and empowerment efforts.

Conversely there was a commitment that preference for the council/committee to primarily comprise social workers to preserve their professional voice. However, there are concerns that diversifying representation might dilute the influence of social workers within the organization.

Furthermore, there's a strong recommendation to not only meet but exceed minimum representation goals, specifically by appointing individuals from historically impacted communities to pivotal roles. This approach ensures that those with direct experience can significantly influence change. The feedback also calls for clearer guidelines to address underrepresentation and suggests temporary partnerships to maintain active dialogue and decision-making, even in the absence of full representation.

A broader interpretation of direct experience is advocated for, covering a range of sectors and emphasizing the necessity of diverse perspectives in representative roles. Additionally, there's a push for defining additional qualifications for council members to support their contributions in a trauma-informed manner, ensuring a safe environment for sharing personal experiences.

Figure 1: *How important do you believe it is for the NSCSW to ensure our council and committees include a minimum of 30% representation from individuals who have directly experienced social work services?*
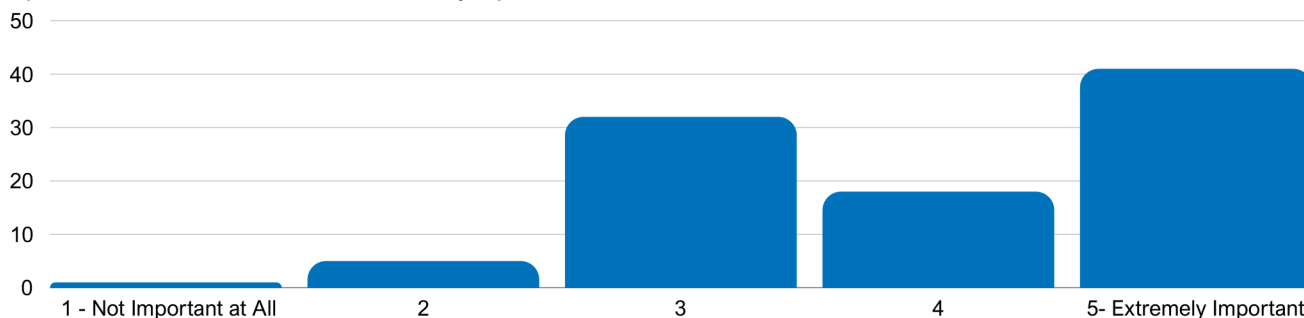

Intersectionality

Feedback underscores the necessity for a clearer understanding and broader application of intersectionality within NSCSW's framework, noting that current approaches might not fully capture all facets of oppression, including weight and education discrimination. Personal accounts of weight discrimination call for improved reporting mechanisms and comprehensive training to address all forms of intersectional bias. Additionally, there's a plea for thoughtful language use around intersectional identities (such as Black, neurodivergent, (dis)Abled) to promote a respectful and empowering environment, highlighting the importance of precision in terminology to avoid perpetuating harmful biases.

Incorporation of Indigenous/Afrocentric Perspectives

Feedback underscores the critical need for integrating Indigenous and Afrocentric values and practices into NSCSW operations, aiming for a balance between voluntary adoption and mandatory implementation. There's a unified call for the profession to commit to decolonization and ensure the delivery of equitable, respectful services across all communities. Enhancements suggested including better service capacity, compensating for first-voice contributions, and grounding governance with accountability towards Indigenous lands. The importance of compensating participants in dialogues with Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities is highlighted, promoting reciprocity, and valuing their input.

Figure 2: *How important do you find the incorporation of Indigenous and Afrocentric social work practices into our regulation and practice standards?*
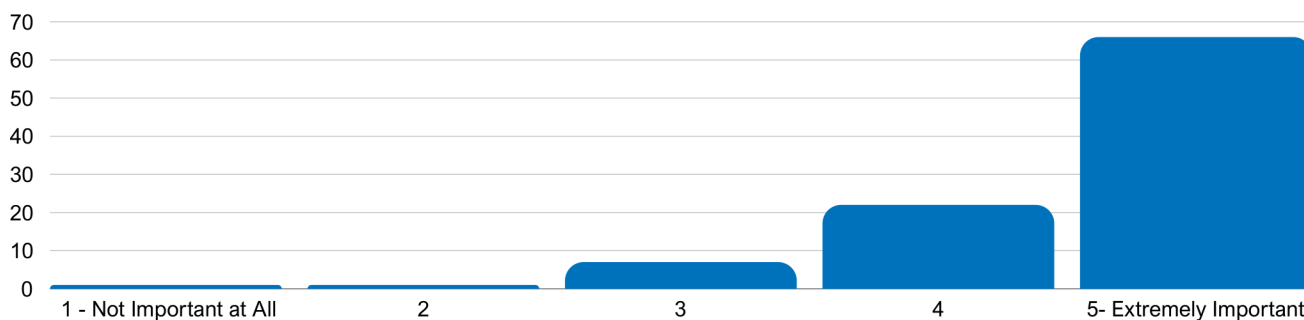
Lastly, the feedback emphasizes the importance of an oppression-free guidance in social work, highlighting that insights from individuals with firsthand experience are crucial for the profession's growth. This collective input points towards a more inclusive, responsive, and respectful approach in shaping NSCSW's practices and policies, emphasizing diversity and equity at every level.

Inclusive Regulations and Practice Standards

The need to include all populations in regulations and practice standards is emphasized, ensuring that the diversity of the province's communities is reflected in the NSCSW's policies and practices.

Suggestions for promoting the NSCSW's dedication to this commitment through various channels indicate the importance of public awareness. Proposed methods include posters in key locations, online circulation through social media, radio announcements, etc., to ensure that the community is aware and can engage with these efforts.

It's emphasized that assumptions about the superiority of certain social work practices should be set aside in favour of a critical examination of their viability and fairness. Diversity within traditional and non-traditional practices necessitates a careful analysis to ensure the adoption of truly equitable and effective practices. Lastly, there's an acknowledgment that the history and practice of social work hold valuable lessons for Commitment #1. This historical perspective can guide the NSCSW in navigating current challenges and opportunities, ensuring that the renewed governance framework and regulatory mandate are informed by both past experiences and future aspirations.

Recommendations

Firstly, there should be an enhanced explanation of intersectionality. This involves providing a clearer definition and practical examples of intersectionality, ensuring to cover often overlooked areas such as weight and education discrimination. Secondly, an adjustment to representation goals is advised. It's suggested that flexible targets be set for representation, particularly from individuals with direct experience in social work services, to ensure a diverse range of perspectives are included. Thirdly, there should be a focused effort on decolonization and the delivery of respectful, services across all communities. This includes recognizing the importance of decolonizing practices within social work and striving for excellence in service delivery. Lastly, compensation and reciprocity for engagement are crucial. Participants in dialogues and consultations should be offered fair compensation for their contributions. This not only acknowledges their valuable input but also ensures a reciprocal relationship, fostering a sense of respect and value for their participation.

Responses to Proposed Commitment 2: Cultivation of a Safety Culture

The second proposed commitment of the NSCSW's strategic plan for 2024-2027 aims to cultivate a culture of safety within the organization and across the broader systems that surround social work. Feedback on this proposed commitment revealed a mix of concerns, suggestions, and areas needing clarification.

Candidacy Revitalization

Feedback on the NSCSW's Candidacy Mentorship Program suggests a need for several enhancements to improve its effectiveness and accessibility. There is a strong recommendation for increased NSCSW oversight to ensure that mentorship practices are current, evidence-based, and actively incorporate decolonized practices, addressing the resistance to decolonization observed in Nova Scotia. Additionally, there is a call for better recruitment strategies to attract mentors from diverse backgrounds, including Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, and newcomer communities, with a suggestion to implement a province-wide system for matching mentors and mentees that considers cultural and racial identities. It is also proposed that mentorships should offer compensation or be integrated within work hours to alleviate the burden on mentors, with an extension of support specifically tailored for those entering private practice. Furthermore, suggestions to enhance the mentorship program emphasize group supervision and better connectivity between mentors and mentees to prevent mentoring in isolation, aiming for a more supportive and interconnected professional community.

There was one concern raised about the candidacy process being overly burdensome and contributing to burnout among young social workers, primarily due to extensive documentation requirements and the perceived lack of advocacy for competitive pay for BSW-level workers. There was a suggestion to either significantly revaluate or completely eliminate this process to reduce stress on emerging professionals. Furthermore, there was a call for social work educational institutions to adopt more selective criteria in their programs.

Role of Advocacy

Feedback concerning the environment and operations within the field of social work and the NSCSW's role presents constructive suggestions for improvement. There is a notable dissatisfaction with the existing systems where social workers provide services, described as toxic and failing to prioritize client needs, which positions private practice as a preferable alternative aligning more closely with social work values. A significant appeal is made for the NSCSW to adopt a more assertive role in advocating on behalf of social workers, particularly in amplifying their concerns and addressing systemic challenges. Conversely, there was one comment expressing apprehension regarding the expectation for social workers to adhere to specific political ideologies, perceived as being masked under the advocacy for social policy and justice, suggesting a nuanced approach to political engagement.

The discourse around risk and advocacy underscores a recognition of the inherent risks associated with pushing for social justice, highlighting a potential tension with the pursuit of a safety culture. To address these concerns and foster a more inclusive and effective system, several recommendations have been put forward. These include the production of reports that focus on improving social conditions through diverse lenses and acknowledging the contribution of diversity to enhancing overall safety and social conditions. The proposed formation of a social policy committee aims to collaborate with various organizations to review and suggest improvements to policies, with a focus on social justice and reconciliation for equity-seeking groups.

Figure 3: How important is it for the NSCSW to advocate for social policies that move us closer towards social justice?
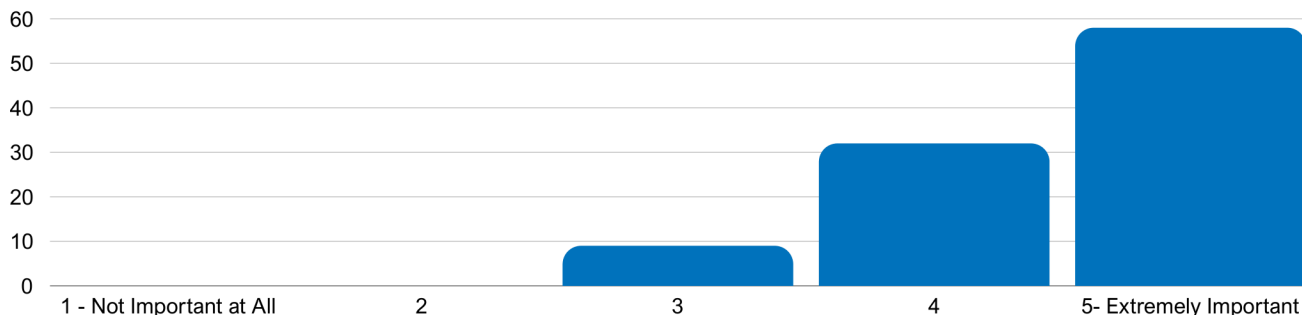

Safety Registry

Feedback on the proposed safety registry reveals a mixture of confusion, apprehension, and critique. There is a clear call for further clarification on how the registry would operate, its distinctions from, or enhancements to, the existing complaints process, and concerns about its potential misuse, including the exploitation by white supremacist ideologies amid emerging societal and legal challenges. Despite acknowledging the potential benefits, fears persist that its implementation may focus excessively on risk mitigation at the expense of innovation and client-centred care, perhaps giving rise to a false sense of safety without improving the conditions for social workers and their clients.

Criticism also targets the broader concept of a risk registry, which some view as perpetuating managerialism and diverting focus from the essential goal of achieving social justice. The traditional notion of "risk" is contested for allegedly obscuring underlying issues such as power abuse, inequality, and undemocratic systems. Additionally, there was one comment on the NSCSW complaint process for social workers, with calls for substantial improvements to provide better support and advocacy for social workers during these procedures.

How significant is the implementation of a safety registry in promoting the safe delivery of social work practices?
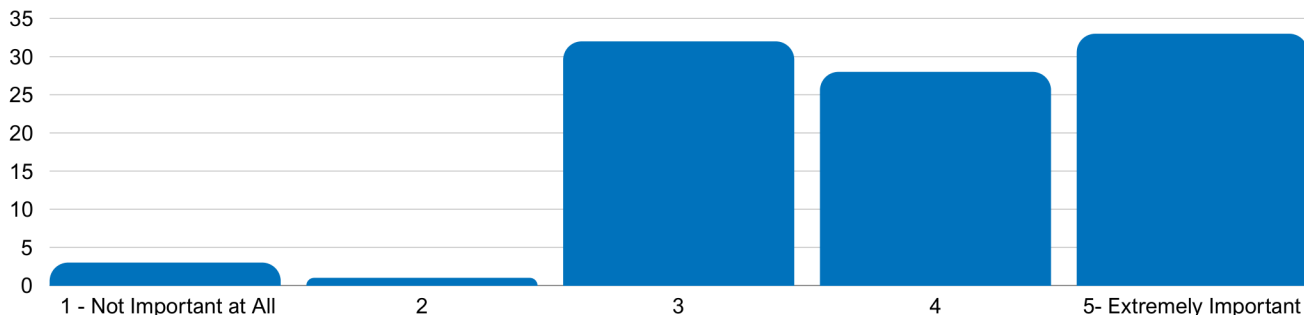
The discourse around the terminology of "safety" proposes a shift towards "safer practices" and "safer spaces," recognizing that the experience of safety is not universal but varies significantly among individuals and within different contexts. This suggestion aims to include those marginalized by dominant discourses. and acknowledges the complex nature of safety in workplace dynamics. The introduction of group consultation is recommended to foster a more inclusive and effective approach to social work practice, suggesting that collaborative discussions could lead to a deeper understanding and implementation of safety measures that cater to the diverse needs and situations of the workforce.

Recommendations

Reorient the focus from a risk or safety registry towards a concept that emphasizes mapping and strengthening ethical social work practice. This shift involves moving away from the language of "risk" and "registry" to provide a tool that showcases how NSCSW activities contribute to fostering a culture of ethics. By doing so, this approach aims to highlight the proactive and supportive role of NSCSW in enhancing social work practices, focusing on ethics and professional development rather than compliance and monitoring. This reframing would seek to support social workers in navigating complex challenges by offering resources and guidance that uphold ethical standards and promote a safer, more inclusive environment for both practitioners and client.

Responses to Proposed Commitment 3: Meaningful Dialogue

The third proposed commitment of the strategic plan revolves around meaningful and continuous dialogue to facilitate greater safety in social work practices and improve the provision of safe social work services. Dialogue should lead to tangible improvements in practice and policy that reflect the diverse experiences and requirements of all community members. Feedback presented a variety of insights and suggestions aimed at enhancing the commitment's impact and reach.

Building Partnerships

Participants underscored the value of pre-arranged education for sectors closely related to social work, such as healthcare, emphasizing the importance of educating interprofessional teams about the role and contributions of social workers. Further, there's a strong call for extending engagement efforts to institutions offering social work education. Highlighting the critical role of informative practicum supervisors, feedback suggests that broader efforts are needed to ensure students entering social work programs have a clear understanding of the College's expectations, thereby fostering trust and understanding in the NSCSW from the onset of their careers.

There's a call for the College to intensify its support for students, particularly through advocacy for paid placements, which are identified as a significant barrier to entering the social work field. This barrier perpetuates cycles of power and privilege, restricting access to the profession. Additionally, there's a push for the NSCSW to play a more active role in regulating and setting standards for educational institutions regarding placements, ensuring students begin their professional journeys on a positive note.

Figure 5: *How effective are our efforts in strengthening relationships with core collaborators and partners in enhancing the delivery of social work?*
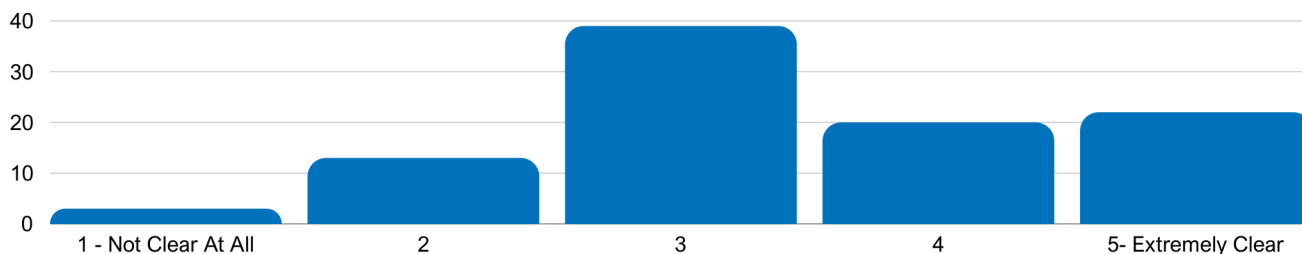

Collective Impact

The feedback also reflects appreciation for the positive changes seen under new leadership and emphasizes the need for ongoing efforts to connect social workers with college requirements, noting that such connection seems stronger in social work than in other professions like counseling. The idea of "it takes a village" captures the sentiment that establishing understanding around the role and function of the NSCSW is a complex endeavour requiring collective effort and engagement.

Personal testimonies underscore a general satisfaction with the NSCSW's efforts, and the mentorship experiences provided, though opinions vary among practitioners. There's an acknowledgment that changing public perceptions about the role and scope of social work, especially beyond child protection, is a gradual process that requires sustained effort. Suggestions for a provincial campaign to better communicate the diverse roles and contributions of social workers and the College itself were made, aiming to redefine public understanding and appreciation of the profession.

Figure 6: *Do you believe the members of the College have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of the NSCSW?*
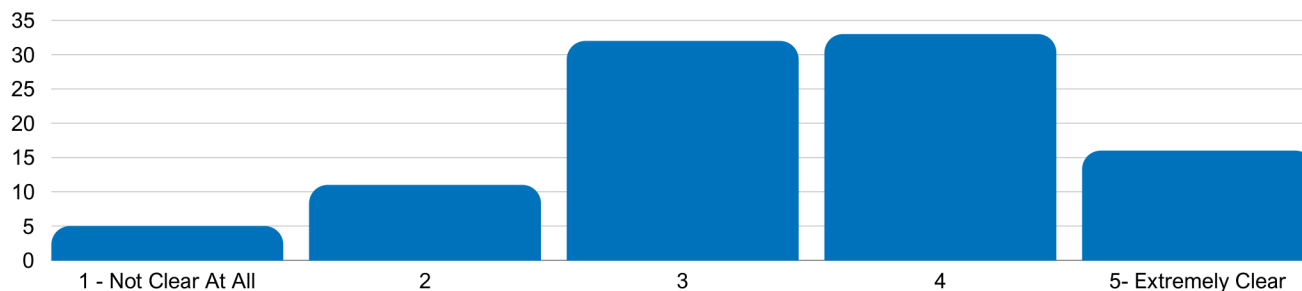
Outreach

Suggestions include organizing a yearly conference day for public and community organizations/employers to learn about social work practices, share challenges, and review the new code of ethics. This could help non-social workers gain a clearer understanding of the role and function of the College, an objective acknowledged as challenging yet important.

The feedback points out the need for social work to better inform the public about who social workers are and what they do, highlighting the misconception held by some community members who view social workers primarily as child removal agents. It suggests more awareness is needed about the diverse roles social workers play. Ideas for round table discussions on issues impacting social workers and the delivery of their work were also mentioned.

Focus on meaningful dialogue for ensuring safety in the delivery of social work, there's a consensus on the need for the NSCSW to extend its visibility and influence across various platforms and settings. Recommendations include enhancing the College's presence in workplaces that employ social workers by engaging with public relations representatives during social work month and offering annual training sessions. This approach aims to establish a more recognizable "face" for the NSCSW within the professional community and beyond.

Furthermore, encounters with the public have revealed a limited understanding of social work's capabilities and contributions, with many underestimating the profession's impact on community well-being. This underscores the importance of articulating a clear and consistent presence of the College, ensuring employers and the broader community are aware that the NSCSW monitors practice standards and advocates for ethical social work practice across all settings.

Figure 7: *Do you believe the general public has a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of the NSCSW?*
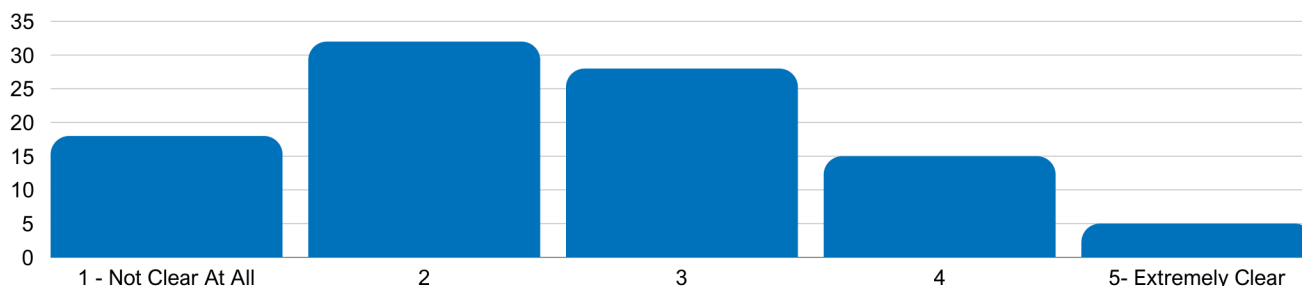
Framing of Safety

Concerns were raised about the use of the term "safety" within the commitment, suggesting that perceptions of safety are relative and influenced by various factors. The feedback highlights the importance of not assuming that only social workers understand the nuances of meaningful and ongoing "safe" dialogue. It emphasizes the need to listen to service users, who are considered experts in their own lives, thereby reinforcing the principle of client-centred practice.

Recommendations

In light of advancing a paradigm shift towards safety-focused social work practice, it is imperative to reframe the language of safety as a social construct rather than a mere concept of risk. The primary objective should be the cultivation of safer practices within the field. By emphasizing the creation of environments that foster safety and well-being, we can veer away from traditional risk-centric notions. It is essential to redirect our efforts towards mapping pathways that lead to the implementation of safer social work practices. This approach underscores a proactive stance in ensuring the welfare and security of individuals and communities, steering us towards a more holistic and preventive approach to social work interventions.

Responses to Proposed Commitment 4: Responsibility, Accountability & Transparency

The fourth commitment in the strategic plan proposal is grounded in the ongoing need for the NSCSW to demonstrate that is worthy of the public's trust, particularly from the vulnerable populations in Nova Scotia. Feedback from stakeholders suggests several areas for improvement and reflection.

Engagement with Marginalized Communities

Concerns have been voiced regarding the ability of marginalized communities to trust the NSCSW, stemming of he profession's history of mistreatment, financial and ableist barriers to access, as well as experiences of inter-disciplinary racism. It is viewed as crucial to engage with and build trust among these marginalized populations to enhance overall public confidence in the profession. This necessitates not only ensuring the safety and well-being of social workers but also fostering an environment conducive to positive dialogue, advocacy, and meaningful structural changes. To rebuild and fortify this trust, it is essential for the NSCSW to actively address and work towards remedying both historical injustices and ongoing discriminatory practices prevalent within the profession. Implementing strategies aimed at safeguarding the welfare of social workers, especially those coming from marginalized groups, is pivotal. Such initiatives would promote a more inclusive and supportive professional atmosphere, paving the way for stronger relationships between social workers and the communities they serve.

Transparency and Engagement

The feedback provided highlights a significant issue with public perception and trust in the social work profession, pinpointing a general lack of knowledge and understanding among the broader public. This gap in awareness has resulted in diminished trust, a consequence deeply tied to the profession's historical and colonial practices, especially those involving child welfare. The negative repercussions of these practices on families and communities have long-lasting effects that continue to impact trust levels. While transparency within the profession is appreciated, there's a strong call for deeper, more meaningful engagement. Such engagement would foster critical interactions and support the healing process from the historical scars left by the profession. It's suggested that mere dissemination of information is insufficient for genuine community engagement or for facilitating an understanding and healing process.

Furthermore, there's a concern regarding the overall awareness and understanding of the social work services available, not only among the public but also among professionals from other disciplines. This lack of awareness perpetuates stereotypes and misunderstandings about the profession, underscoring the need for concerted efforts to educate and inform both the general public and professionals from various fields about the diverse range of services provided by social workers and the essential roles they play within communities.

Figure 8: *How important do you believe it is for the NSCSW to demonstrate accountability and transparency to its members and the public?*
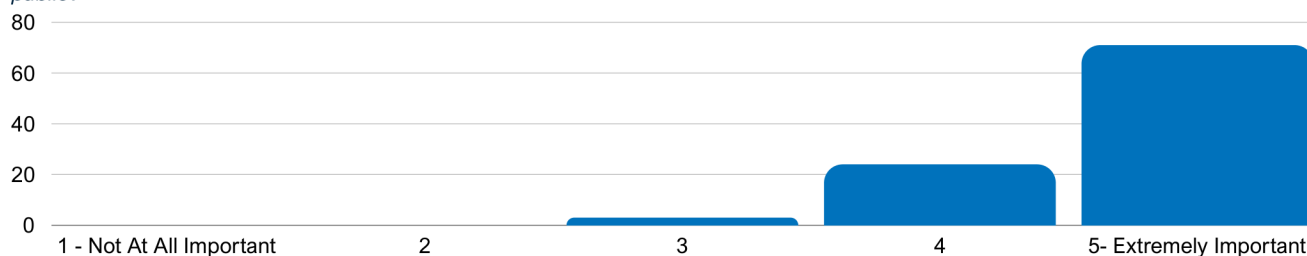
Overcoming Challenges in Public Perception and Building Trust

Despite the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers' (NSCSW) attempts to distinguish itself, a prevailing perception remains that it faces difficulties in showcasing its uniqueness compared to other organizations. One of the critical challenges stems from societal issues, including entrenched patriarchal beliefs and racist attitudes, which are seen as pervasive within its operations. Furthermore, critiques have emerged regarding the NSCSW's lack of explicit commitments to feminism and gender equality, especially noticeable in discussions related to social justice concerns such as violence against women. This gap highlights the need for a stronger emphasis on these principles within the NSCSW's documentation and practices.

Another significant obstacle is the visibility and awareness of the NSCSW among Nova Scotia's vulnerable populations. Many believe that these groups are largely unaware of the NSCSW's existence and its role as a regulatory body. This lack of awareness prevents the formation of trust and accountability, crucial elements for successful interactions between social workers and the communities they aim to serve.

On a positive note, there is recognition of the NSCSW's good intentions toward fostering healthier community relationships. However, there is an understanding that more efforts are necessary to bridge gaps effectively. A particular challenge noted is the confusion between case workers and social workers, which further complicates public perception and trust. Addressing these challenges head-on will be vital for the NSCSW in strengthening its relationships with the public and advancing the profession's impact on society.

Pressure on New Social Workers

The financial burden of registration fees and student debt is also highlighted as an unnecessary added stressor. Notably, this burden can have a disproportionate effect on social workers who experience oppression along several dimensions. For example, social workers may graduate with a higher debt load if they lacked familial financial support while pursuing their degree. They may also encounter difficulties negotiating appropriate and non-discriminatory compensation at entry-level jobs, particularly in non-union work settings.

2024-2027 NSCSW Strategic Plan

Navigating Towards Safe(R) Social Work Practice

In our pursuit of safer social work practice, it is vital to understand that safety is a dynamic social construct with varied implications for Nova Scotia's most vulnerable citizens and the dedicated social workers who support them. The College acknowledges that achieving safer practice involves advocating for social policies that enhance community well-being and upholding principles of justice. Furthermore, we recognize the significance of ethical praxis requiring practitioners to address unconscious bias and vicarious trauma in their professional endeavours.

Commitment 1: Strengthen Regulatory Mandate and Renewal of the Governance Framework

We pledge to renew the governance framework for the social work profession, ensuring an intersectional approach to strengthen regulation.

Outcomes:

- Restructure the council, committee, and staff body to ensure a minimum of 30% representation from individuals who have directly experienced social work services, enhancing the diversity and inclusivity of our organization.

- Design and implement an intersectional framework which acknowledges the intertwined aspects of identities like race, gender, class, and sexuality; seeks to understand the unique, multifaceted experiences of oppression and advantage in our regulatory practice; and strives to address their combined effects on discrimination and privilege.

- Conduct quarterly dialogues with Indigenous social workers and organizations to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and practices into social work practice and regulation.

- Integrate Afrocentric social work practices and establish a reparations program specifically aimed at ending anti-Black racism.

- Develop and integrate a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice that reflect our commitment to inclusivity, equity, and justice.

- Proactively integrate and evaluate the clinical social work regulatory framework, and prepare for legislative changes.

Commitment 2: Cultivate Ethical Social Work Practice Towards Safe(R) Services

We aim to foster a culture of well-being within the NSCSW and work towards safer systems where social workers operate.

Outcomes:

- Implement ethical mapping to strengthen the ethical delivery of social work on micro, mezzo and macro level.

- Revitalize the Candidacy Mentorship Program to better support emerging social workers towards ethical and safe practice.

- Advocate for social policies that enhance social conditions and move us closer towards social justice.

- Establish advocacy campaigns to strengthen the health, wellness, and professional identity of social workers.

Commitment 3: Meaningful Dialogue

We are dedicated to facilitating meaningful and ongoing dialogue to ensure safety in the delivery of social work.

Outcomes:

- Membership and public have a clear sense of of the role and responsibilities that the NSCSW holds.

- Strengthen relationships with core collaborators and partners to enhance our collective impact in the delivery of social work.

- Develop and facilitate a strategy for active engagement with employers in the social work sector towards safer social work services.

- Actively engage with marginalized communities to understand their unique needs and challenges, and to enhance safe social work services.

Commitment 4: Responsibility, Accountability & Transparency

We pledge to be responsible, accountable, and transparent in all our operations.

Outcomes:

- Work to build greater trust among vulnerable Nova Scotians by demonstrating transparency, accountability, and commitment to their well-being.

- Demonstrate accountability as a regulatory body by communicating with members on our core mandate and on the achievement of the Standards of Good Regulation, promoting transparency and trust.

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