

President's Letter

August 12, 2016

NLMA to Host Conference on the Need to Review Health Facilities and Services



**Christopher Cox,
MD, FRCS, FACS
President**

Dear Colleagues:

Doctors across the province are concerned about the financial situation of the provincial government and the potential negative impact on the quality of health care for the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador. In March 2016 the NLMA consulted widely with physicians and made budget recommendations to Ministers Dr. John Haggie and Cathy Bennett on how to address cost pressures while maintaining high quality health services. These recommendations are available on our [website](#).

The province's financial picture has not improved since early 2016, and the government has not yet made clear its plans for cost-cutting or restraining growth. We know there will be an interim budget this fall. Whether or not health decisions will be made this fall, it is our belief that big decisions that affect the health sector and every other sector are on the horizon as the government attempts to address its fiscal problem.

The NLMA does not welcome this situation, but we need to play a role in shaping and influencing the decisions that government will be making. We cannot simply stand by and react to government's ideas and proposals. We cannot risk the possibility that government's decisions will be short-term or ad hoc in nature. Even with best intentions, the electoral cycle can often weigh heavily on health care sector decision-making.

One of the steps we are taking this fall is to host a conference on the need for a thorough, inclusive and independent review of health services in the province. Our view is that the current distribution of health services across the province is based on the population structure and disease burden of 30 to 50 years ago. A sustainable health system needs to be based on the needs of the population today and in the future. Any government decisions in the health sector to bring the budget into balance should only be made with a road map that delineates the roles of each facility and the distribution of clinical and related services.

The conference will bring together a wide variety of health care stakeholders – unions, professional associations, regulators, educators, researchers, advocacy groups, municipalities, RHAs, and government. The goal is to create an informed debate about how such a review could take place. Our hope is that government will then use the views expressed at the conference to guide the form and nature of a review process.

We realize that a review of health facilities and services is complicated and controversial. It may have impacts on our own members and the communities in which we live. However, the Board of the NLMA believes that as a professional association we are helping our profession and our patients the most when we engage actively on difficult policy issues. We do not hold fixed views on the specific changes that should emerge from a review, but we feel strongly that such a review must be done to ensure objective and evidence-based decisions. The alternative is too risky.

The conference will take place on October 19, 2016 and is by invitation-only so that we can ensure a balanced representation from all stakeholder groups. We commit to informing you about the conference outcomes and any other follow-through activity.

Regards,



**Christopher Cox, MD, FRCS, FACS
President**



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