



Nova Scotia
Association for
Community Living

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 Response Must Protect People with Intellectual Disabilities

More than 500 Nova Scotians in institutions are at particular risk

HALIFAX, N.S. / April 2, 2020: As Nova Scotia continues to respond to the developing COVID-19 crisis, the Nova Scotia Association for Community Living (NSACL) stresses that governments and communities must carry out inclusive policies so that our most vulnerable receive the support they need and are entitled to.

“The implications of COVID-19 for people with intellectual disabilities and their families are significant,” says Ruth Strubank, Executive Director of NSACL. “There are more than 500 people with intellectual disabilities living in institutions across this province. Urgent action is required by government to provide specialized care and consideration for this vulnerable population.”

People with intellectual disabilities already face barriers to live in community with the supports and access to services including, health care, mental health supports, social activities, income supports, and inclusive education. In emergency situations, these barriers are heightened. Many people with disabilities cannot live in community without appropriate support and services that meet their individual needs.

“Before we found ourselves living in a pandemic, the people in these institutions were often left feeling isolated with little or no personal space, and choice about who, what, and when they live each day,” says Strubank. “Now, with no visits from family or friends, the feelings of isolation and despair have increased. While we certainly understand the importance of physical distancing practices, there needs to be creative solutions and care offered to this group, such as physically distanced or virtual visits.”

Now, more than ever, every level of government, every community agency, every business and non-profit, and every community initiative needs to consider and accommodate the unique needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

As a member of the Disability Rights Coalition, NSACL supports the action items outlined in a recent letter sent to Deputy Minister, Community Services, Tracey Taweel and Dr. Robert Strang. In order to safeguard the health of individuals both in and out of institutions, NSACL and

the DRC are urgently requesting that public health and the Department of Community Services take the following steps:

- Consult with intellectually disabled Nova Scotians and disability rights advocates to enact measures in line with the Province's COVID-19 health directives for all persons with disabilities.
- Speak openly on the COVID-19 policies to protect the health and lives of people with disabilities living in institutional settings. Likewise, ensure that all policies be publicly announced, regularly updated, and include plans to allow for ongoing care on behalf of those who become infected.
- Provide the Department of Community Services the necessary resources to move as many people as possible out of institutional settings and, with adequate support, into the community. The risk of infection to people living in large institutions requires urgent action.
- Provide community-based organizations the resources to ensure adequate support of persons with disabilities during this time of isolation. The barriers that these people face daily, such as transportation, employment, housing, health care, education, and financial security, are being magnified during these difficult times. The crisis at hand requires government resources and leadership.

"Inclusion is about removing barriers facing those with an intellectual disability," says Strubank. "In these uncertain times, what is certain is that the province and community organizations must come together, commit to inclusion, and ensure that no one is left behind."

NSACL will continue to work with its partners, its team, and the government to identify and address the urgent needs of people with intellectual disabilities in Nova Scotia's COVID-19 response. For more information on NSACL's position during these unprecedented times, please visit www.nsacl.ca.

###

About NSACL

NSACL is a 65-year-old provincial not-for-profit organization committed to ensuring that individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families have the support they need to thrive. This is done by advancing policies and practices to government and community organizations that enable and promote the full inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in all areas of community life.

For more information please contact:

Ashley Gallant
NSACL Fund Development & Communications
Phone: 902-469-1174 ext.4
Email: ashley.gallant@nsacl.ca