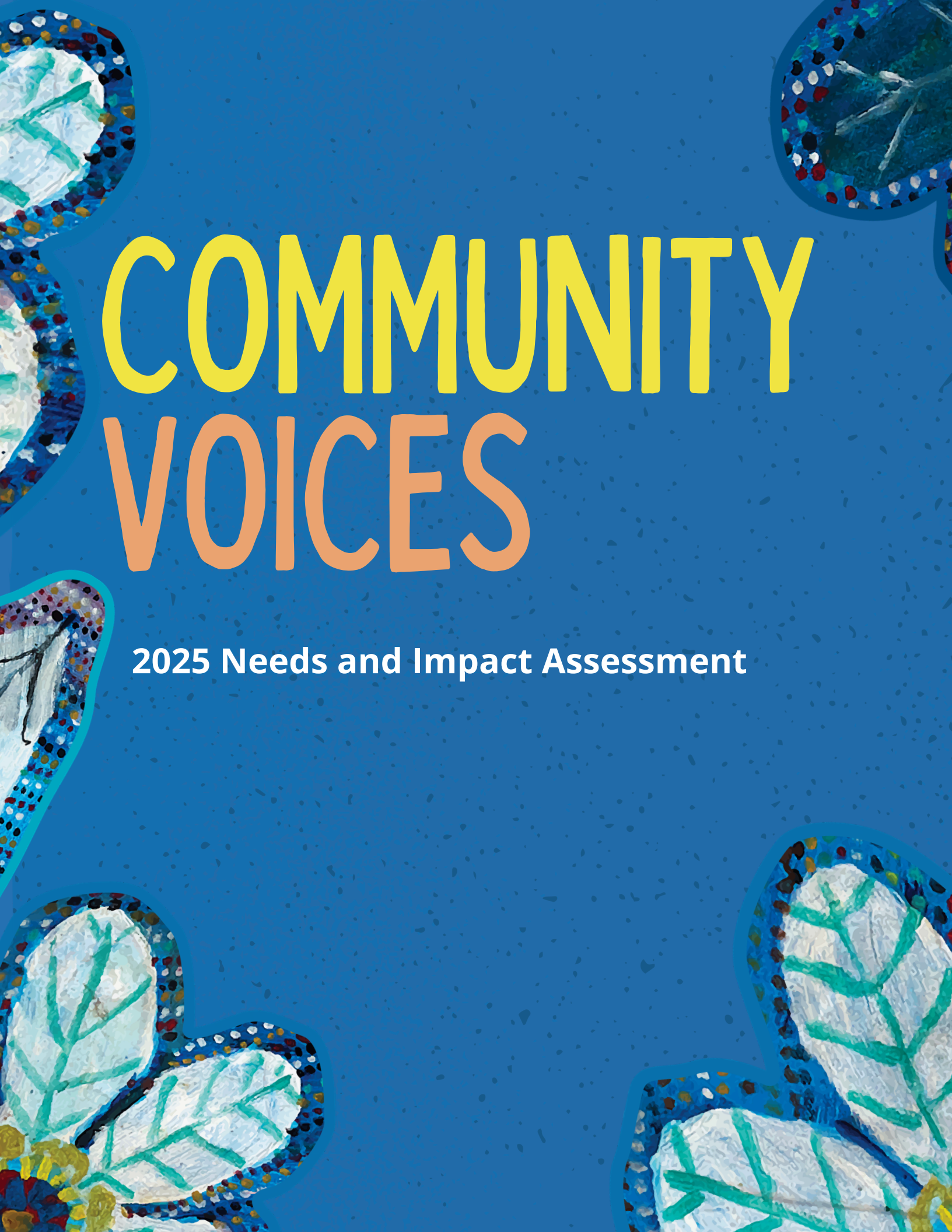


The background is a solid blue color with a fine, light-colored speckle pattern. In the corners, there are decorative circular elements. The top-left and bottom-right corners feature a circular design with a blue border and a white center containing green and blue abstract shapes. The top-right and bottom-left corners feature a circular design with a blue border and a dark blue center containing white and light blue abstract shapes.

COMMUNITY VOICES

2025 Needs and Impact Assessment

This document was prepared by Davis Pier Consulting in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Office of Addictions and Mental Health. Prepared May 2026.

COMMEMORATION OF THOSE IMPACTED BY THE MASS CASUALTY

On April 18 and 19, 2020, a mass casualty in Nova Scotia, Canada, changed many lives forever. It caused deep grief for all Nova Scotians, especially those who live, work, volunteer or are connected to Colchester, Cumberland, and (East) Hants Counties. Six years later, its effects are felt.

We remember:

- Tom Bagley
- Kristen Beaton and her unborn child
- Greg Blair
- Jamie Blair
- Joy Bond
- Peter Bond
- Lillian Campbell
- Corrie Ellison
- Gina Goulet
- Dawn Gulenchyn
- Frank Gulenchyn
- Alanna Jenkins
- Sean McLeod
- Lisa McCully
- Heather O'Brien
- Jolene Oliver
- Aaron Tuck
- Emily Tuck, a teenager
- Const. Heidi Stevenson
- E. Joanne Thomas
- Joey Webber
- John Zahl

We also remember those lost since that time and keep in our thoughts everyone who experiences the physical and emotional impacts of the mass casualty.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This “Community Voices: 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment” document was created in response to Recommendation C.13 from the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) Final Report, which calls for addressing the public health emergency in Colchester, Cumberland, and (East) Hants Counties and carrying out needs and impact assessments in 2023, 2025, and 2028.

This document is the result of several engagements to understand the mental health, grief, and bereavement needs of the community and the impact of existing supports. This included seven sessions with over 60 participants from community organizations and Nova Scotia Health, and four sessions with 40 community members in 2025.

This document shares insights from a point in time when the information was collected and outlines what we heard people and communities need, what supports or programs are already in place, and how well those supports are able to meet those needs. It is a community-led tool for all levels of government, organizations, and community to inform decisions, programs, and policies that will build on what already exists, while addressing the barriers that remain.

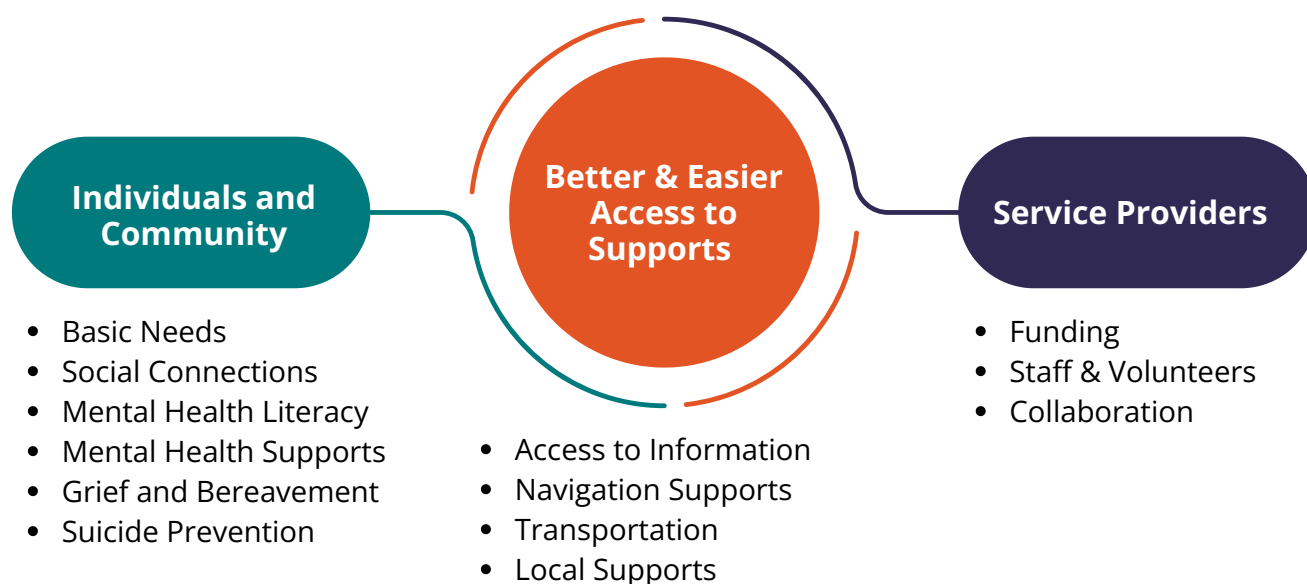
KEY DEFINITIONS: Mental health, grief, and bereavement

Community Voices defines mental health, grief, and bereavement as:



INSIGHTS

The next pages give a snapshot of the main themes and ideas that came out of this work. The themes are separated into three categories: Individuals and Community Needs; Better and Easier Access to Supports; and Service Provider Needs.



For each theme there are three columns with more information on what was heard:

- **Needs:** Summarizes what community members said they need, both for themselves and for their community. The wording was adjusted to reflect the main ideas and feelings shared during the conversations.
- **Ideas For the Path Forward:** Highlights the ideas and suggestions from community about what could better support communities in the future. These ideas may not fully reflect what is currently happening in community, but were ideas shared during the engagements.
- **C.13 Initiatives:** Shares examples of initiatives funded between 2023-2025 in response to Recommendation C.13 to address the needs identified. *More information on these initiatives can be found in Appendix - A C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes.*

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY

Needs

Ideas for Path Forward*

C.13**

Basic Needs

People talked about how people in their community are not able to meet their basic needs. People need access to food, a safe place to live, and income security before meeting other needs.

- Increase one-time financial supports that help individuals or families secure stable housing.
- Increase housing supports including emergency funds for housing costs.
- Increase access to food through food security programs such as community gardens, shared kitchens, and food delivery.

5 Initiatives

(Example: Portauisque Community Centre - Market Greens Program)

Social Connections

People spoke a lot about how disconnected they feel from their community and how hard it can be to feel connected without the right places and programs. Seniors and youth were specifically mentioned as needing more welcoming spaces to gather.

- Create culturally safe and non-institutional spaces to gather.
- Increase community events and social activities.
- Increase low-cost or free practical programming.
- Build and improve active living and drop-in spaces (specifically for youth and seniors).
- Increase peer and mentorship programs.

25 Initiatives

(Example: Ship's Company Theatre - Community Theatre Project)

Mental Health Literacy

People said that mental health support often comes too late, usually when someone is already in crisis. People emphasized that community needs more proactive mental health literacy supports and supports that directly target the stigma in community that prevent people from accessing what is available.

- Increase skill development and training for all ages.
- Increase stigma prevention activities and information.
- Introduce lessons on emotional regulation and other basic mental health skills early in school and continue beyond grade nine.
- Examine community perception gap in mental health literacy.

5 Initiatives

(Example: Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce - Wellness Resource Project)

*These community ideas may not fully reflect what is currently happening in community, but were ideas shared during the engagements.

**Column 'C.13' indicates the number of initiatives funded under C.13 intended to address the need outlined in the row.

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY

Need

Mental Health Supports

Community emphasized that existing mental health supports are simply not enough and often do not meet people's needs. People asked for easier to find supports offered by people they know, in safe places, especially for men.

Ideas for Path Forward*

- Increase access to counselling in local spaces, including locally based 24/7 mental health line.
- Increase mental health support offered by trusted people (e.g., peer supports, local professionals, etc.).
- Offer mental health supports in informal and comfortable spaces (e.g., a home).
- Develop mental health supports for men.

C.13**

5 Initiatives

(Example: After Trauma Empowerment Network - Counselling Supports)

Grief and Bereavement

Community highlighted the need for grief and bereavement supports, which should be easy to access, with as few barriers as possible, available when people need it, provided by the community, and offered to all members (including diverse groups).

- Enhance knowledge and skills for professionals and volunteers.
- Increase equitable access to grief supports (easy to access, low cost, easy to join).
- Increase opportunities to collaborate.
- Increase tools to identify needs and connect people with appropriate supports for community-based and health system providers.

6 Initiatives

(Example: Luke's Legacy Memorial Society - Grief Program)

Suicide Prevention

People spoke openly about the deep impact of suicide on individuals, families, and communities. They shared that suicide is a serious and ongoing issue in their communities and that grief can be complex when the loss is from suicide. People felt there were not enough supports for them.

- Improve suicide prevention supports that build knowledge and reduce stigma.
- Increase availability of suicide intervention supports to reduce immediate risks and keep the person safe.
- Increase access to suicide recovery supports to support healing and reduce the chance of relapse.
- Increase grief and bereavement supports for families and communities.

1 Initiative

(Nova Scotia Health - Roots of Hope)

*These community ideas may not fully reflect what is currently happening in community, but were ideas shared during the engagements.

**Column 'C.13' indicates the number of initiatives funded under C.13 intended to address the need outlined in the row.

BETTER & EASIER ACCESS TO SUPPORTS

Need

Ideas for Path Forward*

C.13**

Information

People do not know what supports are available or how to access information about available supports.

- Increase reach of communication materials and availability.
- Increase internet access, including for local spaces.
- Make communication materials easier to understand.

0 Initiatives

Navigation

People need someone who can act as a guide to help them to understand what they are going through, figure out what resources are available, and help connect them to the right services.

- Expand communication and integration of existing supports, including navigation supports in key communities.

5 Initiatives
(Example: Youth Health Centres)

Transportation

Transportation is seen as one of the biggest barriers to accessing services. Without reliable transportation, families struggle to get to food banks, medical appointments, or jobs that help them stay healthy and housed.

- Explore existing transportation programs or funding to meet community needs.

2 Initiatives
(Example: The CCRCE - EB Chandler Jr High-Late Bus Pilot)

Local Supports

Services are not always available in every area, and people often have to travel to multiple places to get the support they need.

- Increase access in rural areas, including exploring temporary or pop-up service hubs or increased collaboration between existing mobile services and community organizations.

1 Initiative
(Nova Scotia Health - Northern Zone Adult Outreach Team)

*These community ideas may not fully reflect what is currently happening in community, but were ideas shared during the engagements.

**Column 'C.13' indicates the number of initiatives funded under C.13 intended to address the need outlined in the row.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Need

Ideas for Path Forward*

C.13**

Funding

Community organizations need flexible and sustainable funding that covers operational costs, helps staff thrive, and allows them to respond quickly when community needs change.

Create a new multi-year funding approach to:

- Allow for changes in services based on the needs of community.
- Promote collaboration.
- Cover fair wages, training, benefits, and common hidden costs like marketing.
- Support diverse approaches.

0 Initiatives

Staff & Volunteers

Community organizations are often asked to do more with fewer resources and feel like they are always in crisis mode. This leads to burnout, high staff turnover, and challenges finding and retaining volunteers.

- Increase supports for staff, including fair wages, stable employment, and mental health supports.
- Strengthen supports for volunteers, including training on topics such as trauma-informed care, grief, bereavement, and mental health.

12 Initiatives

(Example: Nova Scotia Health and Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care - Nova Scotia Grief Alliance Program)

Collaboration

Community organizations often find themselves working in silos, as they are stretched too thin and competing for scarce resources. Because of this, services are disconnected, people don't always know what's available, and there are missed opportunities to coordinate, collaborate, share resources, and refer people to the services they need.

- Increase collaboration between groups such as community organizations, government, and other system partners.
- Invest in role to understand the supports in community, provide navigation support for community organizations, and coordinate informal, grassroots-led gatherings for open, honest conversation.

0 Initiatives

Some ongoing projects involve government and community groups working together, as well as community groups building connections with each other. Some C.13 Initiatives touch on this goal, but none focus on it as their main purpose.

*These community ideas may not fully reflect what is currently happening in community, but were ideas shared during the engagements.

**Column 'C.13' indicates the number of initiatives funded under C.13 intended to address the need outlined in the row.

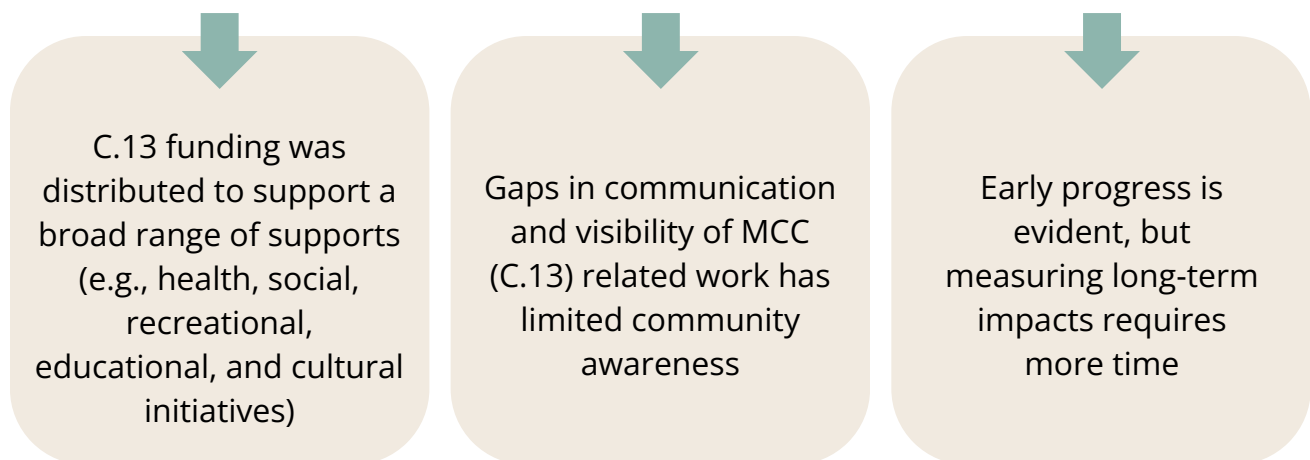
FINDINGS

The 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment shares community voices, along with information about how C.13 funding was distributed and what the early impacts of these initiatives have been on community and their needs. The findings section brings together both community input and data collected by each initiative to identify key insights and conclusions.

We identified six findings based directly on community voices:

-  Meeting basic needs is important for mental health and wellbeing
-  Stigma related to mental health is a significant barrier to access
-  Communities want less formal and more community-based programming
-  There are some key supports people feel are missing
-  C.13 Initiatives exist, but many individuals can't reach them
-  Community-based supports need more flexible funding

Three broad conclusions were also drawn from the insights:



LOOKING AHEAD

In the discussions held throughout 2025, people across the region shared their voices on what they believe is needed to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their communities. They offered reflections about how the community felt, what is working well, the perceived effects of the initiatives that are starting to respond to those needs, and important ideas for where additional attention is needed to improve outcomes.

Like the development of this document, the communities' ideas for the path forward and how the identified needs should be addressed requires collaboration - similar to that fostered in the year of engagements and making of this document.

The MCC Recommendation C.13 called for a needs and impact assessment for 2023, 2025, and 2028. The 2023 Needs and Impact Assessment designed a structured framework to support future assessments using pre-existing engagement data. This 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment focused on community voices and early outcomes. It found evidence that C.13 funding was used to support programs aligned with needs identified through the engagement process, helping to strengthen mental health, grief, bereavement, and overall community wellbeing where people live.

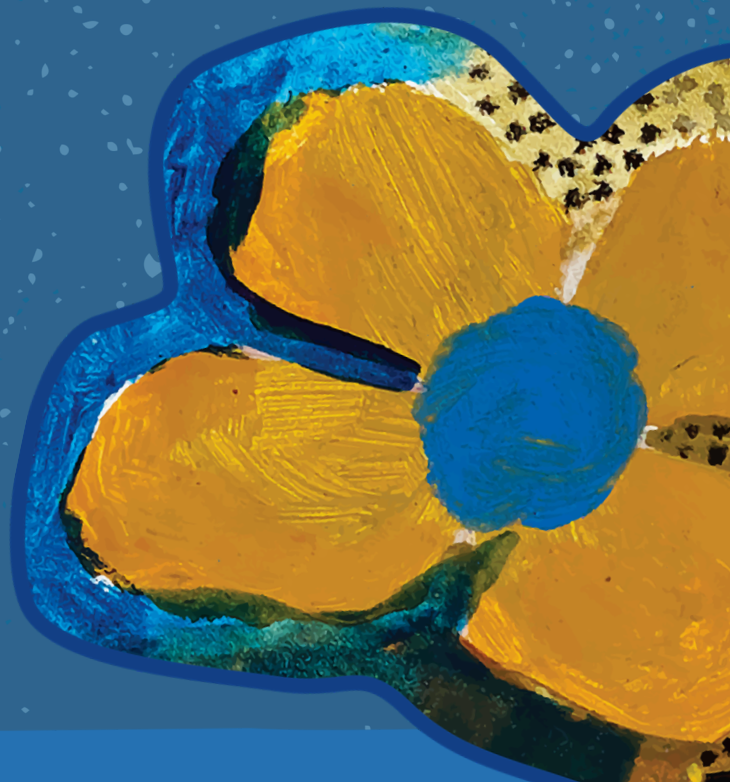
The 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment is an opportunity to leverage the previous assessments to understand the long-term impacts on community and the changing needs. The following provides guidance for the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment, based on learning from this work:

- Refine the framework developed in 2023* to help guide the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment.
- Use a common data collection template, start data collection early, and conduct direct engagement where possible.
- Support collaboration between organizations prior to the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment.
- Continue efforts to work collaboratively with Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities.

**For the 2023 Needs and Impact Assessment, a framework was developed to guide the needs and impact assessment. The framework was revised in 2025 and will likely need further revision in 2028.*

Community Voices

2025 Needs and Impact Assessment



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Davis Pier Consulting prepared this document in collaboration with the Office of Addictions and Mental Health, two needs and impact assessment working groups, and other key health partners and community organizations.

We want to express our gratitude to the two working groups and their members who helped bring this document together, including representatives from:

- Nova Scotia Health
- Community Health Board (Along the Shore)
- IWK
- Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association
- Nova Scotia Executive Council Office
- Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage
- Autumn House
- Municipality of the County of Colchester

We also want to thank the following community organizations that took the lead in bringing people together and guiding conversations in their communities:

- After Trauma Empowerment Network
- Truro Pride
- Luke's Legacy

Disclaimer

- Many other people and organizations not mentioned were consulted and engaged as part of the development of this document.
- The information and perspectives presented reflect what was shared by community members, what was observed by service providers, and what was measured by programs and services. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views or official positions of any one group or the Government of Nova Scotia.

INTRODUCTION



BACKGROUND

This document directly responds to Recommendation C.13 from the Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) Final Report, which calls for addressing the public health emergency that exists in Colchester, Cumberland, and (East) Hants Counties as a result of an unmet need for mental health, grief, and bereavement supports arising from the April 2020 mass casualty, and carrying out needs and impact assessments in 2023, 2025, and 2028.

Needs and impact assessments describe what people and communities identify they need, what supports or programs are in place, and how well those supports are able to meet those needs. They are often formal and technical documents.

Based on what we heard from community, the 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment looks a little different. It has the same goal: understanding needs and impacts, but it amplifies community voices, reflects lived realities, and describes what community believes ideas for the path forward could be. The 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment is a tool for all levels of government, organizations, and community to ensure decisions, programs, and policies build on what already exists, while addressing the gaps that remain.

It has been organized into three key sections:

- **Community Voices: 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment** provides a detailed overview of the key needs identified, examples of initiatives that are working towards addressing those needs, and ideas for what the path forward could be.
- **Appendix A - C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes** focuses specifically on initiatives supported through the \$18 million combined Federal and Provincial funding for mental health, grief, and bereavement initiatives.
- **Appendix B - Community Reflection Tools** include tools for designing and implementing programs that are more responsive, culturally grounded, and aligned with what community members said they want and need.

CONTEXT FOR INTERPRETING THE 2025 NEEDS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

As you read the 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment, please consider the following:

- The content in this document reflects the voices of community. The needs and ideas for the future are based on their experiences and thoughts. In some cases community members may not be fully aware of all the resources that are available in community (which is further highlighted below).
- Much of the work happening in community in response to C.13 received funding between 2023–2025 and therefore, the impacts of some of the initiatives may take time to be apparent.
- The impacted area of the province is vast and includes a mix of rural and urban centres and two Mi'kmaw communities. This means that the experiences, needs, and solutions of one community may look different than for others.
- Individuals from Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities were invited to participate in these discussions. While some of their needs may be reflected in this document, continued efforts to engage these communities is recommended.



JOURNEY HIGHLIGHTS

This timeline highlights some of the key events and activities that have shaped this document.

2023 – 2024

- The Mass Casualty Commission (MCC) Final Report and recommendations called for needs and impact assessments to be carried out in 2023, 2025, and 2028.
- Nova Scotia Health hosted sessions with community to learn about key issues affecting community wellness. For more information, visit Engage4Health.
- The outcome of the 2023 Needs and Impact Assessment was a framework on which to base future assessments. No new engagements were held in 2023 due to engagement fatigue in the community.
- The Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association (NSHPCA) was designated as the Community Grief and Emotional Wellness Hub Organization. For more information, please visit the Government of Nova Scotia website.

2024 – 2025

- Provincial government departments, health authorities, and community organizations received a combined total of \$18 million from the Federal and Provincial governments to support mental health, grief, and bereavement initiatives. This is referred to as C.13 funding in this document when referencing the funding, and C.13 Initiatives when referring to the initiatives.
- Sixty seven (67) initiatives were funded through the C.13 funding, including initiatives established by local community organizations. Examples of these initiatives and their impact can be found throughout this document, with a summary of all of the funded initiatives and their impact located in Appendix A - C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes.

MOVING FORWARD: 2025 – 2028

- A 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment is forthcoming and will deepen understanding, track progress, and continue to guide actions.

Note: This timeline is not meant to be a full summary of all actions taken in response to the Mass Casualty Commission Report.

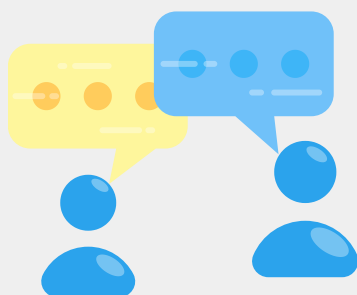
PROCESS

The following describes the process used to understand the mental health, grief, and bereavement needs of the community and the impact of existing supports.



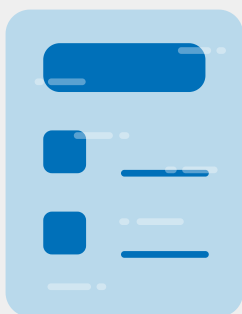
Learning from the past

- A detailed review of past conversations and surveys was completed to better understand what community has shared since 2023.
- Community leaders and government staff shared their knowledge about community needs and provided direction on the best ways to hear community voices.



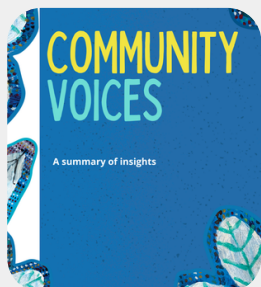
Listening to community

- Seven sessions with over 60 participants from community organizations and Nova Scotia Health were held by Davis Pier.
- Four community-led sessions were held by three community organizations, with over 40 community members in attendance.



Gathering supporting information

- Information was collected from the 67 community initiatives funded through C.13 to understand the impacts of the support available.



Community Voices: A Summary of Insights

- A draft of this document was created and shared with the people involved in the process, including community members and the working groups for their feedback.

KEY DEFINITIONS

The definitions below are used throughout the document and have come from multiple sources (including what people and community organizations expressed during this process), and are supported by the work of the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association and Nova Scotia Health.

While these definitions help ground this document, it is important to remember that some concepts - such as mental health, grief, and bereavement - are complex.

Mental Health, Grief, and Bereavement

Grief and bereavement affect our mental health and mental health shapes how we experience grief and bereavement. When someone is struggling with mental health or grief, it can affect many parts of daily life such as their ability to work or stay connected.



Wellbeing

Wellbeing refers to how people feel and function in their daily lives, including their ability to manage stress, maintain positive relationships, and experience a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Community has used emotional wellbeing, community wellbeing, and wellness to mean wellbeing.

Portapique vs. Portaupique

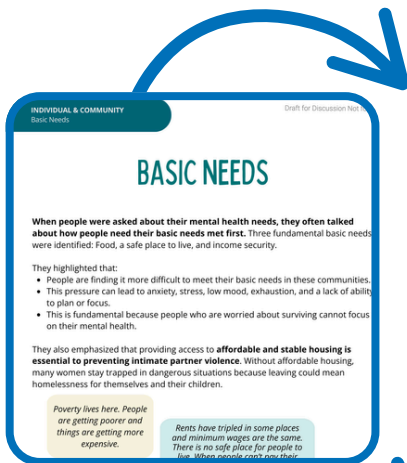
Portapique is the official name of the town. While Portaupique is used as the official name of the community centre located in the town.

Northern Zone

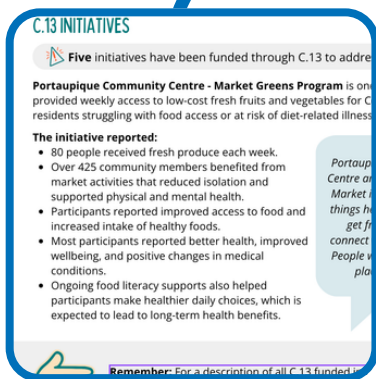
A term used by Nova Scotia Health, it includes Colchester, Cumberland, East Hants, and Pictou Counties.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document provides an overview of what community shared about their needs and the impacts of the services and supports available to them. Each section has:



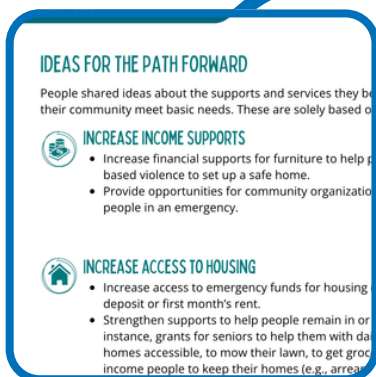
- **A summary of what community said** and quotes highlighting community voices, to ensure they remain central to this work. The quotes in this document reflect what participants said and felt, but in some cases, they are not exact word-for-word quotes to protect privacy or for brevity.



- **An example of a C.13 Initiative and the reported outcomes** is highlighted for each specific need. For each initiative it has been identified when the initiative received and used the funding, or if they were still in early stages of development or implementation at the time of this assessment. More details on all the initiatives can be found in Appendix A - C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes.
- **Other Initiatives** showcasing examples of supports that are meaningful to those living in the community not funded under the C.13 funding.



Mental health, grief, and bereavement needs cannot be solved with just one solution. They are more like a network, with many parts connected to each other. A need outlined in this document may be addressed through several initiatives, and one initiative may help address more than one need.



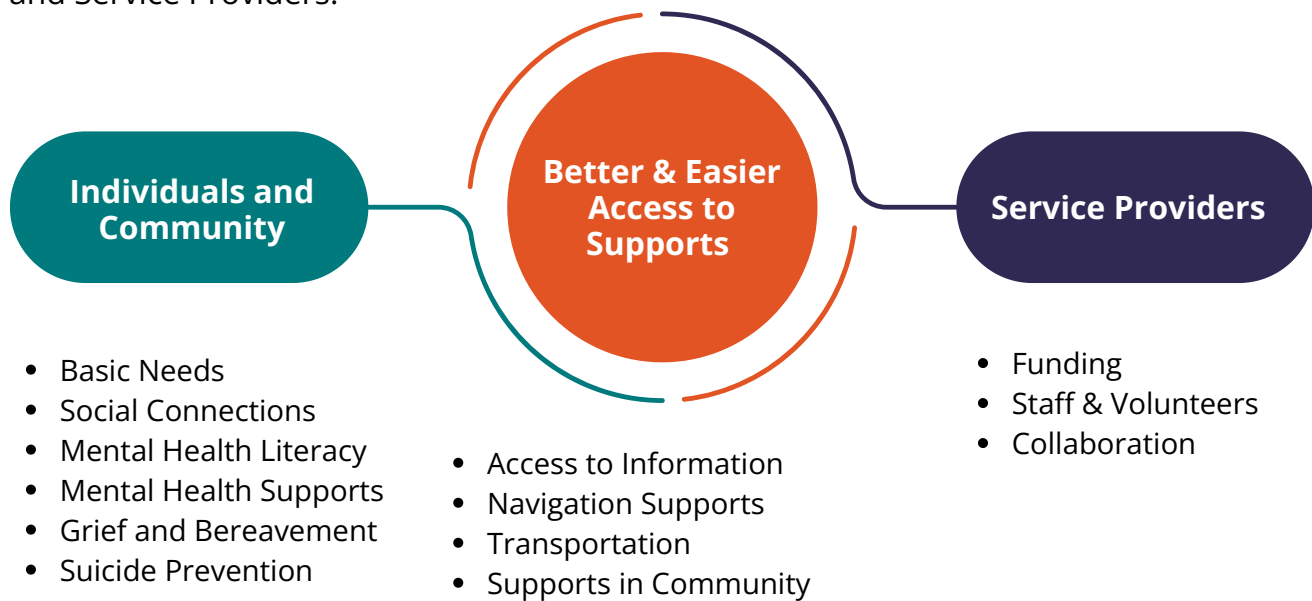
- **Ideas For the Path Forward** highlights ideas from community about what is needed to better support communities in the future. These are practical suggestions to help governments and organizations understand what kinds of programs, supports, and resources could meet community needs.

Note: Seeing the impact of programs and supports in community takes time (sometimes several years). Because many of these initiatives started in 2024-2025, what is reported in this document are the initiatives' outcomes (e.g., how many people received service, how they were helped, etc.).

INSIGHTS

OVERVIEW

This diagram shows a high-level summary of the needs organized into key themes that are explained in more detail on the following pages. The themes have been broken out into three categories: Individual and Community; Better and Easier Access to Supports; and Service Providers.



Throughout this document these symbols under each C.13 Initiative indicate:



They were in early stages of implementation or development.



The funding was used and when they reported early outcomes.

For a description of all C.13 Initiatives please visit [Appendix A - C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes.](#)

BASIC NEEDS

When people were asked about their mental health needs, they often spoke about how people require their basic needs to be met first. Three fundamental basic needs were identified: food, a safe place to live, and income security.

They highlighted that:

- People are finding it more difficult to meet their basic needs in these communities.
- This pressure can lead to anxiety, stress, low mood, exhaustion, and a lack of ability to plan or focus.
- People who are worried about surviving find it challenging to focus on addressing their mental health.

They also emphasized that providing access to affordable and stable housing is essential to preventing intimate partner violence. Without affordable housing, many women stay trapped in dangerous situations because leaving could mean homelessness for themselves and their children.

Poverty lives here. People are getting poorer and things are getting more expensive.

Rents have tripled in some places and minimum wages are the same. There is no safe place for people to live. When people can't pay their rent and buy food, this leads to stress.

We are seeing unprecedented domestic violence and women don't leave their violent relationships because they can't afford to live in a separate space.



C.13 INITIATIVES



Five initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

Portaupique Community Centre - Market Greens Program is one example. It provided weekly access to low-cost fresh fruits and vegetables for Cobequid Shore residents struggling with food access or at risk of diet-related illness.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025, and reported outcomes for February 2025 - March 2025:

- 80 people received fresh produce each week.
- Over 425 community members benefited from market activities that reduced isolation and supported physical and mental health.
- Participants reported improved access to food and increased intake of healthy foods.
- Most participants reported better health, improved wellbeing, and positive changes in medical conditions.
- Ongoing food literacy supports also helped participants make healthier daily choices, which is expected to lead to long-term health benefits.

Portaupique Community Centre and specifically the Market is doing amazing things here. It's a place to get fresh food and connect with community. People want to see more places like this.



For a description of all C.13 Initiatives please visit [Appendix A - C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes.](#)

OTHER INITIATIVES

People also spoke about other initiatives (not funded through C.13) that are helping their communities meet basic needs. Some include:

- **Colchester Food Sharing Network** provides food supports.
- **Anchor of Hope Food Pantry** provides food support in Debert.
- **Cumberland Homelessness and Housing Support Association** provides housing support to individuals experiencing homelessness.
- **Truro Housing Outreach Society** provides shelter and supports, such as help with damage deposits, budgeting, and bill payments.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they believe could further help their community meet basic needs. These are solely based on community feedback.



INCREASE INCOME SUPPORTS

- Increase financial supports for furniture to help people fleeing gender-based violence to set up a safe home.
- Provide opportunities for community organizations to financially support people in an emergency.



INCREASE ACCESS TO HOUSING

- Increase access to emergency funds for housing costs, such as a damage deposit or first month's rent.
- Strengthen supports to help people remain in or maintain their homes. For instance, grants for seniors to help them with daily tasks (e.g., to make their homes accessible, to mow their lawn, to get groceries); or supports for low-income people to keep their homes (e.g., arrear payments).
- Improve wait times for available housing supports such as rental and housing subsidies.
- Improve supports to address systemic housing barriers for Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities.
- Expand transitional and second-stage housing, especially for victims of intimate partner violence.
- Increase availability of youth-focused shelters.



INCREASE ACCESS TO FOOD

- Increase “give and take” food pantries for other communities like they have in Shubenacadie and Parrsboro.
- Create more community-based food services such as food banks, community gardens, gleaning programs, fridges, and community kitchens.
- Increase community meals and shared cooking programs.
- Increase access to food delivery for seniors.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

People spoke a lot about how disconnected they feel from their community and how hard it can be to feel connected without the right places and programs.

Specifically, they shared they feel:

- There are not enough public places, recreation, or social activities – and many are closing.
- There are no free or affordable gyms or exercise spaces, limiting their ability to participate in recreational activities and connect with one another.
- Places in Cumberland and Colchester exist, but they need to be upgraded and be better used (e.g., using schools more, upgrading the community centre).
- Youth and seniors are having a harder time feeling connected to their communities.

Even the gathering places we do have are closing. We lost our restaurant, grocery store, and garage. The community suppers aren't happening. Even the churches are closing. Those were the places people would gather and get a coffee and chat.

The community centre is barely hanging on and we have no money for upgrades. This means we can't host our programs there as easily.

We need more community events to create opportunities for connections, such as the Wallace community events.

There are few free options (if any) for low-cost health and fitness. For example, my neighbourhood gym is over \$100/month.



Youth

People shared that youth need more affordable and welcoming activities and spaces. They also noted that diverse youth, including racialized and newcomer youth, do not have the same access to social programs and opportunities to connect as other youth.

Research shows when young people have strong social connections and access to recreational activities, they are more likely to grow into healthy and resilient adults (Fenton et al., 2017; Gao et al., 2023; SickKids, 2021; Calhoun et al., 2022).



A lot of youth programs run during the day (after school or in summer), which doesn't work for parents who are working. We also have some recreational spaces, but the people running them aren't always welcoming to youth.

Seniors

People also said that seniors are feeling increasingly isolated. They do not have enough opportunities to socialize, stay active, or take part in recreational programs, and often do not know about the programs that exist in their communities or how to access them.

Research shows limited social connectedness in seniors can lead to poor physical and mental health as they age (Simionato, 2023).



Our seniors are not being looked after. We need more for them. A lot of seniors are alone. Seniors need to see each other in person and have physical connections.

C.13 INITIATIVES



25 initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

All Community

Examples include:

Canadian Mental Health Association and the Portauipque Community Centre - Walking Trail featured solar lighting, art installations, and the “Tree of Hope” story. The trail provided a reflective, accessible space for community connection and support for individual’s mental wellness.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- 57% of users reported feeling calmer, more relaxed, and inspired to practice self-care.
- 65% of users felt more connected to nature.

Ship's Company Theatre - Community Theatre Project created a community production of “The Hobbit” play, showcasing local talent in acting and design, while offering mentorship opportunities for community members in Parrsboro and surrounding areas.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes from the production held in June 2025:

- About 400 people benefited from the project.
- It helped build stronger connections and a more close-knit community.
- It renewed interest in community theatre, leading to more chances for people to connect and build arts skills.

People gained new acquaintances and newly formed friendships, and a sense of hope and positivity within the community.



North Shore Community Connections Society - Soup and Shop program

plans to host seasonal community events that offer free meals, grocery distribution, live music, dancing, and social activities. The events help increase support for seniors by providing access to food while also encouraging connection, wellbeing, and a sense of community.



The initiative received funding in 2025, was in early stages of implementation at the time of the assessment, and reported:

- They hosted two soup and shop events in November 2025.
- The group has partnered with local organizations such as Maggie's Place and Wallace Community Hall to help expand their reach.
- Two additional events took place in March 2026.

A total of nine initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address the need for social connection. See [Appendix A - C.13 Initiatives: Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes](#) for more details.

OTHER INITIATIVES

Community did highlight that events and gathering spaces arranged by community have made a real impact on their wellbeing. For instance:

- **Sipekne'katik Health Centre's** programming (see quote).
- **Racial Justice Action Committee**, a youth-led group based in Wagobagitik (Truro, NS) brought together racialized youth to have open and honest conversations about race, identity, and community. Community members shared that when it existed it helped youth build connections, feel a stronger sense of belonging, and develop trust.

They have some great programs in Sipekne'katik that are offered by the Health Centre. We are going to the movies tomorrow night with other seniors. We go bowling, apple picking. You get entertainment, social connection, it is so good for your mental health. They have a cooking program for teens. They then take it and feed the community or freeze it for the food bank. It teaches teens life skills and also helping others and sharing the meal.



IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help their community, these ideas included:



CREATE SAFE AND NON-INSTITUTIONAL SPACES TO GATHER

- Create more gathering spaces for groups to share stories and feel welcome. This includes spaces like coffee shops, libraries, and grocery stores for youth and seniors to get together.



INCREASE COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

- Increase access to events that use approaches such as art, music, nature-based healing, and gathering around food (e.g., tea socials).
- Build more activities for seniors, such as going to the movies, fishing, apple picking, and programs such as Earth Angels, where younger people visit and spend time with seniors.



INCREASE LOW-COST OR FREE PRACTICAL PROGRAMMING

- Increase low-cost programming for youth to build youth skills (e.g., teaching youth how to cook or sew).
- Increase programming for seniors including programs that teach seniors how to use a mobile phone and the internet; that have someone visit seniors in their communities or homes; and that support seniors or people with diverse abilities that live alone.



BUILD ACTIVE LIVING SPACES AND DROP-IN SPACES

- Build awareness and access to outdoor trails, health and fitness facilities, and running groups.
- Improve drop-in centre hours including flexible hours during evenings and weekends.



CREATE PEER AND MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- Create opportunities that empower youth to contribute, develop leadership skills, and feel connected to their communities.
- Create opportunities that allow seniors to mentor and share their knowledge (e.g., seniors that have gardening skills teaching younger generations).

MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

People said mental health support often comes too late, usually when someone is already in crisis. People emphasized that community needs more proactive mental health literacy to:

- Help understand what mental health is, how to take care of it, how to recognize challenges early, and how and when to reach out for help.
- Help people understand addictions challenges and substance use supports.
- Help children and youth understand their emotions, gain coping skills, and be able to talk about their mental health.

People also identified that stigma was a significant issue in all communities that prevent people from accessing support. People expressed that they need access to more information that will help to reduce stigma around mental health challenges.



From a rural perspective, there's a lot of stigma around accessing services, especially for boys, teenagers, and men. Even if you get the communication out there, a lot of people don't access services they could benefit from because of that stigma. If the word mental health and addictions is on the poster, people won't come. They don't want others to think they're crazy.

Youth need help understanding what addiction and mental health look like and how that ball gets started. But, after grade nine, there is nothing that touches on healthy living.

A lot of the things that are available are reactionary. When you get to the point when you reach out, it is too late... and then you get put on a wait list. Supports need to be proactive. What are the things that we can do to help build that resilience, build those services and supports in a proactive way.

C.13 INITIATIVES



Five initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

All Community

One of the initiatives, **Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce - Wellness Resource Project** - offered wellness resources including a Mental Health and Wellness Guide and workshops for local business owners and teams, focusing on topics such as mental health, stress management, and other mental health needs.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- 190+ people registered for mental health events.
- 300 Health and Wellness Guides printed and shared online.
- The social media campaign garnered 98,441 views.
- 84% of survey respondents worried about their mental health with only 9% rating their overall wellness as “very well” - highlighting the continued need to focus on mental health literacy supports and services for adults.

Addressing Mental Health Literacy

Efforts are being made to address mental health literacy needs through a number of other initiatives including:

- **Mass Casualty Commission Report Recommendation C.11**, which focuses on helping people better understand grief, loss, trauma, and how to build resilience.
- **Nova Scotia Health launched the Life Changes** mental health literacy public campaign and website that aimed to enhance knowledge and build awareness on the topic.
- **Many other C.13 Initiatives** (not listed above) also named mental health literacy as a secondary program priority of their work.
- **Nova Scotia Health Public Health** is doing work to increase mental health literacy.
- **The Community Grief and Emotional Wellness Hub** is doing work to increase grief literacy through various campaigns (visit <https://nshpca.ca/campaigns/>).

Even with these efforts, community members clearly said that more support is still needed. This may mean the messages are not reaching enough people, connecting with people in meaningful ways, or need more time and follow-up before real change is seen.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help, these include the following:



INCREASE SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR ALL AGES

- Build supports that focus on social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness, self-esteem, emotional regulation, coping skills, and resilience.
- Create training that helps people understand their feelings, what mental health is, and how it shows up in everyday life.
- Increase Mental Health First Aid Training to help people recognize when someone may be struggling and know how to offer support.



INCREASE STIGMA PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

- Increase programs that help people understand stigma and discrimination and reduce feelings of shame and blame, including an increase in supports for parents in teaching children about stigma.
- Introduce public campaigns where well-known or trusted public figures share their mental health experiences to help normalize and reduce stigma.
- Increase access to mental health information and support offered through creative activities (such as crafts, art, or textile workshops), rather than formal education.



INTRODUCE EARLY AND CONTINUE BEYOND GRADE NINE

- Introduce lessons on emotional regulation, equity, diversity, self-worth, coping skills, and other basic mental health skills early in school (as part of the regular school curriculum).
- Enhance trainings that teach youth what addiction and mental health challenges look like and how these issues can develop over time.
- Extend healthy living classes after grade nine as that's when students say they need it most.



EXAMINE COMMUNITY PERCEPTION GAP IN MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

- Review communication channels, language, and messaging clarity.
- Identify practical, cultural, and emotional access barriers.
- Examine cultural relevance and co-design a plan to address gaps with communities.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Rather than suggesting specific programs, community emphasized existing mental health supports often do not meet people's needs. People explained that:

- They didn't know where to go when they needed help – they felt that there is a need for locally based 24/7 or 1-800 number to call to get support. This would ensure they get help from people in their community that they can trust.
- They lack services in remote and rural communities.
- The existing services are limited, have long wait times, and do not provide the level of support people need.
- There are no supports that help men with their mental health and reduce the stigma that limits men's ability to access mental health services.
- The services they did know about felt formal and not offered by people they trusted.

There is not enough mental health services out there – you would not have these problems if you had your mental health dealt with – we need more access to mental health supports.

We don't have the spaces or supports for men. If we ignore the problems men have, we're not fixing the issue. We need more programs for men, but mental health programs tend to have low participation because there's a lot of stigma around men's mental health.



Research shows that...

- People living in rural and remote areas often experience poorer mental and physical health outcomes, shorter lifespans, and significantly higher rates of suicide, particularly among youth (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2025).
- Men face higher stigma around mental health, have less mental health knowledge, and are less likely to use services (Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2021; Canadian Men's Health Foundation, 2025).



C. 13 INITIATIVES



Five initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

One of the initiatives is **After Trauma Empowerment Network (ATEN) - Counselling Supports**, which provided free 1:1 counselling services to individuals. They also held seniors and youth groups, where they could participate in healthy living activities and wellbeing workshops.



The initiative received funding in 2023-2024 and reported outcomes in 2024:

- The program provided supports to over 400 community members and over 80 individuals accessed the trauma informed counselling in 2023-2024.

ATEN has been tremendous, you are going to be supported. I have learned so many new things, day to day you get a toolkit, and you get encouragement.



Note: While initiatives funded under C.13 generally focus on access to mental health for all genders, there are no C.13 Initiatives that exclusively focus on men's mental health.

OTHER INITIATIVES

- **The Anchor Youth Space** (one of the Integrated Youth Services Sites) is a one-stop hub for youth and their caregivers in Cumberland County. Services include counselling, peer support, outreach, and programs.
- **SchoolsPlus** brings together professionals and others to help children, youth and their families overcome barriers and navigate services.
- **The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) weekly Thursday lunches** connects community members to mental health support in a casual setting, helping reduce stigma by not labeling it as a "mental health" program.
- **The New Directions Program** offered by the Cumberland County Transition House Association (also known as Autumn House) in Amherst, provides peer support groups, counselling, and a variety of other support services to men.
- **The Men's Sheds** is a national grassroots program that operates locally across communities. They often resemble a backyard workshop where men gather to work on hands-on projects, share skills, and contribute to their community. A Men's Shed Program is running in Debert.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help. These ideas included:



INCREASE ACCESS TO COUNSELLING IN LOCAL SPACES

- Create a locally based 24/7 line that people can call to get access to mental health supports.
- Offer greater access to free, long-term, and low-barrier counselling (e.g., offering more than a one-time or a small number of sessions).
- Offer more counselling in local spaces that people regularly access (e.g., farmers markets), communal settings or trusted locations (e.g., cafes, community centres, in people's homes) and places where people are already getting support (e.g., hospice and shelters).



INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS OFFERED BY TRUSTED PEOPLE

- Increase mental health supports delivered by people who are familiar, who are part of the community, and who people know and trust.
- Offer more training, compensation, and support (including non-financial support) for community members that provide peer support.
- Create peer-based supports for men's mental health and wellness.



OFFER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS THROUGH LESS CLINICAL SETTINGS

- Offer supports that address wellbeing, emotional health, and mental health without using clinical or formal terms (e.g., mental health), helping to reduce stigma and encourage more people to take part.
- Offer supports for men in particular, for topics such as stress, emotions, and coping skills within social programs such as jam sessions, Men's Shed programs, and other group activities.

A note about language: During engagements, community members often referred to the term clinical to describe supports and communication that felt too technical, medical, or formal. This can feel confusing and intimidating as it doesn't match how they describe their own feelings (e.g., "I'm exhausted and overwhelmed" vs. "I'm experiencing depressive symptoms").

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Grief is a normal part of life, but the recent pandemic and multiple tragedies in Nova Scotia have increased the need for grief and bereavement support. Many people are now at greater risk of experiencing more complex and difficult grief.

During community engagements for this assessment, as well as the needs assessment completed by the Community Grief and Emotional Wellness Hub*, community highlighted the need for grief and bereavement supports, that are:

- Easy to access, with as few barriers as possible.
- Available when people need it, especially when experiencing grief and loss.
- Provided by trained community members (i.e., it does not always need professional or clinical services).
- Offered in partnership with other organizations, ensuring people have access to professional or clinical when needed (e.g., social worker).
- Safe, welcoming, and open, where people feel comfortable sharing their grief.
- Available for different groups, such as people with disabilities, chronic illnesses, youth, men, caregivers, and parents.
- Responsive to specific types of grief, including MAID and drug poisoning loss.
- Culturally appropriate and inclusive.
- Built on caring connections, such as family, friends, neighbours, and Elders.
- Aware of intergenerational trauma and access barriers.

People forget or don't know that grief does feel like crap. You can feel that way. You are allowed to feel that way and it's gonna last for a bit. And it's not necessarily a clinical or pathological issue. It's something that we all go through that we do have to deal with and it's not necessarily something that we need clinical supports with. Those are emotions that people need to have. They've just had significant losses.



*The Community Grief and Emotional Wellness Hub is led by Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care. For more information on their Needs Assessment report, please see the reference page and Suen, K. 2025.

C.13 INITIATIVES



Six initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

Examples of the funded initiatives include:

Nova Scotia Health - Grief Program in Northern Zone provided grief and bereavement support, including grief programming, education, case coordination, and training opportunities for community members.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes for April 2025 - September 2025:

- The program helped coordinate care for 300 people.
- It hosted more than 10 community events that reached nearly 1,200 participants.

Wonderful, open shared discussions. I was grateful to hear individual experiences of grief. The willingness of others to share so much. I enjoyed the group session. I very much enjoyed this time listening to each of the participants share their stories and feelings.

.....

Luke's Legacy Memorial Society - Grief Program was an eight-week program designed for grade seven to nine students who had experienced loss. It provided a space for kids to organically share their experiences and work through grief and trauma connected to an art activity.



The initiative was funded between 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in May 2025 for the eight-week program:

- Overall feedback was positive and the program created a safe place where children felt supported.
- Participants felt they developed a better understanding of grief expression, connection with others, and more confidence in using healthy ways to express their grief.
- The classes fostered greater connections and provided tools for remembrance.
- Many participants reported feeling more connected to others who were also grieving.
- Art making – especially the t-shirt activity – proved to be a powerful tool for emotional processing and honouring lost loved ones.

OTHER INITIATIVES

- **Peer Outreach Support Services & Education (POSSE Project)** offers a volunteer-run, peer-led support group for youth experiencing grief.
- **Grief yoga through the Lotus Centre** is a gentle practice that uses simple movement and breathing to help people cope with loss. It offers a calm, supportive space to release stress and emotions.
- **Death cafes** are informal gatherings where people come together to talk openly about death and dying.

***Grief yoga** offered by the Lotus Centre has really helped people process their grief. It is done in a way that you did not realize you were receiving support.*

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

During the community engagement sessions, people shared more about their experiences with grief and the needs of community rather than “Ideas for the Path Forward”. Instead, please find ideas for the path forward presented by the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association and Nova Scotia Health, through the Knowledge Collaborative outlined below:



ENHANCE KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS

- Continue to build grief literacy at all levels – individuals to professionals.
- Enhance knowledge and skills related to grief for peers, Elders, volunteers, and people with lived experience to provide grief support alongside professional services.



INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT SUPPORTS

- Enhance access to a broad range of grief supports through free or low-cost supports that do not require referrals, are easy to find and join (in-person, phone, and online options), and respond to different types of loss.
- Increase supports offered at different times and in flexible ways (drop-in, evenings, weekends, short-notice support).



INCREASE COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIP

- Increase opportunities to collaborate, form deep connections, and partnerships across programs and sectors.



IMPROVE CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY-BASED AND HEALTH PROVIDERS

- Equip community-based and health system providers to identify needs, enhance their skills, and connect people with the appropriate support.

Note: Work is ongoing by multiple organizations to develop communications materials related to grief and bereavement, including the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association and the Nova Scotia Health Palliative Care Network.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

People spoke openly about the deep impact of suicide on individuals, families, and communities.

They shared that:

- Suicide is a serious and ongoing issue in their communities.
- There is a need for more support for suicide prevention – immediately for those who experience suicide loss and for those who are grieving a suicide loss.
- Some were not aware of what local services existed for suicide prevention or suicide loss. Others felt that even when services exist there are not enough supports available for people who need them. Others felt stigma prevented people from reaching out to the supports available.

There is nothing in the system to support suicide loss. There is nothing in the system that supports peer support. There's nothing in the system for caregivers to understand how they support their loved ones in their homes. There is no education for suicide prevention for the community that's offered in a formal way.

There is no culturally appropriate suicide prevention life promotion work happening in the system. So those are gaps within the system. There is nothing happening specifically for people to reach out to.



Data shows that...

- Between January 2023 and September 2024, 23% of texts and 8% of counselling services received by Kids Help Phone from Nova Scotia were related to suicide (Kids Help Phone, 2025).
- Men have higher suicide rates than women, with three in four suicide deaths in Canada being men (Statistics Canada, 2021).



C.13 INITIATIVES



One initiative has been funded through C.13 to address this need.

Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Roots of Hope, an initiative in collaboration with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, led community based programs that aimed at reducing the impacts of suicide on communities. Suicide prevention and risk reduction interventions were implemented based on community expertise that were tailored to the local context. This program expanded to Colchester, (East) Hants, Pictou, and Cumberland Counties.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes for April 2025 - September 2025:

- The program has offered specialized supports such as suicide loss support groups and restorative justice circles.
- At the time of this assessment, 13 education sessions have been delivered in the community, and program staff have regularly attended or hosted public awareness events.



I have a brother who came to me several years ago in a complete mental health crisis... It took me two days of constant care, talk and convincing to get him to let me take him to the hospital for help. If I had received this training then, it would have made it less scary for me. I believe continuing the conversations and training in community about suicide, and providing resources regarding mental health would be helpful.



Note: Other C.13 Initiatives and supports offered through Nova Scotia Health & IWK aim to prevent suicide and address suicide loss as part of their programs – although not a main focus. Immediate supports exist through the 988 Suicide Helpline and the Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line. However, many community members still felt uncertain about where to go to get help, believing supports are not available.

Note: Roots of Hope is an initiative that was expanded to support Cumberland, Colchester, and (East) Hants Counties as part of the response to C.13, however, the program received funding through another source, not the C.13 funding.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help. These ideas included:



IMPROVE SUICIDE PREVENTION SUPPORTS

- Improve supports that help individuals before they reach a crisis point and reduce the risk of a life-threatening event.
- Improve supports to help families and communities build knowledge, reduce stigma, and improve confidence in helping.



INCREASE SUICIDE INTERVENTION SUPPORTS

- Increase programs that reduce immediate risks by stabilizing, de-escalating, and keeping the person safe.
- Enhance access to supports that provide immediate emotional and practical guidance for families and close networks so they can help safely.
- Increase access to suicide intervention training for volunteer firefighters.



INCREASE SUICIDE RECOVERY SUPPORTS

- Increase supports for the person to support healing and reduce the chance of relapse and recurrence.
- Create more supports for families and communities that address validating feelings, reduce isolation, and address trauma.



INCREASE SUICIDE GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT SUPPORTS

- Increase access to supports for families and communities when a suicide happens. Grief can be especially complex when the loss is from suicide, bringing feelings of guilt, anger, confusion, or stigma.
- Increase access to and awareness building for immediate supports once suicide is experienced, including immediate access to supports for families and other needed resources such as cleaning services.

INFORMATION

Many people said they do not know what supports are available or how to access help. At first, many believed there were no services at all. As conversations continued, it became clear that some services do exist but are not reaching people in ways that are easy for them to find or access.

Community shared that:

- Information about available supports is hard to find and understand. This is especially true for newcomers, people with disabilities, and people who have limited digital literacy.
- When resources exist, many people don't know about them or don't see them. Information should be made easy to find in everyday places like libraries, community centres, grocery stores, clinics, and online spaces people already use.
- It's important to use language that feels right for different ages, cultures, and communities.
- When community organizations rely entirely on digital formats, such as websites and Facebook, many people may miss information, especially seniors, low-income families, and people in rural areas who have limited or unreliable internet or find technology hard to use.
- Internet access is not consistently available across rural areas. Improving internet access and digital literacy is becoming more important as information continues to go online.



We have all these great services, but we don't know how to use them or how to see information about what is available.

I know people have tried their best to make forms, mental health tools, and resources as clear and concise as possible, but communication on how to access supports, how to sign up, who is eligible, still ends up being very clinical formal in a way that is not easy to sign-up.



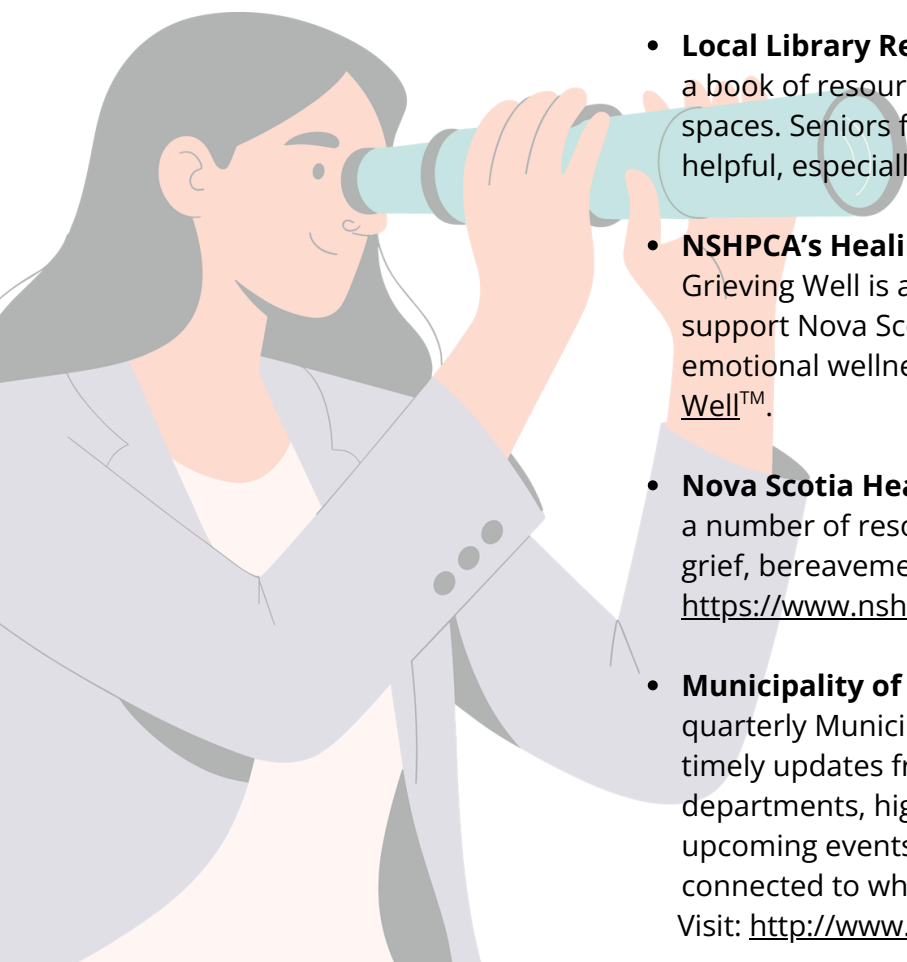
C.13 INITIATIVES

No C.13 Initiatives are focused directly on enhancing access to information of existing initiatives.

OTHER INITIATIVES

During the community conversations, it became clear that many were unaware of the supports available or who to turn to for access to this information. A select few did highlight there are places in the community where you can find a list of available resources and get access to the information you are looking for. For example:

- **211:** A 24/7 information service that connects people with available programs in their community. We heard from community members how useful 211 can be to help them find what they need. People can call and there is someone to try and help you. Visit <https://ns.211.ca>
- **Local Library Resource Books:** Many local libraries have a book of resources with local programs, services, and spaces. Seniors found certain resources particularly helpful, especially those provided as physical binders.
- **NSHPCA's Healing Pathways - Grieving Well App:** Grieving Well is a new online resource designed to support Nova Scotians as they navigate grief and emotional wellness. Visit: [Healing Pathways - Grieving Well™](#).
- **Nova Scotia Health Resources:** Nova Scotia Health has a number of resources available on their website about grief, bereavement, trauma and resiliency. Visit: <https://www.nshealth.ca/lifechanges#bereavement>.
- **Municipality of Colchester Resource Newsletter:** The quarterly Municipality of Colchester newsletters share timely updates from the mayor and municipal departments, highlighting local priorities, services, and upcoming events, helping residents stay informed and connected to what's happening in their community. Visit: <http://www.colchester.ca/>



IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help. These ideas included:



INCREASE REACH

- Use a mix of formats (paper-based and digital) so that people can find information in the way that works best for them.
- Explore alternatives to reach people who rely on verbal or community-based communication (e.g., word of mouth, trusted local leaders).
- Make materials available in places people already go to (e.g., libraries, clinics, food banks, community centres, schools).



INCREASE INTERNET ACCESS

- Offer free internet access at community organizations so residents can connect in safe and trusted spaces.
- Expand affordable internet plans, improve rural network coverage, and ensure everyone has reliable digital access.



MAKE COMMUNICATION MATERIALS EASIER TO UNDERSTAND

- Use plain language, so everyone can understand what is being said.
- Offer information in multiple languages, so people who speak different languages can access it.
- Offer clear contact information and next steps.



If we can't explain it to a five-year-old, it shouldn't be on there.



We need a community hall to set up internet and computers – if you could have sessions on how to use your cell phone or internet that would be very helpful to find what's out there.

NAVIGATION

People said they need someone who can act as a guide to help them to understand what they are going through, figure out what resources are available, and help connect them to the right services. People said knowing what supports are available in the community isn't always enough.

People shared some navigation support exists, and in those cases, navigation is working well. Navigators are showing up in communities in ways that feel real and meaningful. These navigators make it easier for people to reach out for help.

At the same time, people were clear that more navigation support is needed. Community said navigators should be able to connect people to services, provide information about what to expect from the service, and help manage expectations.

One clear distinction that community members felt, is that like many other services, having someone embedded in community and offering navigational support would make the services easier to access. In the absence of this, people often turn to community service providers and library staff to fill the gaps. This can be challenging for staff who are not equipped or compensated to take on this role.

When people break their arm, they know they go to a doctor... but with mental health, it's not so transparent. It's not so easy to get in.

A lot of people have no idea where to go. We need community navigator roles...put a face to it instead of online and calls.



C. 13 INITIATIVES



Five initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

For example, **Youth Health Centres (YHCs)*** in the Northern Zone worked to create safe and inclusive spaces in schools. These spaces offered a range of supports including navigation and referral services related to health, mental health, grief, and bereavement.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes for September 2024 - September 2025:

- The program facilitated over 640 referrals and nearly 3,500 supportive conversations.
- Nearly 9,000 students used YHCs as a safe space.
- Over 8,000 students participated in YHC events and programs.
- Recruitment challenges for the YHC Coordinator position were experienced.



Note: While a number of C.13 Initiatives include the provision of navigation support, many community members were unaware of these supports. This may mean the existing services require greater awareness building or integration with existing community partners.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help. These ideas included:



EXPAND COMMUNICATION AND INTEGRATION OF EXISTING SUPPORTS

- Provide collaboration opportunities with existing navigation services and community organizations to increase awareness and use.
- Increase communication about existing navigation supports with a focus on reaching organizations working directly with community.
- Identify communities where navigation supports are minimal and focus expansion in these areas.

*YHCs are designated youth-friendly spaces in high schools where youth can connect and access health services. Integrated Youth Services (IYS) are hubs where youth can access mental health, primary care, and social supports.

TRANSPORTATION

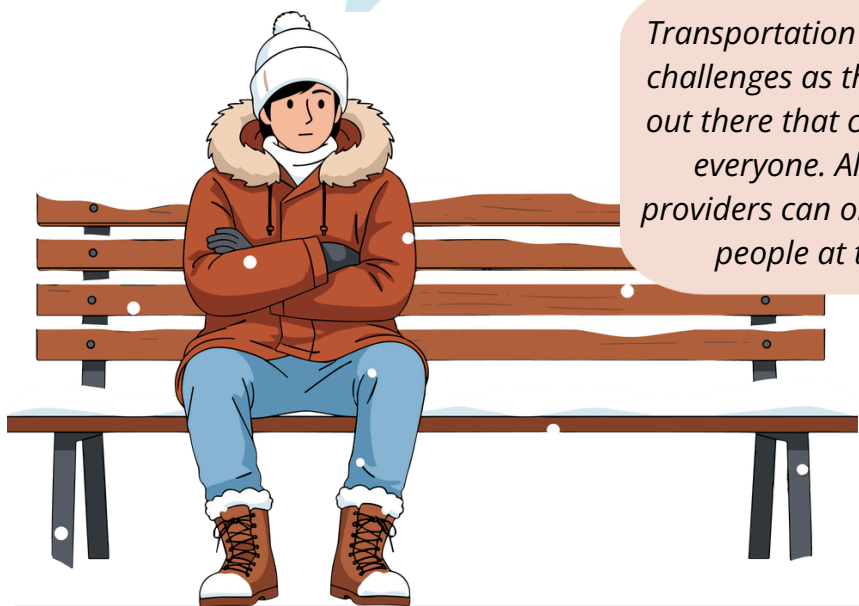
People described transportation as one of the biggest barriers to accessing the services and supports they need. Without reliable transportation, families struggle to get to food banks, medical appointments, or jobs that help them stay healthy and housed. For historically underserved groups, such as queer people in rural communities, transportation challenges are made even harder by financial barriers. While transportation supports exist in these communities, they are at maximum usage and are experiencing increasing demand pressures.

People have to walk to places which leads them to miss appointments. They don't have anyone to take them.

Transportation is bad, no public transport, people with disabilities struggle to get around especially outside of Truro.

Transportation is needed for things beyond healthcare appointments. Getting to employment is also helpful. It keeps people employed and improves their access to mental health services and other supports.

Transportation will always have its challenges as there is not a system out there that can be everything to everyone. All transportation providers can only pick up so many people at the same time.



C.13 INITIATIVES



Two initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

For example, **Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) – EB Chandler Jr High - Late Bus Pilot Project** received funding to provide transportation support to youth participating in school and community-based after school activities.



The initiative received funding in 2025 and was in early stages of implementation at the time of the assessment.

The program is working to reduce barriers to participation and reduce social isolation among students, particularly in rural communities.

Funding will be used to launch a Late Bus Pilot at three to four select schools based on community child poverty rates. The program also requested additional funding to expand to two additional schools.

OTHER INITIATIVES

- **Colchester Transportation Cooperative Limited (CTCL)** serves those who don't have transportation for essentials such as groceries, medical appointments, social connections, shopping, and recreation. The program also offers fare subsidies and is exploring expanding routes and services in the coming years.
- **Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS)** provides accessible transportation to all residents of Cumberland County for medical appointments and programs, social events, and other essential services. It is a pre-booked service requiring 24-hours notice. They also offer subsidies for fares.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared about what they felt could further help:



INCREASE TRANSPORTATION SUPPORT

- Explore how to improve existing transportation programs and opportunities that could meet current demand.

LOCAL SUPPORTS

People shared services are not available in every area and people often have to travel to multiple places to get the support they need. Specifically, they shared:

- Many programs are based in larger communities (e.g., Truro and Amherst), making access harder for rural communities.
- People need services closer to home and, when possible, in one central place.
- There is a need for more rural service hubs where people can access multiple supports, such as food programs and mental health services.
- There is also a need for mobile services that still feel like familiar community spaces, where trust and relationships make it easier for people to seek help.
- Most importantly, community identified that it takes time for people to feel comfortable, so even if uptake is low, if services continue to come, people will eventually show up.

We need services to go into community, go where people are. In the rural communities the programs that do the best are the ones that are offered directly in the community and people can find multiple services.

There needs to be in every rural area a centralized services place where people can go and access all their services (food networks, mental health, etc.). It feels like you are going into a comfortable community space. And from there, they can be connected to other services.



Data shows that...

- Kids Help Phone data between January 2023 to September 2025 identified Hants, Colchester, and Cumberland Counties in the top five counties in Nova Scotia with an unbalanced supply and demand for mental health services, meaning the demand for mental health services in these areas is greater than the services available.

C.13 INITIATIVES



One initiative has been funded through C.13 to address this need.

Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions Program - Northern Zone

Mental Health and Addictions Adult Outreach Team offered a number of services to the community including navigation support and referrals to appropriate services within the Mental Health and Addictions Program and community.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in September 2025:

- Since fall 2023, the program provided individual support and facilitated referrals to higher levels of care.
- It raised awareness to promote mental wellness and wellbeing in the region.

OTHER INITIATIVES

There is an Anchor Youth Space (one of the Integrated Youth Services sites) located in Amherst. The site provides a safe place for youth to get support for mental health issues, addictions, and other needs. The goal is to connect youth and their caregivers with the right services, at the right time, and close to home.



IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the supports and services they felt could further help:



INCREASE ACCESS IN RURAL AREAS

- Explore pop-up hubs in rural communities where individuals can access needed supports in one place.
- Increase collaboration between existing mobile services and community organizations to meet people where they are and enhance uptake.

FUNDING

Community organizations identified a need for flexible and sustainable funding that covers operational costs, helps staff thrive, and allows them to respond quickly when community needs change. Funding is essential for organizations and allows them to address the needs community is experiencing. Organizations describe operating year-to-year, never sure if they will survive once a grant ends.

Community organizations shared that often funding support:

- Is project based – when the funding ends, projects cannot continue as new funding usually focuses on new initiatives rather than existing programs.
- Is rarely multi-year or core funding.
- Rarely covers aspects beyond service delivery, such as advertising, transportation, governance, volunteer coordination, and evaluation.
- Leads to community organizations competing with each other for the same funding.
- Tends to go to the largest, most established organizations.
- Requires significant reporting which is an administrative burden.
- Does not support new approaches to community challenges—especially those that don't fit within a traditional, westernized mindset.
- Does not enable community organizations to address emerging community needs when the context changes or the needs of community change.

These challenges have led organizations to be adaptable and resilient. They adjust quickly, collaborate where they can, and keep meeting needs even when resources fall short. But this flexibility comes at a cost. Organizations feel they are being asked to solve big community problems with the least amount of resources.



The non-profit sector is expected to do the meaningful work. We are being asked to solve the problems with the least resources. Non-profits ask themselves: Am I going to survive?

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about what they felt funding could look like in order to help address the challenges organizations are experiencing:



CREATE A NEW APPROACH TO FUNDING

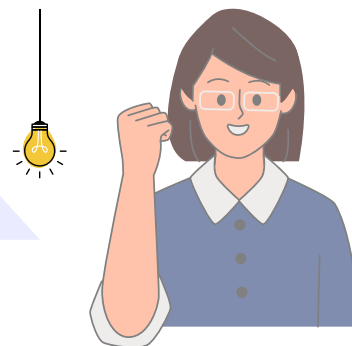
Community is asking for a new approach to funding that:

- Is multi-year.
- Allows them to shift the services they are offering based on the needs of community.
- Promotes collaboration/pooling resources among several organizations.

This could include:

- Offering multi-year grants to networks or coalitions of organizations rather than single groups.
- Allowing funds to be shared or re-allocated among partners as community needs shift.
- Covering the costs of collaboration itself (legal agreements, shared evaluation, facilitation, governance training, and technology platforms that make it easier for multiple organizations to plan and report together).
- Comes with a benchmark or framework that focuses on funding community outcomes (e.g., reducing homelessness in a region).
- Covers fair wages, training, and benefits so organizations can attract and keep skilled staff.
- Covers common hidden costs such as marketing, brand costs, awareness raising, governance, volunteers, and impact measurement.
- Supports investments in technology, evaluation, and leadership development to strengthen organizations long-term.
- Supports a diversity of approaches that reflect the full range of voices and experiences that make up Nova Scotia.
- Allows for organizations to help support or incubate smaller organizations for administrative purposes.

We need funding models that support new and different ways of approaching community problems, even when they fall outside conventional Western ways of thinking about solutions.



STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Relying on short-term funding makes it hard to keep staff, offer fair pay, and provide stable jobs. This, in combination with the complex and challenging working environment, means many organizations face staff shortages and struggle to meet staff needs. Representatives from community organizations shared they are often asked to do more with fewer resources and feel like they are always in crisis mode. This leads to burnout, high staff turnover, and mental health challenges, which can weaken the services communities depend on.

Volunteers are essential to many organizations' service delivery models. However, many identified how it is becoming more challenging to find and retain volunteers. This is because existing volunteers are aging out and require more supports, as a result it is becoming harder to find new ones since people can't give as much of their time for free to organizations. The cost of recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers is also increasingly challenging for organizations. All this has led to a significant shortage of volunteers.

I've had two staff at risk of having their power turned off and we have people making what they made 10 years ago. Now, we have staff living in poverty.

The referrals and clients that are coming in are more complex than ever. We have service providers who are stressed. People in front line and leadership are moving. We are in a crisis. It makes sense to focus our resources here. I cannot overemphasize how huge this is.

One of the biggest problems, especially in rural areas, is the lack of volunteers. There are emergency centres everywhere, but there is nobody to support them.



C.13 INITIATIVES



12 initiatives have been funded through C.13 to address this need.

Nova Scotia Health and Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association - Nova Scotia Grief Alliance, for example, worked on establishing a network across Nova Scotia to share grief information and resources, foster connections, strengthen collaboration in grief support, and coordinate training and education for grief support. The Alliance launched in spring 2025 and was designed for individuals working in or interested in grief support, including grief groups, non-profit organizations, and community members.



The initiative was funded in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Four regional roundtables were hosted with over 100 participants from a range of sectors including non-profit, community-based organizations, school system, health professionals, volunteers, and researchers.
- Monthly, free, grief support focused, online education webinars were delivered.
- Over 170 people participated in the first four offerings.
- A Provincial Grief Symposium was held in November 2025, bringing together 150 clinicians, hospice staff, volunteers, and community organizations from across Nova Scotia. 98% of symposium participants said they would recommend future offerings and events.

The guests were wonderful, a real community of caring people lifted me higher and gave me hope.

Coming from a small community – I am so happy to be able to follow the Grief Alliance for a great resource.

OTHER INITIATIVES

Some service providers noted they received supports for grief and mental health services such as funded counselling sessions or grief yoga after the mass casualty. Access to these were described as lifelines – safe spaces where staff could share their experiences, process their emotions, and feel less alone.

The counselling sessions I received got me through COVID and the mass casualty times.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

Staff and volunteers are dedicated and deeply committed to their work, but they need the right conditions to continue making a difference. Across discussions, community organizations highlighted the need for funding to address the following priorities:



INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- Increase fair wages and stable employment (long-term contracts) for staff.
- Increase supports and resources for volunteers.
- Enhance mental health supports, such as peer-support groups, grief circles, and accessible counselling for staff and volunteers.
- Enhance partnerships with local businesses and community to target volunteer opportunities.



STRENGTHEN STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TRAINING

- Strengthen and offer free/low cost training for staff and volunteers.

Training Needs Identified By Community Organizations

- Trauma-informed care training (sensitivity to people's experiences).
- Grief, bereavement, and mental health training.
- Community engagement training.
- Crisis response training.
- Suicide intervention/prevention training.
- Intercultural training for service providers and community leaders.
- Understanding local demographics to tailor community services.
- Training on asset mapping and planning (e.g., housing and community needs).
- Culturally appropriate service training (intercultural awareness).
- Training to identify and support vulnerable populations.
- Training on how to support people struggling with addictions.



COLLABORATION

Community organizations consistently emphasized their desire for action oriented collaboration and coordination. Collaboration is a strong part of how community organizations work. Service providers regularly want to support one another and identify that collaboration is the only way to share ideas and solve problems quickly.

Yet, they often find themselves working in silos, as they are stretched too thin and are competing for scarce resources. They also acknowledged that working collaboratively with governments and the health sector is critical to supporting community. Those who are connecting people to services lack the awareness of what others are doing, leading to missed opportunities to coordinate, collaborate, share resources, and refer people to the services they need.

With the right funding and support systems in place, these partnerships could grow stronger and help services reach more people across the region.

Service providers want to collaborate with each other, have conversations with each other on work being done, where there are gaps, etc. We love to connect. There is a lot of conversation but not a lot of action. Action is missing.

Many organizations are working in silos. Communities don't communicate with each other and the same work is being done by two or three organizations. There is an opportunity to share resources. For example, one group might have a space, another has a program that needs one and others have volunteers or services that could support it. A hub model would reduce duplication of supports.



C.13 INITIATIVES

The Nova Scotia Community Grief and Emotional Wellness Model (NSCGEWM) is an overarching model aimed to create a coordinated system that supports equitable access for all, does not rely on one program or service, and recognizes the role of strong social networks and community-based supports for grief and emotional wellness.

The NSCGEWM is comprised of five key components, many of which bring together independent Nova Scotia Health C.13 Initiatives to enhance coordination and collaboration across a range of formal health system service areas and portfolios.



As part of the NSCGEWM, the Nova Scotia Grief Alliance works to strengthen collaboration in grief support. In addition, the Knowledge Collaborative offers free education, learning, and collaboration opportunities for community-based organizations (external to government, Nova Scotia Health and IWK) who deliver mental health and addictions support to people in Nova Scotia.

IDEAS FOR THE PATH FORWARD

People shared ideas about the what they felt could help:



INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN GROUPS

- Bring community organizations, government, and other system partners together to share ideas, skills, and perspectives, so they can solve problems together.
 - Government to be at the same tables as community – not to bring solutions or facilitate, but to be a part of the work.



INVEST IN ROLE TO SUPPORT COLLABORATIONS

- Understand the available services, spaces, and supports in community and provide navigation support for community organizations.
- Bring community organizations, government, and other system actors together to create more informal, grassroots-led gatherings for open, honest conversations.
- Support community organizations to share resources.

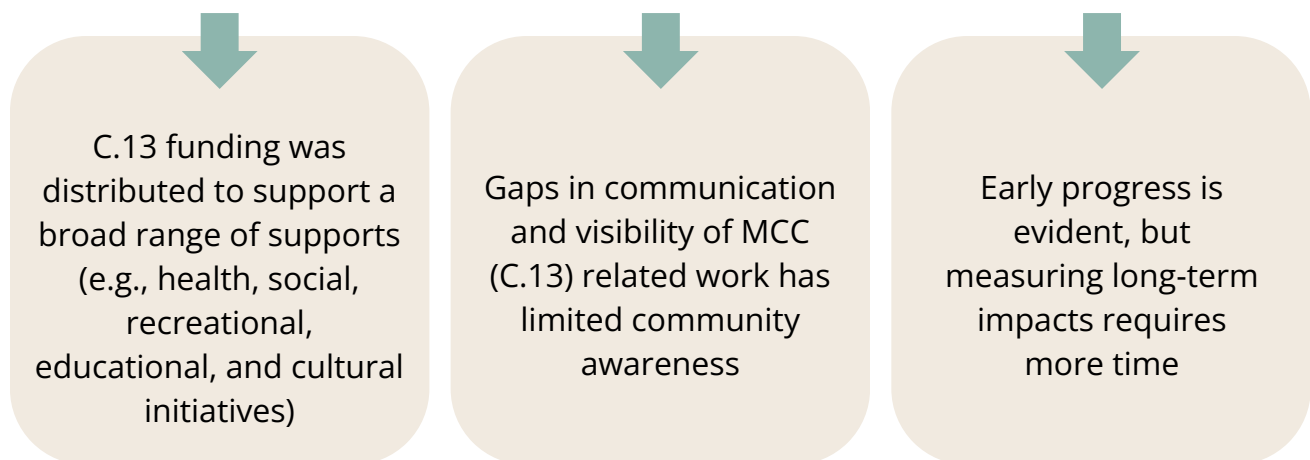
FINDINGS

The 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment shares community voices, along with information about how C.13 funding was distributed and what the early impacts of these initiatives have been on community and their needs. The findings section brings together both community input and data collected by each initiative to identify key insights and conclusions.

We identified six findings based directly on community voices:

-  Meeting basic needs is important for mental health and wellbeing
-  Stigma related to mental health is a significant barrier to access
-  Communities want less formal and more community-based programming
-  There are some key supports people feel are missing
-  C.13 Initiatives exist, but many individuals can't reach them
-  Community-based supports need more flexible funding

Three broad conclusions were also drawn from the insights:



FINDINGS DIRECTLY FROM COMMUNITY



MEETING BASIC NEEDS IS IMPORTANT FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

While not the direct focus of C.13, wellbeing and the ability to experience positive mental health is directly tied to one's ability to support their basic needs. These are the foundations for positive mental health, and addressing them requires collaboration across sectors.

As these are broader systemic issues that require policy development and long-term investment, C.13 funding was not specifically designed to focus on these areas. Other funding and programs do support these needs, which shows the importance of a more connected, whole-of-system approach.



STIGMA RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH IS A SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO ACCESS

People said that stigma is one of the biggest barriers to getting help. They shared how stigma affects many kinds of supports, not just mental health or grief. As a result, people often feel shame when using food banks, income assistance, and other social supports.

Even though stigma shows up in many areas, it is especially strong around mental health, grief, and bereavement supports. Community members said it feels easier to get help when mental health support is:

- Blended into regular community activities so people can get help without feeling singled out.
- Promoted through friendly, welcoming language that focuses on wellness, connection, and community.
- Offered in ways where people can enter through any program (like food supports, recreation, or social activities) and still be connected to mental health help if they want it.

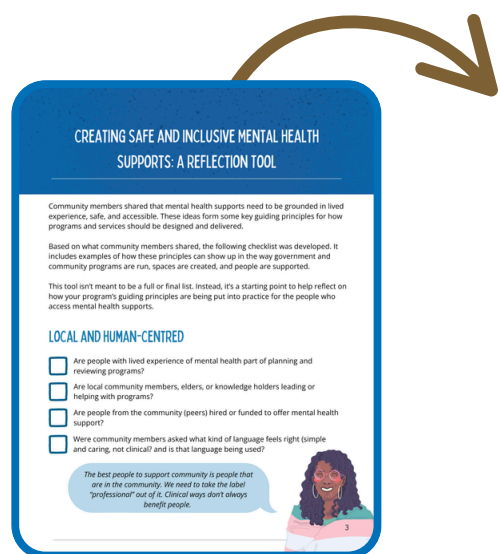


COMMUNITIES WANT LESS FORMAL AND MORE COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMMING

A clear pattern emerged throughout the assessment: People are more likely to access and use supports when they are local, welcoming, relationship-based, non-clinical, and offered in trusted community places. These types of supports help people feel comfortable and make it easier for them to get the help they need.

Communities prefer community-based approaches, even for services that are often seen as more specialized, such as mental health counselling, grief care, or emotional support. People are more likely to seek help when it is offered through trusted local relationships, rather than through external or unfamiliar systems.

Participants consistently shared that it is not just the service itself that matters - it is who delivers it, where it happens, and whether trust has been built over time. This reinforces the importance of relational, community-embedded models such as After Trauma Empowerment Network, which received exceptionally positive feedback.



Community highlighted that supports are most effective when they are:

- Delivered by trusted people who show up consistently so that people know who they are and who they are going to for help.
- Rooted in the community.
- Offered in familiar, trusted, local spaces.
- Culturally grounded.
- Not stigmatizing.
- Focused on connection rather than clinical labels.

For practical tips on how to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive mental-health supports, read and use *the Creating Safe and Inclusive Mental Health Supports: A Reflection Tool* located in Appendix B.



THERE ARE SOME KEY SUPPORTS PEOPLE FEEL ARE MISSING

During the engagements several areas were identified where community strongly believed there were limited supports or supports that were missing entirely. While part of the challenge is community may not be aware what services exist, it still means people are not getting the supports they need.

Men's mental health supports are essentially nonexistent, despite clear need. Community members repeatedly noted there are few, if any, safe or appropriate spaces for men to access social connection, emotional or mental health literacy, and support.

Seniors are underserved, particularly when it comes to social connection programming. Many seniors expressed they felt isolation and face additional barriers such as transportation, mobility challenges, and limited nearby services. While some government departments, such as the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, are doing important work to address this, community felt there were not enough supports available.

Suicide prevention and intervention programs are not reaching people. Community members felt strongly that there are limited supports for individuals and families related to suicide prevention, intervention, and recovery. While programs exist to help those in need, few people seemed to be aware of them during the engagement process.





C.13 INITIATIVES EXIST, BUT MANY INDIVIDUALS CAN'T REACH THEM

While the initiatives that exist are working well for those who reach them, access remains one of the biggest challenges. Many people cannot benefit from the C.13 Initiatives simply because they cannot get to the programs or do not know they exist.

There is a need for greater information sharing, awareness building, and navigation support. Many people in the community don't know what help or services are available, or how to find them. Sometimes supports exist, but people are not aware of them. Most individuals hear about programs through word of mouth, which means information does not reach everyone.

Access is also harder because internet and cellphone service can be limited. Many seniors do not feel comfortable using digital tools, while more and more organizations are sharing information online. More local, in-person, outreach, and easier to navigate supports would help people find the services available and understand what options they have.

Transportation supports should be a focus. Many rural communities are spread out and services don't always reach everyone. Even if a program exists somewhere in the region, people may not feel it is close enough or easy to get to. Transportation supports are very helpful, but there are not enough of them to meet the need. Without reliable ways to travel, many residents are still unable to reach services or take part in community programs. Transportation supports will help residents access care and community activities when there is a need to travel.

Services need to be closer to communities and better connected. Community members said services need to work together better so people in rural areas can get the support they need. Most services are located in bigger towns or city centres, which means people in rural areas often have very limited access. Even if transportation was to be offered, long travel distances still make it hard for people to reach care.

To improve access, there needs to be a better balance between bringing services closer to where people live and providing transportation for times when travel is still needed. Stronger partnerships between community groups, along with more mobile or outreach-based services, can help make support easier to reach.



COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORTS NEED MORE FLEXIBLE FUNDING

While community organizations and community groups want to continue doing important work to respond to mental health, grief, isolation, and basic needs, they shared their efforts are difficult to sustain.

Service providers emphasized the need for flexible, stable, multi-year funding. The current funding is often short-term and project-based. This creates constant uncertainty, adds administrative work, and makes it hard for organizations to plan ahead or cover real operating costs such as marketing, transportation, outreach, and evaluation. Multi-year funding would allow services to grow and adapt as community needs change.

Second, organizations reported serious strain on staff and volunteers. Burnout, high turnover, and increasing complexity of client needs are widespread. Providers stressed the need for fair pay, stable jobs, mental health supports for workers, and access to training in areas such as trauma, grief, and suicide intervention. Volunteer capacity is also shrinking as many long-time volunteers age out.

Overall, these findings show that community supports will be most effective when organizations have stable funding, supported staff, and better coordination. Long-term sustainability depends not only on programs themselves, but on the systems that allow community-based services to remain consistent, trusted, and sustainable over time.

A useful example of multi-year funding can be drawn from the Nova Scotia Office of Addictions and Mental Health [Mental Health and Addictions Community Wellness Grant](#). This grant stream provided up to three-year funding to support long-term community wellness projects.

This three-year funding model was designed to help providers plan beyond annual funding cycles. Although the outcomes of this grant were not examined as part of the 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment, it provides a helpful reference point for understanding how multi-year funding arrangements have been applied in practice.

Given current requests from providers for more flexible, longer-term funding, it would be valuable to look more closely at what worked well in past initiatives like this. Exploring the experiences of both service providers and government departments could offer important insights into the benefits, challenges, and conditions that support effective multi-year funding. These lessons could help shape future approaches and contribute to more sustainable and responsive service systems.

CONCLUSIONS



C.13 funding was distributed to support a broad range of supports (e.g., health, social, recreational, educational, and cultural initiatives)

Between 2023 and 2025, the C.13 funding supported 67 initiatives. These projects varied in size and focus, and more than 50 were led by community organizations.

Funding went to both community groups and the formal health system. This is important, as community asked for more local and community based health supports to address mental health, grief, and bereavement. The C.13 funding was provided to support several key areas:

- Improving community spaces, such as recreation and cultural facilities, so people have places to gather.
- Improving access to mental health, grief, and bereavement supports so people can get help when they need it.
- Building skills and capacity for people working in mental health, grief, and bereavement, including community leaders, staff, and volunteers.
- Supporting community-based programs that help people with grief, bereavement, and wellbeing.



Gaps in communication and visibility of MCC (C.13) related work has limited community awareness

However, when planning communications about the MCC work, community members asked that MCC language be avoided so that people would not be further harmed. In response, an intentional effort was made not to explicitly mention MCC or C.13 as part of communication about the initiatives.

Because of this approach, and until this project began, many people did not realize that the supports and services they were providing or using were developed as part of the MCC response. Initiatives were individually responsible for their own communication to help spread awareness of their programs.

Going forward, there should be a shared and consistent understanding – at minimum among service providers and key partners – of where funding comes from, how it aligns with the MCC Recommendations, and what initiatives it supports.



Early progress is evident, but measuring long-term impacts requires more time

The C.13 Initiatives reported that people who took part in their activities said they had good experiences, felt they learned helpful things, and received support that made a difference.

These initiatives focused on needs the community said were most important:

- Helping with basic needs through the Portaupique Community Centre's Market Greens Program.
- Reducing isolation and creating safe places to connect through the Kemptown and Area Recreation Association's Monthly Open Mic Night or the walking trail created by the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Portaupique Community Centre.
- Supporting mental health through the counselling offered by After Trauma Empowerment Network
- Helping people with grief through the eight-week grief program offered by Luke's Legacy.

Many of these programs are new or growing. We can see early results, such as how many people took part and how satisfied they were. Bigger, long-term changes, such as better mental health over time, fewer crises, and stronger communities will take longer to measure. The next section, called Looking Ahead, explains what steps can be taken to better understand these long-term results in the future through the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment.

LOOKING AHEAD



People shared their voices on what they believe is needed to improve the services and supports for mental health, grief, and bereavement in their communities. They offered reflections on how the community is feeling, what is working well, the perceived effects of the initiatives that are starting to respond to those needs, and important ideas for where additional attention is needed to improve outcomes. The Findings section outlines key insights from all that was shared.

The community's ideas for the path forward and how the identified needs should be addressed requires collaboration. The collaboration fostered in the year of engagements and the making of this document should be carried forward to make the necessary changes.

As previously mentioned, the MCC Recommendation C.13 called for a needs and impact assessment to be conducted in 2023, 2025, and 2028. The 2023 Needs and Impact Assessment produced a structured framework to support future assessments using pre-existing engagement data and the MCC Final Report findings. The 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment focused on community voices and early outcomes. In 2028, there is an opportunity to leverage the previous assessments to understand the long-term impacts of initiatives on grief, bereavement, and mental health needs.

The following provides guidance for the preparation of the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment, based on learning from this work:

- **Structured Framework for the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment:** By 2028, enough time should have passed for more people to learn about and access the 67 initiatives funded through C.13. This means the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment can focus on looking at broader community impacts. While the 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment focused on understanding community needs and the early outcomes being reported by the initiatives, in 2028, the work can focus on understanding the broader impacts by looking at broader population trends. Further refinement of the framework developed in 2023 can also be completed in order to help guide the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment.

- **Start Data Collection Early and Coordinate Where Possible:** The 67 initiatives were responsible for collecting their own data, leading to variations in the questions being posed and inconsistency in the data collection process. In addition, other surveys and data collection initiatives were happening during this project (e.g., Well NS, Engage NS survey collection). This created competing demands for residents who were being asked about mental health needs through multiple channels. As a result:
 - The 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment data collection should start as early as possible - this includes population level data collection.
 - Common templates or coordinated efforts for data collection should be used where possible to streamline the questions being asked across different initiatives and sources.
 - If community organizations are asked to collect data again, support and training should be provided to them - decreasing the burden by helping organizations with the administrative burden of collecting and reporting data.
- **Ongoing Communication with Initiatives and Community:** Relationships were created as part of the community engagement process. Continued communication and collaboration between and with organizations prior to the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment will help support the work needed to measure community needs and impacts of services. This can include ongoing communication and work with working group members (those responsible for overseeing the initiatives, e.g., the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association, Nova Scotia Health, IWK, and ongoing communication with the communities and those organizations and groups that participated in the assessment (e.g., sharing information and updates related to C.13).
- **Continue Focus on Diverse Representation:** Efforts were made throughout the 2025 Needs and Impact Assessment to ensure representatives of the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw communities were part of the planning process as well as the engagements. Representatives from these communities were asked to participate in the ways they felt comfortable and the process respected the level of participation they were able to offer. Continued efforts to work collaboratively with Mi'kmaw and African Nova Scotian communities in the region is encouraged to ensure diverse voices are reflected in the 2028 Needs and Impact Assessment.

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Appendix A

C.13 Initiative Profiles and Reported Results, Outputs and Outcomes

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

Appendix A provides a description of the 67 funded initiatives, the results of the initiative, and any early outcomes they are seeing based on information they collected.

Initiatives reported on:

- **Outputs:** Activities and services that come directly from the work (e.g., number of people who attended a support group).
- **Outcomes:** Early changes that happened because of the work. They show how people or communities are starting to benefit (e.g., people feel more supported).



The reported information will look different for each initiative as they vary in size and length of time they have been running.

For each theme, you will find:

- **Description of the initiative:** A summary of the initiative.
- **Reported program results:** Data (where available) that highlights the outcomes and outputs from the initiatives. This includes when the initiative was funded and when they reported information (where available).
- **Quotes:** Reflect feedback from program or engagement participants.

At the time of this assessment each initiative was at a different stage - some used their funding, some were in early stages of implementation, and others were still in development. Under each initiative we have identified if:



They were in early stages of implementation or development.



The funding was used and when they reported early outcomes.

It is important to note that each initiative received funding at a different point between 2023-2025, and each reported their results at a different point in time, through a different process. This means that not all the initiatives are reporting during the same period of time in the same way. Additionally, some initiatives received C.13 funding however the initiative continues with alternative funding sources.

C.13 INITIATIVES

OVERVIEW

The table below shows how many initiatives fall under each need and the following pages describe each initiative in more detail.

Need	C.13 Initiatives
Basic Needs	1. Portapique Community Centre - Market Greens Program 2. Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre - Water Program 3. Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - Universal School Food Pilot Program - Food Service Support 4. Portapique Community Centre - Community Care & Connect Program 5. Advocate District Development Association - New Community Hall Cooking Equipment
Social Connections (All Community)	1. Canadian Mental Health Association and Portapique Community Centre - Walking Trail 2. Kemptown and Area Recreation Association - Monthly Open Mic Night 3. Municipality of Cumberland - Fundy Shore Winter Carnival 4. Ship's Company Theatre - Community Theatre Project 5. Wallace Area Development Association - Memorial Gazebo 6. Truro Chapter of Autism Nova Scotia - Social and Recreation Initiative 7. Economy Recreation Centre - Community Recreation and Connectedness Program 8. Hilden Elementary School and Community - Community Trail 9. Municipality of Colchester - Community Connection Project (Sport & Recreation) 10. Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre - Interpretive Trail Signage Project 11. Advocate Harbour - Astronomy Program 12. Luke's Legacy Memorial Society - Inclusive Wellness Sessions
Social Connections (Youth)	1. Sport Nova Scotia - Inclusive School Sport Pilot Program 2. Millbrook First Nation - Early Education Centre Bike Initiative 3. West Colchester Elementary - Mountain Bike Program 4. Millbrook First Nation - Early Education Centre Spring Mawiomi 5. West Colchester Medical Society 6. Portapique Community Centre - Summer Day Camp 7. Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - Health Promoting Schools (HPS) - HPS Grants and the Nova Scotia Active Smarter Kids (ASK) Kits Program 8. East Hants Family Resource Centre - Splash & Play Program 9. Millbrook First Nation and Sipekne'katik Youth Centre - Youth Cultural Exchange Program

Need	C.13 Initiatives
Social Connections (Seniors)	1. Farm Equipment Museum Society - Creation Café 2. After Trauma Empowerment Network - Seniors/Elders Group Chat and Craft Night 3. Londonderry Community Centre – Community Care & Connect Program 4. North Shore Community Connections Society - Soup and Shop Program
Mental Health Literacy	1. Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce - Wellness Resource Project 2. Light in the Forest - Mental Health and Wellness Support Program 3. Roots of Empathy (ROE) Program 4. Steps on Arthur - Music Room Program 5. Colchester East Hants Library - Emotional Wellbeing Initiative
Mental Health Support	1. After Trauma Empowerment Network (ATEN) - Counselling Support 2. Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Adult Mental Health Access and Services 3. Victims Services - Criminal Injuries Counselling Program 4. Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre (Cumberland) - Community & Family Wellness Programs 5. Millbrook First Nation - Mental Health Project
Grief & Bereavement	1. Nova Scotia Health Palliative Care - Northern Zone Grief Program* 2. Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association - Healing Pathways Initiative 3. Colchester East Hants Community Hospice Society - HUG Centre (Hope and Understanding for the Grieving) Initiative 4. Luke's Legacy Memorial Society - Grief Program 5. Colchester Sexual Assault Centre - Expanding Trauma-Informed Support for Survivors Experiencing Grief and Loss Initiative 6. Cumberland Hospice Palliative Care Society - Comprehensive Grief Support Program
Suicide Prevention	1. Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Roots of Hope

*This initiative is presented across two themes as the program provides different supports that meet unique community needs (e.g., providing local supports in community and providing navigation supports).

Need	C.13 Initiatives
Service Navigation	1. Youth Health Centres (YHC) 2. Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Northern Zone Adult Outreach Program* 3. Nova Scotia Health - Northern Zone Mobile Health and Wellness Team 4. First Nations Partnership – Youth Navigation and Supports 5. North Shore Community Connections – Wellness Navigator Initiative
Transportation	1. Nova Scotia Health - Rural Transportation Pilot 2. Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - EB Chandler Jr High - Late Bus Pilot Project
Local Supports	1. Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Northern Zone Adult Outreach Program*
Supports for Staff & Volunteers	1. Palliative Care Network - The Nova Scotia Health Grief Practice Support Program (GPSP) 2. Nova Scotia Health Palliative Care - The Northern Zone Grief Program* 3. Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - The Knowledge Collaborative 4. Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - Girls on Fire Program 5. Nova Scotia Health and Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association - Nova Scotia Grief Alliance Program 6. Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre - The Feather Carrier Program 7. Rath Eastlink Community Centre (RECC) - Futures In Fitness 8. Nova Scotia Health - The Roadmap to Organizational Health Program 9. Bass River Fire Brigade - Training Project 10. Millbrook First Nation Wellness Centre - Employee Wellness Project 11. Colchester East Hants Library - Emotional Wellbeing Initiative 12. IWK Trauma Informed Practice Program

**This initiative is presented across two themes as the program provides different supports that meet unique community needs (e.g., providing local supports in community and providing navigation supports).*

BASIC NEEDS

Below are the **five (5) initiatives** funded through C.13 addressing the basic needs of community members and their reported outcomes.



Portaupique Community Centre - Market Greens Program

provided weekly access to low-cost fresh fruits and vegetables for Cobequid Shore residents struggling with food access or at risk of diet-related illness.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025, and reported outcomes for February 2025 - March 2025:

- 80 people received fresh produce each week.
- Over 425 community members benefited from the market, which reduced isolation and supported physical and mental health.
- Participants reported improved access to food and increased intake of healthy foods.
- Most participants reported better health, improved wellbeing, and positive changes in medical conditions.
- Ongoing food literacy supports also helped participants make healthier daily choices, which is expected to lead to long-term health benefits.

Comments from Community Engagements

The engagement participants' perspectives made it clear that this initiative provides more than just food for the community, but it's also a space for community connection.



Portaupique Community Centre Market is doing amazing things here. It's a place to get fresh food and connect with community. People want to see more places like this.... Every time you can definitely tell that there is a strong sense of community in that space.

BASIC NEEDS



Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre - Water Program was an outreach support program in Wentworth that increased access to clean drinking water. Through the funding a water tap was installed at the Wentworth Learning Centre, which provided residents with 24/7 access to clean drinking water.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Residents said they felt less stress knowing they could rely on the community water tap.
- It helped ease financial concerns for individuals, especially when water was needed outside regular business hours.



Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - Universal School Food Pilot Program - Food Service Support.

Nova Scotia Health worked with the CCRCE to improve access to healthy food for all students. This included enhancing the existing breakfast program and a universal school lunch program.



The initiative received funding in 2023-2024 and reported outcomes in 2024:

- It strengthened the quality and delivery of access to food for schools in the region.
- It introduced a Food Service Facilitator role to improve food service in participating schools.
- The program rolled into the Nova Scotia School Lunch Program introduced in 2024.



BASIC NEEDS



Portaupique Community Centre - Community Care & Connect Program, offered free weekly lunches for community members, along with health supports through the Nova Scotia Health mobile service and occasional musical performances.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- About 30 to 50 people attended each lunch session, between August 2024 and March 2025.
- The program addressed key community needs by offering food assistance, medical access, and social supports.
- Participants said access to meals was the most important support they received.



Advocate District Development Association - New Community Hall Cooking Equipment allowed the group to purchase cooking equipment and to improve their culinary capabilities, enabling them to better engage with the community and offer valuable programs. In addition to the new equipment, the association ensured that the group received proper certifications and training, underscoring their commitment to quality and safety.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- By equipping the community hall with new kitchen appliances and tables, the association created opportunities to bring people together, helping to alleviate isolation and foster hope and optimism.
- Since the equipment was acquired, the Advocate Children's Party Committee has hosted at least three events including a lobster roll dinner, a dance, and a Christmas party at the Advocate Log Building.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS

Below are the **twelve (12) initiatives** addressing the social connection needs of community members through the C.13 funding.



Canadian Mental Health Association and the Portauipique Community Centre - Walking Trail featured solar lighting, art installations, and the “Tree of Hope” story. The trail provided a reflective, accessible space for community connection and supports individual mental wellness.

 The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

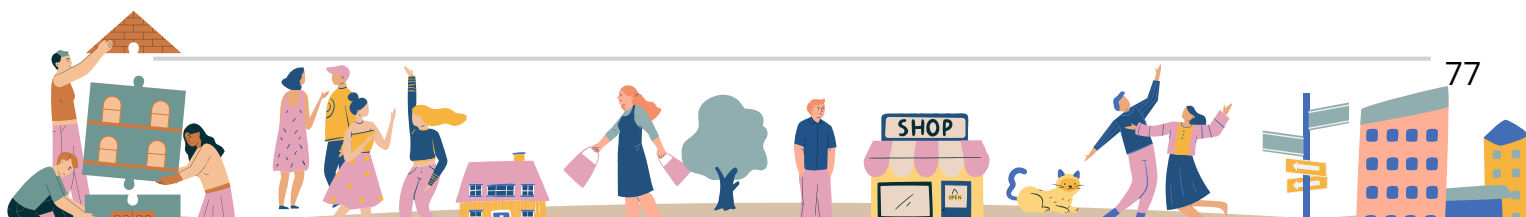
- It brought people together through art, nature, and storytelling, building a sense of unity and shared healing.
- After walking the trail:
 - 57% of users reported feeling calmer, more relaxed, and inspired to practice self-care.
 - 65% of users felt more connected to nature.



Kemptown and Area Recreation Association - Monthly Open Mic Night aimed to reduce isolation, foster a sense of belonging, and increase social connections in the community.

 The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Improved mental wellbeing through program participation.
- One attendee shared: “Witnessing old friends reconnect, seeing hugs, laughter, and enjoyment was truly gratifying”.
- Although initial attendance was low, word of mouth increased participation.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS



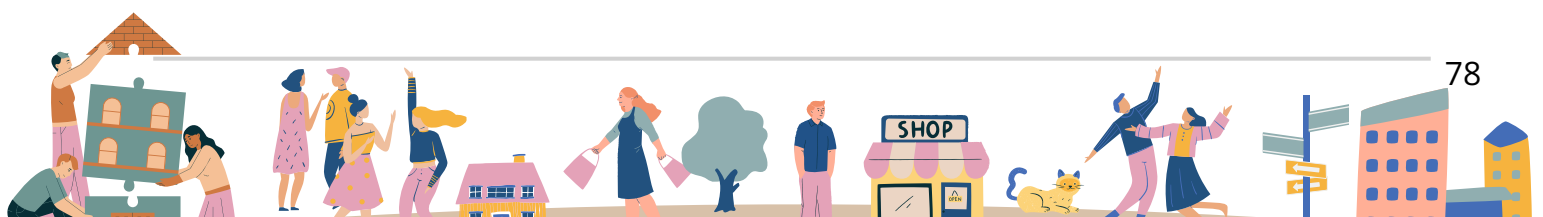
Municipality of Cumberland - Fundy Shore Winter Carnival

offered fun and engaging activities for residents of all ages across the Fundy Shore and North Shore communities. The goal of the event was to help get community members outside, stay active, socialize, and enjoy the winter season together.



The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- More than 500 people took part in the event. Event and organizers were able to reach the intended audience members through the variety of activities.
- Higher attendance in exercise and mobility classes helped residents stay active during the winter.
- The team expanded participation through ongoing engagement and more digital advertisements outside social media.
- The event reduced isolation and strengthened social ties and overall wellbeing in rural areas.
- Issues such as weather and illness presented challenges. Additional local groups and volunteers ran their own activities during the carnival, boosting community collaboration.
- The events spanned from Debert, Parrsboro, Five Islands, Bass River, Great Village, Portapique, Port Greville, as well as other communities.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS

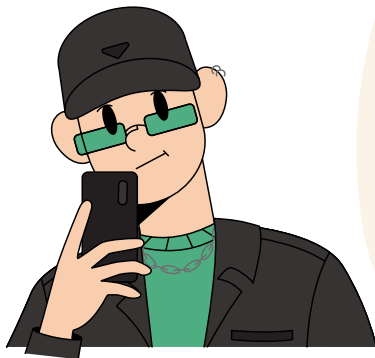


Ship's Company Theatre - Community Theatre Project created a community production of "The Hobbit" play showcasing local talent in acting and design while offering mentorship opportunities for community members in Parrsboro and surrounding areas.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported data from the event in June 2025:

- Approximately 400 people, including the audience and production crew, benefited from the program.
- It helped build stronger connections and a more close-knit community.
- It renewed interest in community theatre, leading to more chances for people to connect and build arts skills.
- Community connections and partnerships enabled the project to be successful. There was recruitment of students and class-time workshops at the local schools in Parrsboro.
- Local organizations such as the legion and the band hall provided low-cost workshop space.



My favourite part was the engagement in the creation process and seeing others join in, learn together, and relish their experience with both pleasure and pride in their accomplishments... People gained new acquaintances and newly-formed friendships and a sense of hope and positivity within the community.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS

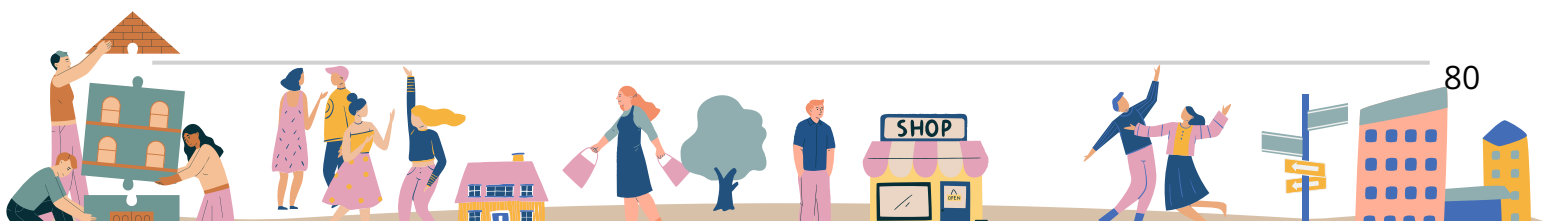


Wallace Area Development Association - Memorial Gazebo created a space for families, including a new playground and a gazebo with memorial benches to honour five community members lost in the 2020 mass casualty.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- It strengthened social connections by bringing community members together around a shared goal.
- It inspired collaboration, boosted volunteer morale, and created momentum for future community projects.
- The initiative's success has encouraged volunteers to continue their engagement and pursue future projects with renewed enthusiasm.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Truro Chapter of Autism Nova Scotia - Social and Recreation Initiative received funding to launch new recreational, social, and respite activities that foster inclusion, adaptive sports participation, and social connection for individuals with autism.

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Economy Recreation Centre - Community Recreation and Connectedness Program received funding to provide free recreation programs (including meals, craft activities, meal preparation, and skill-building) and events for West Colchester residents, aiming to promote community connection, healthier lifestyles, and healing.

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Hilden Elementary School and Community - Community Trail received funding to feature storyboards, benches, hammocks, and cozy corners, aiming to improve social and physical environments while providing a barrier-free outdoor space that encourages gathering and connection.

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Municipality of Colchester - Community Connection Project (Sport & Recreation) received funding to expand access to recreation and physical activity in West Colchester by providing free, flexible opportunities for families and youth, including the Fun in the Sun Mobile Camp, pop-up family events, 20 pairs of skates and 40 helmets, and a \$1,000 micro-grant to community organizations.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre - Interpretive Trail Signage Project received funding to develop three new accessible trails that will enhance the visitor experience at the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre and support the sharing of cultural knowledge and learning.

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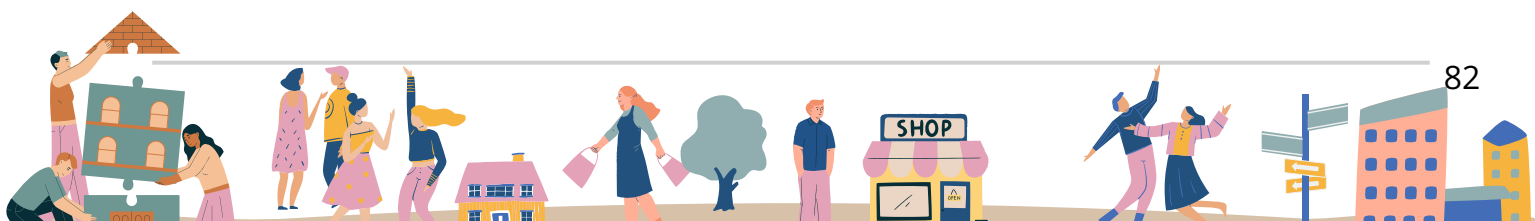


Advocate Harbour - Astronomy Program received funding to host a community program at the Cumberland public library that has telescope viewings of the moon, planets, and stars, as well as planetarium-style presentations. The program is aiming to support community outreach and connection.

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Luke's Legacy Memorial Society - Inclusive Wellness Sessions received funding to offer a year-long series of free, low-barrier wellness sessions across Debert, focusing on mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. The project creates inclusive spaces that foster social connection, aiming to reach 100+ participants with 50% expected to form new social connections.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS AMONG YOUTH

Below are the **nine (9) initiatives** addressing the social connection needs of youth through C.13 funding.



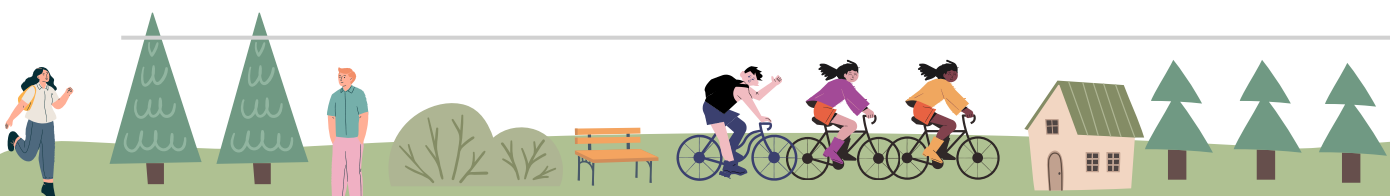
Sport Nova Scotia - Inclusive School Sport Pilot Program

provided funding of up to \$5,000 per school to create safe and inclusive sport opportunities in rural and underserved communities across Colchester, Cumberland, and East Hants. It supported schools to offer accessible, non-competitive sports that promote student wellbeing, belonging, and social connection.



The initiative received funding in 2024 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Between February 2024 and March 2025, over 1,000 students engaged in sport activities, with approximately 95% participating for the first time.
- The program received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participating schools and communities.
- Feedback themes included increased student engagement and enhanced emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Schools eliminated or reduced financial, transportation, and facility access barriers – making sport more accessible.
- Improved confidence, physical activity, and emotional wellbeing among students.
- Stronger peer relationships and a greater sense of belonging and pride among students.
- The program reached students with disabilities and diverse backgrounds.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS AMONG YOUTH



Millbrook First Nation - Early Education Centre Bike Initiative offered children the opportunity to learn and practice bike riding after school. This allowed children to become active, strengthen their gross motor movements, ride bikes with others, and sparked an interest in bike riding within families.



The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Approximately 250 students participated in this program between April and June 2025.
- The program participants felt excited and encouraged.
- The program successfully increased the number of families who participated in physical activities.
- Bike riding became a routine activity for most students.

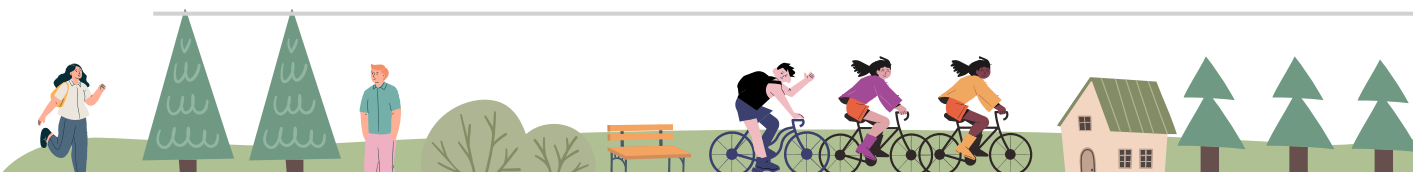


West Colchester Elementary - Mountain Bike Program integrated cycling into school life, including physical education, wellness sessions, and group rides. The program supported grade seven to nine youth. Thirty mountain bikes and helmets were purchased. The program offered an engaging, movement-based approach to social-emotional development and trauma-sensitive healing.



The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- The program provided a unique path for social emotional development and trauma-sensitive healing.
- Students felt more comfortable opening up in conversations during group rides.
- A number of positive benefits including:
 - 26% of students reported feeling less anxious.
 - 44% of students reported feeling happier.
 - 83% used the bikes at least once a month.
 - 74% reported their experience as good or excellent.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS AMONG YOUTH



Millbrook First Nation - Early Education Centre Spring Mawiomí was a community gathering that brought together youth, Elders, leaders, and knowledge holders from the Mi'kmaw community. It offered time to connect, learn, and celebrate Mi'kmaw culture through dancing, making traditional foods, drumming, and storytelling. The event also served as a place to learn about traditional culture.



The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- 250 people benefited from this initiative.
- The gathering not only showcased culture but provided youth a place to practice and further cultural knowledge from others in community.
- Outcomes included strong social connection and pride in the Mi'kmaw culture which supports healthy mental wellbeing.



West Colchester Medical Society worked with local schools to offer creative and wellness-based activities, including equine-assisted therapy, eight yoga sessions focused on grief, ten therapy dog sessions, and a field trip to the Ship's Company Theatre. These activities aimed to boost students' connection and emotional wellbeing.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Feedback was gathered from 119 students (grades two-nine) and eight staff members.
- 78% said it helped when they felt sad or upset, and 85% felt happier and more connected to classmates.
- Students expressed interest in more programs like this.
- The program strengthened the school community and supported student wellbeing.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS AMONG YOUTH



Portaupique Community Centre - Summer Day Camp hosted a free arts and recreation program for youth aged 10–16 in summer 2025, fostering fun, friendship, and belonging. The initiative expanded youth programming in the area, addressing a gap in services for youth and families.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- The program engaged youth in a number of activities and provided social interaction and relationship building.
- The program provided child care opportunities for working parents, while creating a space for children to connect.
- 31 youth participated in the program, with an overall positive response from attendees and families.
- The camp built strong community connections, positive wellbeing for community, and addressed a community need.



My child told me how much she loves the structure and variety of art and recreation offered. She says it's the best camp she has gone to.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS AMONG YOUTH



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - Health Promoting Schools (HPS) - HPS Grants and the Nova Scotia Active Smarter Kids (ASK) Kits Program received funding to develop 20 ASK kits to support physically active learning in the classroom for students. It aims to promote physical activity, healthy eating, and wellbeing among students.



East Hants Family Resource Centre - Splash & Play Program received funding to provide 18-weeks of free, one-hour pool sessions for children aged six months to five years, running from March to June and restarting from September to early December 2025. The program aims to promote physical activity, social connection, and improved mental wellbeing for participants.



Millbrook First Nation and Sipekne'katik Youth Centre - Youth Cultural Exchange Program received funding to bring Mi'kmaw youth together to learn, share, and celebrate their culture through traditional activities (including to create ribbon skirts/shirts, build Mi'kmaw medicine pouches). It enabled two youth from each of the 13 Mi'kmaw communities to attend the annual Fundy Region gathering, fostering cultural knowledge, safe spaces, and inter-community connections.



SOCIAL CONNECTION NEEDS SENIORS



The following four (4) initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Farm Equipment Museum Society - Creation Cafe received funding to host a weekly Creation Cafe where seniors can take part in creative activities such as quilting, rug-hooking, and other crafts. It aims to offer a welcoming space where seniors can learn new skills while building meaningful social connections.



After Trauma Empowerment Network - Seniors/Elders Group Chat and Craft Night received funding to host a Seniors/Elders Group Chat and Craft Night. It is a free monthly program for older adults to share skills and stories in a supportive, therapeutic space. The focus is on sharing arts-based skills and music.



Londonderry Community Centre - Community Care & Connect Program received funding to provide a regular, accessible, open space where residents can safely gather, connect with neighbours, and access local programs and services. It was created to strengthen community connection and support for adults and seniors in the Cobequid Shore area and nearby communities.



North Shore Community Connections Society - Soup and Shop program received funding to host seasonal community events that offer free meals, grocery distribution, live music, dancing, and social activities. These events will help increase support for seniors by providing access to food while also encouraging connection, wellbeing, and a sense of community. Two sessions were held at the time of this assessment. Two additional events were held in March 2026.

MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

Below are the **five (5) initiatives** addressing mental health literacy through C.13 funding. It is important to note many initiatives funded under C.13 also touch on mental health literacy alongside other goals.



Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce - Wellness Resource Project offered wellness resources including a Mental Health and Wellness Guide and workshops for local business owners and teams, focusing on topics such as mental health, stress management, and other mental health needs.

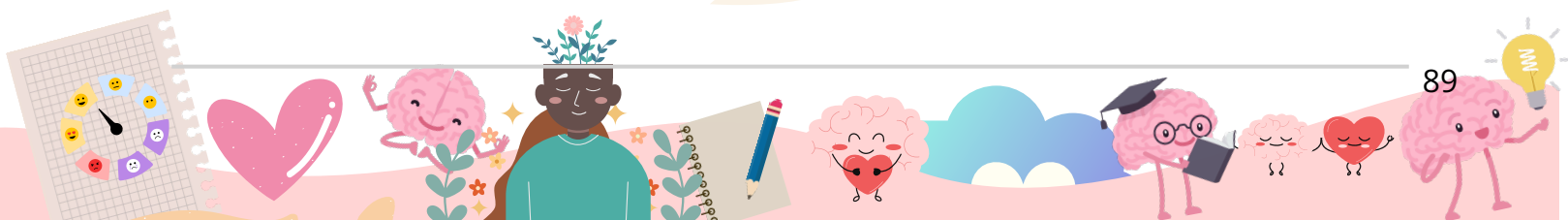


The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- 190+ people registered for mental health events, showing strong community interest and need.
- 300 Health and Wellness Guides were printed and shared online.
- 84% of survey respondents worried about their mental health with only 9% rating their overall wellness as “very well” - highlighting the continued need to focus on mental health literacy supports and services for adults.



It helped me to understand and be aware that not all mental health crises are messy and loud, some people are suffering without bringing a lot of attention. As a person who works with the public it is good to have this awareness.



MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY



Light in the Forest - Mental Health and Wellness Support Program featured a live art presentation, exhibit, and interactive mental wellness stations aimed at offering mental health tools and resources to communities. The initiative facilitated the development of the Comfort Tree book, a children's book centred on healing and positive mental health teachings. The book was developed in partnership with the Portapique community.



The initiative received funding in 2023-2024 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- From March 2023 to November 2025, the program delivered a series of activities including live presentations, interactive wellness stations, touring exhibits at museums and galleries, community events, and the launch of the “Comfort Tree” story trail.
- Approximately 15,000 participants engaged across all events and exhibits in Nova Scotia, including 700 children and families at the Kentville exhibit and 200 attendees at the Portauptique Community Centre.
- The program reached children and youth from primary to grade 12, post secondary students, families, educators, counsellors, community members, and newcomers in both rural and urban communities.
- The Comfort Tree book was provided to 300 individuals, and was donated to several libraries in Northern Region.
- The program also piloted an app and digital manual, extending its reach beyond in-person events.

It's been a joy sharing the Light in the Forest experience throughout all the regions of Nova Scotia... It is hard for me to quantify all the heart felt experiences people have shared with me. At each event I have created a gratitude tree and have collected 1000 notes of gratitude from all ages of participants, which reflects for me participants' willingness to engage in their emotional wellbeing when given the opportunity.



MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY



Roots of Empathy (ROE) Program supported children in Nova Scotia who have faced trauma or stress from events such as the 2020 mass casualty, fires, floods, and the lasting effects of COVID-19. ROE is a proven empathy-based classroom program designed for teaching and coaching children ages five to thirteen on how to connect with their vulnerability and their emotions.

Through the funding, the program expanded to schools in Colchester, Cumberland and (East) Hants Counties to help more students build emotional literacy, understand their feelings, and learn about empathy and resilience.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Funding covered costs for five additional trainers and recurring program costs.
- 26 programs were delivered thus far, reaching 34% of schools in the region in the 2024–2025 school year.
- About 750 students took part in the program.
- Mid-year reporting showed child participants expanded their emotional literacy.
- ROE improved the skills and capabilities of children.

I am continually impressed by how well thought out the curriculum is and how comprehensively the program is laid out. As I leave each classroom visit, I marvel at the way children naturally engage and embrace the content, as through their brains have specially developed receptors for this very type of wisdom. I happen to be fortunate enough to deliver the program in my own daughter's grade two class so I get to see the impact it has.



MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY



Steps on Arthur - Music Room Program used music therapy to help people express their feelings through creative expression, social interaction, and confidence-building, resulting in improved reported mental wellness. The program supported grief, bereavement, and emotional wellness, as engaging with music stimulated the brain and promoted positive emotions.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- The space became a welcoming place for people to relax, manage stress, and connect with others.
- Of the 18 survey responses, 14 said it helped them feel more relaxed; 14 appreciated the opportunity to learn new things; 12 shared it allowed them to express themselves; and 12 felt it helped clear their minds.



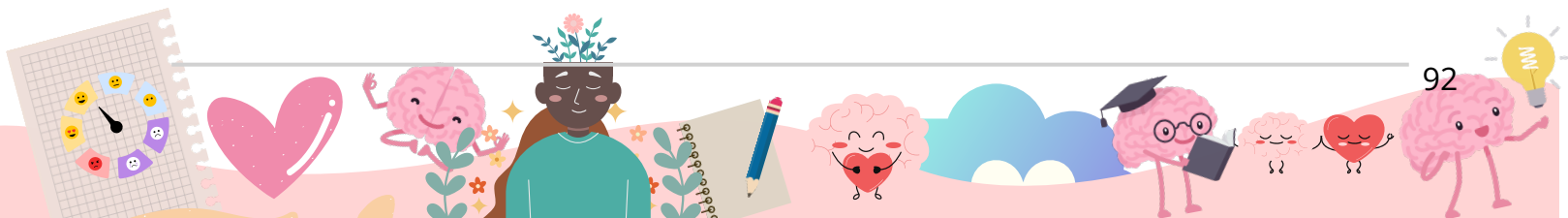
The following initiative received funding in 2025 and was in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Colchester East Hants Library - Emotional Wellbeing Initiative received funding to strengthen emotional wellbeing support in the community by expanding the library's collection of accessible resources on grief, bereavement, mental health, and related topics for all ages.



Remember: Through community engagements, individuals shared that they view the library as a key resource for finding information about available community supports.



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Below are the **five (5) initiatives** addressing the mental health needs of community members through the C.13 funding.



After Trauma Empowerment Network (ATEN) - Counselling Supports, provided free 1:1 counselling services to individuals. They also held seniors and youth groups where they could participate in healthy living activities and wellbeing workshops.



The initiative received funding in 2023-2024 and reported outcomes in 2024:

- The program provided supports to over 400 community members and over 80 individuals accessed the trauma informed counselling in 2023-2024.

ATEN has been tremendous, you are going to be supported. I have learned so many new things, day to day you get a toolkit, and you get encouragement.



Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Adult Mental Health Access and Services, an initiative in the Northern Zone, aimed to increase the mental health services and resources available to adults experiencing moderate to severe mental health and addictions disorders. Funding supported additional resources to provide faster access to mental health and addictions care for individuals.



The initiative received funding between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Since 2023, the program has hired three new clinical therapist positions.
- Increased program appointments by approximately 2,000 annually.



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS



Victims Services - Criminal Injuries Counselling Program

received additional funding to support private counselling services for people affected by the mass casualty.



The initiative received funding in 2023-2024 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Counselling supports were received by 96 people affected by the mass casualty.
- A 0.5 FTE was established for an administrative position to coordinate the additional services.



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre (Cumberland) -

Community & Family Wellness Programs received funding to provide a safe, welcoming space to access short-term wellness supports (through the Mother's Wellness Program, Children's Play Groups). They will also offer one-on-one support for parents, peer support for families, and access to a community hub, as well as navigation support and access to information on programs and services.



Millbrook First Nation - Mental Health Project received funding to create a safe, therapeutic outdoor space for children and youth seeking mental health services. The space will feature a studio pod at the Millbrook Health Centre, providing a private, calming place where children can express feelings, build coping skills, and strengthen resilience. It will include cultural art and be used for child bereavement therapy, offering supportive care for those who need it.



GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Below are the **six (6) initiatives** addressing the grief and bereavement needs of community members using the C.13 funding.



Nova Scotia Health Palliative Care - Northern Zone Grief Program* provided grief and bereavement support in the Northern Zone, including grief programming, education, case coordination, and training opportunities for community members.



The initiative received funding between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- From April 2025 to September 2025, the program helped coordinate care for 300 people.
- It hosted more than 10 community events that reached nearly 1,200 participants.



I didn't feel as alone. My own grief awoke in ways that surprised me. Discussing terms that gave labels to feelings/emotions. It was very informative...Presenters worked well together, both knowledgeable. People seemed to be thankful to have an event to go to.

Wonderful, open, shared discussions. I was grateful to hear individual experiences of grief. The willingness of others to share so much. I enjoyed the group session. I very much enjoyed this time listening to each of the participants share their stories and feelings.

*This initiative is presented across two themes as the program provides different supports that meet unique community needs (e.g., providing local supports in community and providing navigation supports).

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT



Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association - Healing Pathways Initiative has undertaken a number of key activities to help increase access to grief and bereavement supports.



The initiative received funding between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- They oversaw the implementation of the Healing Pathways Community Grant Fund for Grief Loss, and Emotional Wellness in two phases, 2024 and 2025, which funded 14 organizations across Colchester, Cumberland, and East Hants to deliver grief and wellbeing initiatives.
- The development and launch of Healing Pathways Grieving Well™, a new online directory of grief and bereavement resources to better support Nova Scotians.
- They also supported the development of the Nova Scotia Grief Alliance and are the Community Hub Organization co-leading the implementation of the Nova Scotia Community Grief and Emotional Wellness Model, which provides community-based supports for grief and emotional wellness.

More Details on this and other related initiatives can be found at: [Healing Pathways - Grieving Well™](#) and [Nova Scotia Grief Alliance](#).



GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT



Colchester East Hants Community Hospice Society - HUG Centre (Hope and Understanding for the Grieving)

Initiative supported elementary school children who were dealing with grief and loss through the development of peer-led grief groups.



The initiative received funding in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Two eight-week peer grief groups facilitated for 20 children.
- Three family events held to help families connect, heal, and feel supported.
- Peer facilitators provided training, and "refresher" training for those already with training.
- Professional development training provided for staff at the elementary school.
- Of the 82% of participants who completed a feedback form:
 - 96% rated the experience as excellent to very good.
 - 92% felt their learning objectives were met.
 - 100% said they would recommend the experience to others.



Colchester East Hants Hospice Society supports people from middle school age to seniors, offering grief counselling and training. Their services are open to anyone grieving and they have many volunteers who help lead programs. They're spending more time in the community, building partnerships, and planning new offerings. I think it's a great way of operating.



GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT



Luke's Legacy Memorial Society - Grief Program was an eight-week program designed for grade seven to nine students who had experienced loss. It provided a space for kids to organically share their experiences and work through grief and trauma connected to an art activity.



The initiative was funded in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025 for the eight-week program:

- Overall feedback was positive and the program created a safe place where children felt supported.
- Participants felt they developed a better understanding of grief expression, connection with others, and more confidence in using healthy ways to express their grief.
- The classes fostered greater connections and provided tools for remembrance.
- Many participants reported feeling more connected to others who were also grieving.
- Art making – especially the t-shirt activity – proved to be a powerful tool for emotional processing and honouring lost loved ones.



GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Colchester Sexual Assault Centre - Expanding Trauma-Informed Support for Survivors Experiencing Grief and Loss Initiative

received funding to offer grief-sensitive counselling, community education, and digital outreach to survivors of sexual, domestic, and gender-based violence experiencing grief and loss. The program aims to empower survivors to heal in safe, trauma-informed environments.



Cumberland Hospice Palliative Care Society -

Comprehensive Grief Support Program received funding to hire a social worker to develop a well-structured, evidence-based program accessible to the community. The program will serve all residents of Cumberland County, offering compassionate assistance during times of loss. It will also support referrals from the Palliative Care team, ensuring that individuals and families navigating end-of-life care receive the help they need.



SUICIDE PREVENTION

Below is the **one (1) initiative** addressing this need. It is important to note that other C.13 funded initiatives do touch on suicide prevention along with other goals.



Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions

Program - Roots of Hope, an initiative in collaboration with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, is a community-led program aimed at reducing the impacts of suicide on communities.

Suicide prevention and risk reduction interventions were implemented based on community expertise that were tailored to the local context. This program expanded to Colchester, (East) Hants, Pictou, and Cumberland Counties.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes for April 2025 - September 2025:

- The program offered specialized supports such as suicide loss support groups and restorative justice circles.
- 13 education sessions have been delivered in the community and program staff have regularly attended or hosted public awareness events.



I have a brother who came to me several years ago in a complete mental health crisis... It took me two days of constant care, talk and convincing to get him to let me take him to the hospital for help. If I had received this training then, it would have made it less scary for me. I believe continuing the conversations and training in community about suicide, and providing resources regarding mental health would be helpful.

Note: Roots of Hope is an initiative that was expanded to support Cumberland, Colchester, and (East) Hants Counties as part of the response to C.13, however, the program received funding through another source, not the C.13 funding.

SERVICE NAVIGATION

Below are the **five (5) initiatives** addressing the navigation support needs of community members.



Youth Health Centres (YHC) worked to create safe and inclusive spaces in schools in the Northern Zone. These spaces offered a range of supports including navigation and referral services related to health, mental health, grief and bereavement.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- The program facilitated over 640 referrals and nearly 3,500 supportive conversations.
- Nearly 9,000 students used YHC as a safe space.
- Limited internal capacity and ongoing recruitment challenges in rural and remote Mi'kmaw communities created delays in staffing and program delivery. Partnerships and financial support helped maintain momentum.



Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Northern Zone Adult Outreach Program* offered a number of services to the community, including navigation support and referrals to appropriate services within the Mental Health and Addictions Program and community.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Since fall 2023, the Adult Outreach Program provided extensive individual supports and facilitated many referrals to higher levels of care where appropriate.
- The team was deeply engaged in community by providing workshops and events, fostering collaboration, raising awareness, and strengthening connections to promote mental wellness and wellbeing across the zone.

**This initiative is presented across two themes as the program provides different supports that meet unique community needs (e.g., providing local supports in community and providing navigation supports).*

SERVICE NAVIGATION



Nova Scotia Health - Northern Zone Mobile Health and Wellness Team provided one-on-one confidential appointments, group programs, and assistance with navigating healthcare services across Colchester, (East) Hants, Cumberland, and Pictou Counties, through a collaborative group of healthcare providers within primary healthcare. The program aimed to improve access to health and wellness services.



The initiative was funded in 2024-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Since 2024, the mobile unit provided nearly 700 visits and supported approximately 1,900 people through wellness programs.
- It increased community presence to build relationships and foster trust with residents.
- It offered virtual urgent care and nurse practitioner clinic appointments, which made it easier for people to receive primary care.

SERVICE NAVIGATION



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



First Nations Partnership – Youth Navigation and Supports received funding to provide service navigation support for youth in communities, including Millbrook and Sipekne'katik, as well as other remote and equity diverse communities.



North Shore Community Connections Society – Wellness Navigator Initiative received funding to hire a wellness navigator who would provide access to resources on grief and bereavement, early childhood development, education, food security, housing, mental health services, and other supports that affect daily life, including income and employment.

TRANSPORTATION

Below are the **two (2) initiatives** addressing the transportation needs of community members.



Nova Scotia Health - Rural Transportation Pilot provided free transportation support to healthcare and wellness appointments for those experiencing transportation barriers in the Northern Zone.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Nearly 49,000 trips were provided from September 2023 to November 2025.
- Over 5,000 residents have accessed the program.
- Most common appointments are for dialysis, cancer care, and mental health or addictions care.
- The program experienced a higher than anticipated demand. This placed a strain on the limited supports in the community, as the program uses existing Community Transportation Associations (Colchester Transportation Cooperative Limited, Cumberland County Transportation Services, CHAD Transit, and East Hants Community Rider) as providers.
- Increased demand has affected service reliability. Efforts to find long-term, sustainable solutions for clients are ongoing.

I've paid taxes my whole life and I noticed a huge difference in the amount of income I was receiving when I switched from social assistance to old age security and simply do not have the funds to support the amount of trips I need to take for all of my appointments. I have cancer and I'm dying but I still have life to live.

There was a public health transportation pilot that was great. I don't understand how they did it this well.



TRANSPORTATION



The following initiative received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) – EB Chandler Jr High - Late Bus Pilot Project received funding to provide transportation support for youth participating in school and community-based after-school activities. The program aims to reduce barriers to participation and reduce social isolation among students, particularly in rural communities.

Funding will be used to launch a Late Bus Pilot at three to four select schools based on community child poverty rates.



LOCAL SUPPORTS

Below is the **one (1) initiative** addressing the local supports need identified by community members.



Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program - Northern Zone Mental Health and Addictions Adult Outreach* offered a number of services to the community including navigation support and referrals to appropriate services within the Mental Health and Addictions Program and community.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Since fall 2023, the program has provided individual support and facilitated referrals to higher levels of care.
- It raised awareness to promote mental wellness and wellbeing in the region.

**This initiative is presented across two themes as the program provides different supports that meet unique community needs (e.g., providing local supports in community and providing navigation supports).*

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Below are the **twelve (12) initiatives** providing grief, bereavement, and mental health training to community organizations.



Palliative Care Network - The Nova Scotia Health Grief Practice Support Program (GPSP) provided Nova Scotia Health staff, physicians, and volunteers with education, training and resources to enhance their knowledge, skills, and confidence in providing high quality grief and bereavement care.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Since October 2023, approximately 40 grief education sessions have been offered, with more than 1,500 staff, physicians, and volunteers participating.
- 10 grief resources and evidence-based tools have been developed and shared on social media platforms and on websites hosted by Nova Scotia Health and external partners.
- 98% of grief education participants reported increased knowledge as a result of attending the sessions.



I can't say enough how impactful this session was for me. I thank you so much for helping us expand our understanding of such an important human experience. I appreciated the practical resources and information that I can share with my clients.

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



Nova Scotia Health Palliative Care - The Northern Zone Grief Program* provided grief and bereavement support, including grief programming for community members, as well as education and training opportunities for service providers within Nova Scotia Health and community in Northern Zone.



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes for April - September 2025:

- Nearly 60 grief group facilitators were trained.
- Seven professional development events were organized, with 50 attendees.



Nova Scotia Health - Mental Health and Addictions Program – The Knowledge Collaborative, launched in spring 2023, has been a provincial hub offering free education, learning, and collaboration opportunities for community-based organizations (external to government, Nova Scotia Health, and IWK).



The initiative was funded between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes for January - October 2025:

- Since launching in 2023 it had over 400 members province-wide.
- The initiative offered 13 education sessions with over 150 participants since January 2025.
- Examples of topics covered include fundamental counselling skills and supporting adults who have experienced traumatic events.

**This initiative is presented across two themes as the program provides different supports that meet unique community needs (e.g., providing local supports in community and providing navigation supports).*



STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education (CCRCE) - Girls on Fire Program provided girls empowerment training for schools in East Hants and Colchester Counties and Sipekne'katik First Nation. Using mindfulness, yoga, and cognitive therapy techniques, the training helped participants build skills to support resilience, self-discovery, and mental wellbeing among girls, teens, and young women. The funding was used to train staff to host these programs across schools in the region.



The initiative was funded in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Approximately 12 staff took part in the training.
- The initiative increased staff's confidence to deliver the program in schools and inspire young girls and teens.
- It provided a space for like-minded women to support one another and continue important work on gender-based violence and empowerment for women.

The two-day Girls on Fire workshop on women's and girl's empowerment was both enlightening and inspiring. I am committed to integrating the insights and lessons gained into my personal and professional life. I felt a profound sense of connection and community with the participants, I am so grateful for the opportunity.



STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



Nova Scotia Health and Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association - Nova Scotia Grief Alliance worked on establishing a network across Nova Scotia to share grief information and resources, foster connections, strengthen collaboration in grief support, and coordinate training and education for grief support. The Alliance launched in spring 2025 and was designed for individuals working in or interested in grief support, including grief groups, non-profit organizations, and community members.



The initiative was funded in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Four regional roundtables were hosted with over 100 participants from a range of sectors including non-profit, community-based organizations, school system, health professionals, volunteers, and researchers.
- Monthly, free, grief support focused, online education webinars were delivered.
- Over 170 people participated in the first four webinar offerings.
- A Provincial Grief Symposium was held in November 2025, bringing together 150 clinicians, hospice staff, volunteers, and community organizations from across Nova Scotia. 98% of symposium participants said they would recommend future offerings and events.

Coming from a small community – I am so happy to be able to follow the Grief Alliance for a great resource.

The guests were wonderful, a real community of caring people lifted me higher and gave me hope.

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre - The Feather Carrier Program, was a year-long Indigenous-led suicide prevention and life promotion initiative. It brought together Indigenous professionals and community volunteers for seasonal, immersive teaching circles where they learned practices grounded in Indigenous knowledge and teachings.



The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Approximately 22 participants benefited, reporting increased pride, emotional healing, empowerment, and renewed purpose which was especially meaningful for those affected by trauma or suicide loss.
- Participants expressed commitment to applying Feather Carrier teachings in their communities, workplaces, and professional roles.
- Leaders reported using program principles to shape programs, mentor staff, and advocate for culturally safe mental healthcare.



I felt deeply honoured to hear everyone's stories and to receive the teachings shared by the Feather Carriers and the Mi'kmaw Elders.

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



Rath Eastlink Community Centre's (RECC) - Futures In Fitness trained community members for careers in the fitness and recreation sector offering certification courses, mentorship, and hands-on experience in personal training, group fitness, and aqua fitness. The program focused on unemployed individuals facing financial or other barriers, while supporting the health and wellness of RECC members and staff.

 The initiative received funding in 2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- 13 participants, 10 staff, and 100 RECC members benefited from training and classes.
- Three participants were hired for casual roles, with others preparing for future positions.
- Increased staffing reduced service interruptions and ensured consistent fitness programming.
- Newly certified trainers promoted health and wellness on social media, extending community impact.
- The program built a healthier RECC workforce, supporting physical and mental wellbeing.



Nova Scotia Health - The Roadmap to Organizational Health Program supported health system teams with education, resources, and tools addressing compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout.

 The initiative received funding between 2023-2025 and reported outcomes in 2025:

- Over 2,000 Nova Scotia Health employees attended Occupational Health Safety and Wellness workshops.
- Nearly 200 completed education sessions via the Learning Management System (LMS).
- Resources and training led to a 20% increase in literacy and skills related to trauma-exposed workplaces.

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



The following initiatives received funding in 2025 and were in early stages of development/implementation at the time of the assessment.



Bass River Fire Brigade - Training Project received funding to support mental health and wellbeing of firefighters through education and training initiatives. The captain of the fire brigade enrolled in training courses to support knowledge in developing and setting up training programs for firefighters.



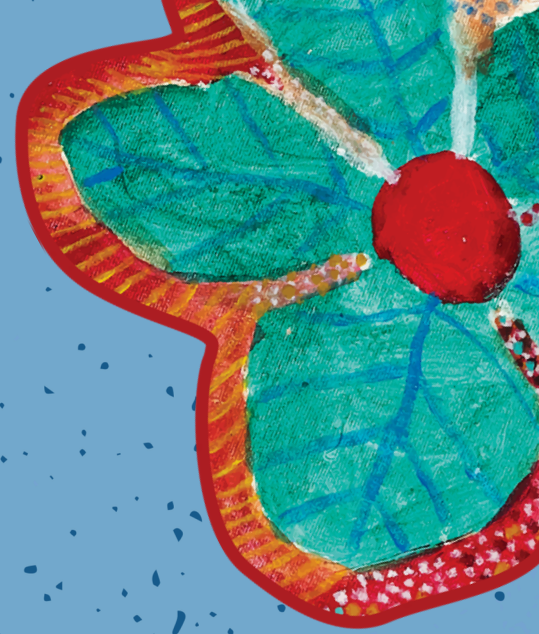
Millbrook First Nation - Wellness Centre Employee Wellness Project received funding to enhance staff wellness by providing mental health training, HR guidance, and self-care resources. It will equip employees with tools to work safely and effectively while helping reduce burnout and sick leave.



Colchester East Hants Library - Emotional Wellbeing Initiative received funding to provide trauma-informed training to all library staff to better understand the needs of library users. This training will help front-line staff understand how people in the community are affected by trauma and how the staff can better assist them.



IWK - Trauma-Informed Practice Program received funding to deliver training for healthcare professionals and community groups, teaching participants to recognize trauma, apply trauma-informed principles, create safe spaces, and manage work in trauma-exposed environments.



Appendix B

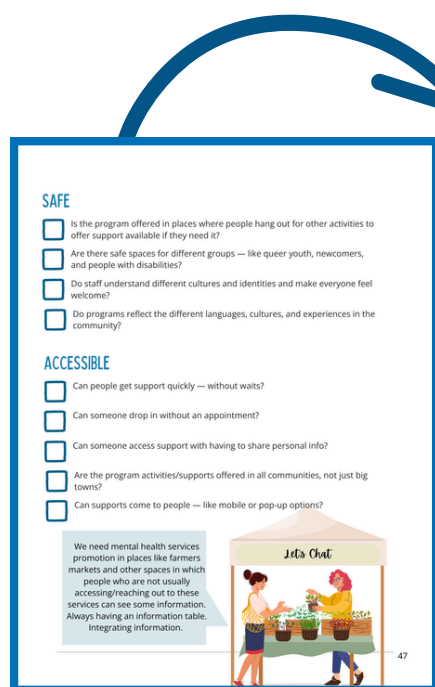
Community Reflection Tools

ABOUT THESE TOOLS

During the community engagements, service providers and community members shared their thoughts on how services and supports could be designed, delivered, and experienced for better outcomes. They talked about the need for services that feel **safe, accessible, inclusive**, and **grounded in lived experience**.

Based on what was heard, these Reflection Tools were created to support government, system partners, and community organizations that want to plan and offer services shaped by the needs of the people they serve. The purpose of this appendix is to guide the design of new programs and services.

Please note that these tools are not meant to be a one size fits all approach. Instead, use them as a starting point when creating or improving mental health, grief, and bereavement supports in your community.



The tools are organized around three themes: **Mental Health, Grief, and Access to Information.**

For each theme, you will find checklists and information to help you:

- Create safe and inclusive mental health supports.
- Better understand and define grief.
- Improve access to information on mental health and grief supports.

CREATING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS: A REFLECTION TOOL

Community members shared that mental health supports need to be grounded in lived experience and be safe and accessible. These ideas form some key guiding principles for how programs and services should be designed and delivered.

Based on what community members shared, the following checklist was developed. It includes examples of how these principles can show up in the way government and community programs are run, spaces are created, and people are supported.

This tool isn't meant to be a full or final list. Instead, it's a starting point to help reflect on how these guiding principles are being put into practice for the people who access mental health supports.

LOCAL AND HUMAN-CENTRED

- ☐ Are people with lived experience of mental health issues part of planning and reviewing programs?
- ☐ Are local community members, Elders, or knowledge holders leading or helping with programs?
- ☐ Are people from the community (peers) hired or funded to offer mental health support?
- ☐ Were community members asked what kind of language feels right (simple and caring, not clinical) and is that language being used?

The best people to support community are people that are in the community. We need to take the label "professional" out of it. Clinical ways don't always benefit people.



SAFE

- ☐ Is the program offered in places where people gather for other activities?
- ☐ Are there safe spaces for different groups – like queer youth, newcomers, and people with disabilities?
- ☐ Do staff understand different cultures and identities and make everyone feel welcome?
- ☐ Do programs reflect the different languages, cultures, and experiences in the community?

ACCESSIBLE

- ☐ Can people get support quickly?
- ☐ Can someone drop in without an appointment?
- ☐ Can someone access support without having to share personal info (if possible)?
- ☐ Are the program activities/supports offered in smaller communities, not just big towns?
- ☐ Can supports come to people – like mobile or pop-up options?

We need mental health promotion in places like farmers markets and other spaces in which people who are not usually accessing/reaching out to these services can see some information.



INTENTIONAL OUTREACH

- ☐ Does the program include specific activities and messages that speak directly to men and other groups who might not usually reach out for help?
- ☐ Were these groups asked about what kind of support or approach would work best for them?
- ☐ Are we using language, images, and examples that reflect their experiences?

WELCOMING

- ☐ Does the program happen in spaces that feel safe, welcoming, and home-like – not clinical or intimidating?
- ☐ Does the program offer the option for people to meet in comfortable spaces for them like going for a walk or visiting a coffee shop?
- ☐ Does the program use words people connect with, like wellness or support, instead of mental health?

Current services and supports often feel formal and institutional – people want to avoid them, as they don't feel safe accessing them. There is a need for services that are offered informally, by people who know them.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION: A REFLECTION TOOL

This reflection tool was created based on real examples and ideas shared by community members about how access to information could be improved. It's designed to help community organizations, service providers, and governments pause and reflect on how well their materials, websites, and outreach efforts make supports easy to see, find, and understand.

This tool isn't meant to be a full or final list. Instead, it's a starting point to help reflect on how these guiding principles are being put into practice for the people who access mental health supports.

LANGUAGE

- ☐ Does the information use plain language, so everyone can understand what is being said?
- ☐ Is the information offered in multiple languages, so people who speak different languages can access it?
- ☐ Does the information offer clear contact information and next steps?



If we can't explain it to a five-year-old, it shouldn't be on there.

COMMUNICATION MEDIUM

- ☐ Are there a mix of formats being used (paper-based and digital) so people can find information in the way that works best for them?
- ☐ Are there groups in the community who may be missing out because of how information is shared? Who might they be?
- ☐ How are people who rely on verbal or community-based communication being reached (e.g., word of mouth, trusted local leaders)?
- ☐ Have community members been asked how they prefer to receive information?

DISTRIBUTION (PAPER-BASED)

- ☐ Are printed materials being provided for people who don't use the internet or prefer something tangible?
- ☐ Are these materials available in places people already go (e.g., libraries, clinics, food banks, community centres, schools)?

DISTRIBUTION (INTERNET)

- ☐ Is information easy to find online (e.g., through search engines, partner websites, or social media)?
- ☐ Are simple navigation and phone numbers being offered in addition to online forms?
- ☐ Are updates being shared with existing community hubs or directories so people can find the information without having to search everywhere?
- ☐ Are updates being included in existing newsletters or should a newsletter be created in collaboration with other supports so people can see all information together?

HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND DEFINE GRIEF: A REFLECTION TOOL

A stronger understanding of grief, grief literacy, and expanding wellness models around grief has been a key focus of many groups, including the Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association (NSHPCA), the Palliative Care Network, Nova Scotia Health, and Nova Scotia Public Health.

Part of the focus has been on defining grief and wellness. Below is a series of definitions related to grief from these various sources.

WHAT IS GRIEF

Grief can appear after loss, change, or tragedy and it can affect thoughts, emotions, and overall wellbeing. Each person experiences grief in their own way and there is no single path through it.

Grief is a personal experience that depends on someone's culture, beliefs, and life situation. In Nova Scotia, every community experiences grief and loss differently, showing how important connection and support are. The way people heal also varies and can be affected by where they live and what resources they have. In rural areas, distance and isolation can make it harder to find emotional support or services, leaving people to face their grief alone.

HOW TO BETTER TALK ABOUT GRIEF



The Nova Scotia Health Palliative Care Network (NSHPCN) created the following definitions to help everyone understand what grief is.

- **Grief is a human experience.** Everyone is affected by the loss of someone or something you're meaningfully attachment to. Attachment relationships are essential for the development of meaning, security, and safety for all human beings. When one of those relationships ends in loss, human beings respond with grief.
- **Grief is an involuntary response.** Just as the central nervous system responds to potential threats to aid in survival, human beings respond with grief when a loss is experienced. Every human being has developed their own grieving style in relation to their development and the losses they have experienced in life. No one grieves in the same way.
- **The context of the loss impacts the grief experience.** In some instances, grief is anticipated or expected - such as the death of a loved one with a known life limiting illness. It can also be unexpected and/or have potentially occurred in a traumatic context - such as an accident.
- **Grief affects individuals, families, and communities differently.** Grief can manifest itself in a range of physical, emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and spiritual ways and is highly influenced by one's experiences, cultural norms, traditions, beliefs, and values.

