

TRAUMA
NOVA SCOTIA



Nova Scotia
ABI NETWORK

A Submission on Bill C-277 An Act to establish a national strategy on brain injuries to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health

SUMMARY

Trauma Nova Scotia supports Bill C-277: National Strategy on Brain Injuries Act, as it strives to address the multifaceted needs of brain injuries across the continuum of care. Trauma services see the significant and lasting impact that brain injuries have on patients, families, caregivers, healthcare systems, and society. Trauma data unfortunately shows that brain injuries are a concern for all age groups and can result from various mechanisms, such as falls and motor-vehicle collisions (1). Regardless of how a brain injury occurs, many people have long-term chronic conditions with lasting impacts.

This is why brain injuries need to be addressed in a cohesive manner. This includes support for prevention and awareness measures, as well as enhanced treatment and recovery strategies to improve long-term outcomes. Trauma Nova Scotia believes that the need for a national strategy on brain injuries is crucial to ensure federal and provincial governments can take steps to alleviate the burden of brain injuries.

BACKGROUND AND STATISTICS

Trauma Nova Scotia collects data on all major trauma patients in the province. This data is stored in the Nova Scotia Trauma Registry which contains records on over 20,000 dating back to the late 1990's. The following statistics highlight the burden of brain injury in Nova Scotia:

- Traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and concussions are among the most significant injuries of concern; these injuries are commonly seen in traumas from falls, motor vehicle collisions, bicycles-related injuries. Brain injuries can occur in various settings, including the workplace, during sports and recreation, and at home (1).
- In Nova Scotia, there were 5,590 TBIs between January 1, 2002, and March 31, 2018 (2).
- The rate of major TBI in Nova Scotia increased (particularly from fall injuries) between 2002 to 2018 (2).
 - Furthermore, falls are a leading cause of TBI in Canada (3).
- Among trauma patients in Nova Scotia, intoxication with alcohol was found to be a risk factor for non-helmet use (4).
 - Helmets, when used properly, are protective devices that can absorb the force from a fall or crash (5). Legislation and education related to helmet use is a key preventive measure for brain injuries (6–8).

This is a snapshot of what Trauma Nova Scotia sees in relation to brain injuries. Beyond this it is estimated that over 70,000 Nova Scotians have an acquired brain injury, and there are 17,000 new brain injuries every year in the province (9).

The intersectionality of brain injury means that it contributes to and is affected by circumstances and systemic issues such as (but not limited to) intimate partner violence (IPV) and homelessness.

- TBI symptoms are experienced by up to 75% of women affected by IPV (11). On September 12, 2024, NS government passed a bill declaring domestic violence an epidemic in the province (12).
- Homelessness is increasing in Nova Scotia. In Halifax alone, the number of unhoused individuals has tripled since 2021 (13, 14). Over half (53%) of homeless people experience a TBI, with more than 70% of those individuals experiencing brain injury **before** they become homeless (15). One in four homeless individuals (25%) experience a TBI that is moderate or severe (15).

In Canada, there are approximately 500 new brain injuries every day, making brain injury a major cause of death and disability for Canadians (3,10).

RECOMMENDATIONS

A national strategy on brain injury is necessary to support and improve the care of persons living with a brain injury. For the national strategy to achieve its goals, the following recommendations should be considered:

Guided by lived experience:

- The government is encouraged to establish a task force inclusive of policymakers, medical/allied health, community agencies, brain injury associations and Indigenous groups, and **most importantly individuals and families with lived experience to guide the development of a national strategy.**

Standardized Data Gathering and Surveillance

- Improve data collection of both incidence and prevalence of brain injury.
 - Data can then be used to drive policy decisions and healthcare strategies at the provincial and territorial levels of government.
- Designate moderate to severe TBI as a chronic condition under the Canadian Chronic Disease Surveillance System

Research and Treatment Development

- Promote research that would advance epidemiological knowledge and determine best clinical practices.
- Focus research across the spectrum of brain injury including acute care, rehabilitation, and community-based services and interventions to guide intervention and support throughout their lifespan.

Prevention and Awareness

- Support prevention through education, advocacy, and policy development.
- Increase public awareness about brain injury prevention, symptoms, and the importance of early intervention.

- Educating the public, healthcare providers, and policymakers can lead to earlier diagnoses and decrease stigmatization providing an overall increase in health outcomes and community engagement.

Promote a multifaceted approach.

- Address all levels of prevention and treatment by ensuring there is an interdisciplinary approach that allows for comprehensive care to all brain injury patients.
- Standardize the diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation processes, and long-term support for brain injuries across the country.
 - This would ensure that all individuals, regardless of where they live or the recovery stage they are at, would receive the same high standard of care.
- A national strategy will necessitate a shift towards a healthcare system that provides ongoing care and support for individuals throughout their lifetime.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of a national strategy would have a positive impact on those with brain injuries, their families, and their communities. By having a unified approach to the awareness, prevention, and treatment of brain injuries, all Canadians will have access to standardized resources and support, leading to improved brain injury health outcomes.

ABOUT TRAUMA NOVA SCOTIA

Trauma Nova Scotia is the provincial trauma program providing optimal trauma care since 1997. As a part of Nova Scotia Health, Trauma Nova Scotia offers leadership, education, research, injury prevention, emergency preparedness, and management of the provincial trauma registry. Trauma Nova Scotia is a recognized leader in integrated trauma care, incorporating patient-centred clinical excellence, innovative education, practice-changing research, and reflective healthcare policy.

ABOUT THE NOVA SCOTIA ABI NETWORK

The Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Program is made up of many services and teams. It provides services to persons who have sustained an acquired brain injury across the continuum of care from inpatient acute care and inpatient rehabilitation to community living.

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