



Office of the Auditor General

Auditor General's Statement to the Media

Release of April 2016 Report to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly
4/26/2016



Nova Scotia

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming.

Later today, my April 2016 Report will be tabled in the House.

For the first time, my Office has a separate follow-up report to the House. This is to stress the importance of telling Nova Scotians if Government is acting to make improvements as it agreed to in prior audits. Specifically, in this report we are checking if 400 recommendations from 23 audits in 2012 and 2013 were completed. This work was performed based on where departments stood at October 2015. We did not assess action past that date.

The 23 audits make recommendations that continue to be largely accepted (93%) by organizations we audit. However, it is solely government's responsibility to get the actions completed and regularly monitor their own performance.

This year's follow-up results show the overall implementation rate was 60 per cent, essentially unchanged from last year's 58 per cent. This is not good enough for those who rely on government services and programs and who expect a government that is efficient and effective in meeting their needs.

However, there is some good news, as six organizations implemented over 80 per cent of their recommendations. These organizations show it can be done. Completing recommendations needs to be a priority across government.

Nova Scotians deserve explanations as to why 14 entities implemented less than 80% of their recommendations, including organizations with rates below 50 per cent. Examples of those doing poorly at making improvements are:

- IWK Health Centre
- Nova Scotia Health Authority
- Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
- Department of Business

These four organizations account for nearly half of the recommendations not completed.

Regardless of an organization's completion rate, it is possible that significant risks remain unaddressed, when recommendations are not completed. For example, we did an audit of the prescription drug monitoring program. Three recommendations related to reviewing prescribing practices and weaknesses in follow-up have still not been completed. A recent media case highlights the ongoing relevance when known weaknesses are not corrected.

Ninety-three per cent of our 2012 and 2013 recommendations were accepted for implementation. We disagreed with government's rationale for not accepting the remaining recommendations. It mainly relates to two organizations.

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I believe that 17 recommendations on the Nova Scotia Jobs Fund are applicable to the Department of Business' newly created economic development funding program – Invest Nova Scotia. The recommendations outline controls and safeguards essential and relevant to funding programs. The rationale for the Department indicating they are not relevant to their new funding plan is not solid in my view.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development does not intend to implement six of the recommendations from our 2012 audit of home schooling. The Department agreed to implement these recommendations when the 2012 report was released. The recommendations focus on learning objectives and outcomes, independent assessments of home schooled children, and assessments of children's progress.

Without doing this, the Department cannot definitely know if home schooled children are being adequately educated. I believe the Department not implementing these actions sends the wrong message to Nova Scotians. Outcomes should matter and the Department should act.

We encourage organizations with lower rates to look to those doing well and take action to fix known weaknesses to help give Nova Scotians better government. Today, I would also expect that Ministers, CEOs, Presidents and Board of Directors of these organizations who are not making the promised improvements will explain to Nova Scotians why this is so. They should also provide commitments and timelines as to when these organizations will get the job done.

I want to thank the staff in my Office for their continued professionalism and their dedication to the independent audit work they do. They work hard to point out where services to Nova Scotians can be better delivered and where Government can be improved. We are all committed to better government for Nova Scotians.

I also want to thank management and staff in the departments and agencies we reviewed. They cooperated with us and there were no difficulties in completing this work.

Those are some of the highlights of the report. Now I would be happy to take your questions.