

NLPSPA Sponsors Public Engagement with Seniors' Advocate
Sharron Callahan, Executive Director

On December 5, the Association sponsored one of the public engagement sessions that the Seniors' Advocate has been conducting for a number of weeks across Newfoundland and Labrador. These engagement sessions were a commitment by Ms. Susan Walsh, the Seniors' Advocate, following her appointment this past summer as she sought to confirm the issues she has heard from seniors and to develop her strategy for addressing these concerns. Also, given the significant economic and social changes that have occurred in the past three years since the appointment of the first Seniors' Advocate, it became critically important to ensure that the concerns and issues voiced in past consultations were current and there was a process of accountability established to ensure action was being taken.

Sponsored by the Association in partnership with the member organizations of the Seniors & Pensioners Coalition, interest was very high in this in-person event, with 60+ persons in attendance. The meeting was held at the Comfort Hotel, Airport Road, St. John's.

Wayne Noseworthy, NLPSPA President, welcomed everyone, Dr. Linda Phillips, C.A.R.P. NL Communications Chair read the Land Acknowledgement, and Sharron Callahan, Executive Director, introduced the Seniors' Advocate, Susan Walsh. The goal of the engagement was to hear the voice of Seniors on current concerns, priorities, and ideas for positive change. Health Care consumed most of the time. Concerns ranged from only one health care item per visit with some doctors, the lack of family doctors, mental health and dementia issues, the limited restrictions faced by pharmacists and nurse practitioners, the need for medical students to have an incentive to stay in NL upon completion of their studies, to the erosion of our health care system. Some serious shortcomings were addressed and oversights were shared that were appalling. The second issue was housing – rental costs have skyrocketed, those wanting to age at home must have the cooperation of the city, town, village they live in with simple matters such as mowing the lawn and snow clearing being easy fixes, with home care being a greater and more difficult issue. Transportation was also discussed as being particularly challenging in rural areas. The cost of living for those on a fixed income is a major concern and issues such as the almost triple cost of oil and the ever-increasing cost of groceries, amenities, and health care. Seniors also raised and reported on disrespect, dismissal, and discrimination experienced on a daily basis. They pointed out – we are taxpayers and thus have earned our rightful place in society. Suggestions for policy changes were made on all of the issues with the caveat of NOW and not five to ten years time. ***(Linda Phillips, CARP NL Communications Chair)***

The session attendees were very engaged and spoke of their issues with clarity, concern, and worry for the future. The session was also interspersed with personal stories of lived experiences which added further clarity and a face of reality to the issues.

The Seniors' Advocate was very appreciative of this opportunity sponsored by NLPSPA and the Coalition. As an Association, we look forward to the report on this engagement series and will provide same to the membership when it is received. It will then be critical upon all of us to ensure there is accountability for these issues and for the solutions/actions offered.