



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND **2022 BUDGET ADDRESS**

Presented by:
Honourable Darlene Compton
Minister of Finance and
Chair of Treasury Board



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Budget Address



Delivered by

The Honourable Darlene Compton
Minister of Finance
and Chair of Treasury Board

At the Second Session of the
Sixty-sixth General Assembly of the
Prince Edward Island Legislature

February 24th, 2022

Good Afternoon, Bonjour, Kwe.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, I am pleased to present the budget and estimates for the fiscal year 2022-2023 for the consideration of the Assembly.

As I begin, I acknowledge that we are living in a period of unprecedented challenges and unprecedented opportunities. It is essential that government address these challenges and seize these opportunities. This budget strives to achieve those goals.

Pandemic restrictions are once again easing, we have achieved impressive levels of vaccination and people are ready to start Moving On. Our economy is ready to boom.

This budget includes \$137 Million in new spending touching all aspects of Island life; for a total expenditure of almost \$2.7 billion. This reflects an increase of 5.5%. The deficit will stand at \$92.9 Million.

Drawing heavily on the Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth Report and our experiences of the past two years, the budget sets the stage for a better future for all Islanders, and for our Island – a precious speck of red clay in an uncertain sea.

The pandemic has demonstrated to us that we are more and more citizens of a global community wherein the impacts and decisions of diverse jurisdictions impact all of us.

The worries of another country can, with the stroke of a pen, cancel a season of hard work, success and optimism in the potato industry.

A health crisis can highlight the weaknesses of our health system while at the same time spotlight the dedication and commitment of those who provide this vital service.

Pandemic restrictions can force businesses to tear up the traditional play book and quickly transition to new strategies for survival and for success.

... we are living in a period of unprecedented challenges and unprecedented opportunities. It is essential that government address these challenges and seize these opportunities. This budget strives to achieve those goals.

Travel and the free flow of goods can be curtailed by sudden and sustained border closures.

Households deal with job losses, work at home requirements, education system changes, the loss of recreation activities and the upending of our daily lives and the lives of those we love.

On top of all that, we are worried about the impact of record inflation adding more pressures to the cost of living.

In these examples there is a common reality – at their core; working and worrying; needing and comforting; wanting and serving; asking and answering - PEOPLE. Never has it been more obvious that it is about people. True, budgets are about money - dollars collected, dollars allocated, dollars spent, results achieved. But without a focus on people, the numbers are meaningless.

To our health care professionals – thanks to each of you for taking on the challenges and making special efforts to ease the strain and worry of others.

To all essential workers who showed up day-in, day-out to provide essential services, thank you for your perseverance.

To our farmers, I say thank you for your tenacity, thank you for your commitment.

To our public service, thank you for being dedicated and responsive to the people we serve.

Some Islanders lost their source of income, their source of child care, their access to family. Some lost loved ones to COVID-19 and other factors and had to grieve in isolation. But we did not lose our sense of self. Our pride in our Island. Thank you for your understanding and your perseverance.

In the year 2022, with all that we have learned and all that we have achieved we still have global superpowers threatening open conflict with all the danger and hardship that inflicts on people - who for the most part, just want an opportunity to work, raise a family, and get some enjoyment out of life.

It may seem strange to mention international conflict in a Prince Edward Island budget address. The fact is we are impacted. Those decisions do matter to us: markets react, people react, the economy reacts, our mental health is impacted; our environment is impacted, and the world environment is our environment.

As I look back at the past two years, I am impressed by what we have endured, what we have sustained, and what we have achieved:

- Our population continues to grow, reaching just over 164,000 this past July and we were again the fastest growing province for the sixth year in a row;
- Over the past year employment grew by 3.5 per cent with an average of 79,400 Islanders being employed, regaining all of our pandemic losses and reaching a new all-time-high for PEI employment numbers;
- 1396 housing units were completed in 2021, the most completed in a single year since 1974, and the third best year on record; and
- Island exports increased 12.5 per cent in 2021 to reach \$1.7 billion, a new all-time high.

So, as challenging as the past two years have been, we must not forget that we have also made some great achievements as a province.

We appreciate the way all levels of government have worked together to provide needed supports and guidance to Islanders. I thank the federal government for the significant funding that has been provided, directly and indirectly, as well as the assistance with acquiring necessary supplies. Colleagues in our neighbouring provinces have been helpful, especially here within the Atlantic region, and our municipalities have made every effort to support health measures and make facilities and services available. I appreciate the Members of this House for their input, their encouragement and their feedback.

I applaud those who have worked so hard under difficult and trying circumstances – to name a few:

Those who have gone full shifts, maybe a double shift, wearing a tight-fitting face mask, sometimes with an added face shield.

Those who have faced loss of income, even the loss of their job, because of lockdowns.

Those who had to transition to work at home.

Those who had to develop the learning opportunities and support at-home education.

Those who waited in line to be tested.

Those who have had to endure complaints, sometimes insults, from those frustrated with the Public Health restrictions.

Those who volunteered to support health care workers and work at vaccination clinics.

Those who volunteered to put stickers on potato bags to meet shipment deadlines.

Those who have continued to reach out to others and support charitable services.

Government thanks each one of you. Those sacrifices are appreciated and will not be forgotten.

Not everyone agrees with the actions of the past two years. That is to be expected and respected. It reflects a healthy democracy. There must always be room for diverse opinions based on mutual respect.

Moving On we must be able to adapt to an ever-changing world and citizens that are no longer content with the old way of doing things. That is why we promised a new approach to governing and that is what has guided our actions over the past two years. Not perfect, because change isn't always easy, but it is happening and will continue to happen.

More than ever before we need a solid and clear plan for Moving On, not just over the next few months or years, but into the decades ahead. One thing that you come to recognize as a Minister, maybe especially as Finance Minister, is that even dramatically transitional change doesn't happen as quickly and as easily as you think it should. What you think should take weeks can take years, and with good reason.

Some of what we collectively decide in this Assembly will not be completed in the time we are here, but it will impact and guide future actions. It therefore requires our full and careful consideration.

Government's agenda must also be more than a "political agenda." It must be the People's Agenda, not based on what is expedient for the current election cycle, but what is right for the future.

Decisions made by government on behalf of the people need context.

The Premier's Council for Recovery and Growth offered the opportunity for a fresh look at our province, its people, needs and opportunities. I again thank the members of the council for their work and their recommendations.

Reflecting on that report, two words come to mind. Sustain and Ability. So much has been achieved and sustained by the work of Islanders, not just over the past two years but throughout our history. Looking at the members of the Council and their view of the future, you appreciate we have so much ability to do more.

So much has been achieved and sustained by the work of Islanders, not just over the past two years but throughout our history.

It seems fitting therefore that our decisions and actions should be guided by the combination of those words - sustainability.

We are not alone in this quest. We are joined by jurisdictions around the world, so strongly, that the United Nations has set out 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals, requesting that all governments, businesses and organizations endorse and work towards the achievement of those goals.

They are:

No poverty; Zero Hunger; Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Clean Water and Sanitation; Affordable and Clean Energy; Decent work and Economic Growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Reduced Inequalities; Sustainable Cities and Communities; Responsible Consumption and Production; Climate Action; Life Below Water; Life on Land; Peace Justice and Strong Institutions; Partnerships for the Goals.

Every initiative in this budget is linked to one of these goals – and in most cases, linked to many of those goals.

Mr. Speaker, there are many new initiatives included in the budget. Throughout this speech, I will highlight some, and my colleagues will be providing more details on the various initiatives in the coming days as we debate the budget in-depth.

Mr. Speaker, for four decades, through successive governments at both the federal and provincial levels there has been a request, even a plea, for increased federal funding of health care. The pandemic has only further highlighted the weaknesses caused in the system by this underfunding and, while grateful for the supports provided through federal pandemic related actions, I am compelled to emphasize the need for the Government of Canada to cover more of the costs of this vital service to ensure the **Good Health and Well-Being of Islanders**. The Premiers from all 13 provinces and territories are united in requesting the Canada Health Transfer funding increase to 35% from the 22% now provided. I ask all Members of this Assembly to stand together in urging a positive and prompt response from the Federal government.

We are committed to doing the best with the resources available to us. I am proud of what has been achieved to date and what we plan to do.

First, we will focus on those who are already part of our hardworking team. This budget commits over \$1 Million dollars to provide supports to front line staff in our healthcare system. This will include resources to address labour relations and human resource concerns, improve coordination to address staffing shortages, and to ensure safety in workplaces. Our Human Resource Help Desk will be extended to provide direct support to those on the front line or those who need to transition back into our workforce after injury or illness.

To support our nurses, we will be investing \$1.1 Million to create a float pool of Registered Nurses that can be assigned based on the most urgent needs and address short term vacancies to avoid bed and temporary service closures. This float pool will create 25 new full-time RN positions to add to our existing complement.

An investment of \$1.5 Million will be made into provincial home care services. This investment adds to our teams to provide enhanced care for Islanders to age in place. It will provide respite support to caregivers, and allow more patients to return home after medical treatments with necessary supports.

An investment of \$1.5 Million will be made into provincial home care services. This investment adds to our teams to provide enhanced care for Islanders to age in place.

Efforts to stabilize the staffing complement at rural hospitals, in particular Western Hospital, will be enhanced with \$1.1 Million to add RNs, LPNs, and allied health supporters to our existing teams.

This budget includes a record investment of \$8.7 Million to add physicians across multiple specialties to ensure Islanders have access to specialty services in our province. Additions will be made in the areas of: General surgery, Geriatrics and Psychiatry, Pediatrics, Obstetrics / Gynecology, Ophthalmology, Radiology, Specialist & Telemedicine Clinic, Hospitalists, Chronic Pain, and a Family Physician specializing in ADHD.

To aid in our recruitment efforts, additional resources will be added to our Recruitment Secretariat with an investment of \$325,000. This includes the addition of a Health Recruitment Coordinator, a Marketing and Communications Officer, and a dedicated International Education Nursing Navigator who will plan, lead, coordinate, develop and monitor the internationally educated nursing program.

While recruitment and retention remain a core focus, the staffing demands require us to train more professionals right here in Prince Edward Island. This past Fall, our government took a historic step forward by partnering with UPEI to provide the necessary support to expand the Faculty of Nursing with six additional seats in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program and increasing the Accelerated Nursing program from 16 to 28. At the same time, our government committed to support creating the UPEI Faculty of Medicine which will provide training for 20 future physicians each year. The total investment over six years for these two initiatives is \$72 Million.

Mr. Speaker, our government also recognizes that in order to aid in recruitment and retention we need to modernize our health care facilities. This budget includes \$360,000 for improvements at the Holland College Wellness Centre and a commitment to five-year operational funding for the Tignish Health Centre to expand service delivery in West Prince.

This budget includes a record investment of \$8.7 Million to add physicians across multiple specialties to ensure Islanders have access to specialty services in our province.

In addition, our health care system is taking the necessary steps forward to innovate how we deliver care in our province. Mr. Speaker, just a block away from this chamber the Polyclinic houses our province's first community-based Visiting Consultant and Tele-health clinic where we are connecting Islanders with specialists not available on the Island, while being supported by in-person health care providers. These tele-health clinics remove the requirement for some to travel off Island and will be expanded across the province and to new specialties. This budget provides an investment of \$536,000.

Mr. Speaker, our government is making record investments around health human resources and health care infrastructure – but we aren't stopping there. We are also providing record investments in expanding health care programs and services across the province to ensure that Islanders have access to the right care, at the right time, at the right place.

We are renewing our primary care health system. Our Medical Homes and Medical Neighborhoods will make us a leader in our country for ensuring Islanders have timely access to primary care. Last year, we committed \$10.4 Million over three years to establish this new model. This budget includes \$2.7 Million to continue this work and focuses on hiring the necessary staff to establish these Homes and Neighborhoods including: physicians, NPs, RNs, LPNs, dieticians, social workers and support staff. These individuals will all work under this transformative model whereby health care providers work collaboratively, in a shared space, with electronic medical records, and wrap-around services.

Our Medical Homes and Medical Neighborhoods will make us a leader in our country for ensuring Islanders have timely access to primary care.

And Mr. Speaker, we recognize the toll that the last 23 months has had on the mental health of Islanders. It hasn't been easy – and we need to ensure Islanders have access to supports. Our Mobile Mental Health Response Teams were launched this past Fall. These units have responded to over 1,000 calls from Islanders and have visited almost 200 individuals at home to provide on-site care. We've seen a 10% reduction in mental health and addiction admissions since this program launched. Our budget includes an additional \$637,000 to annualize this program to bring the total investment to \$3.1 Million. In addition, we will be investing an additional \$1.3 Million to increase the staffing complement at St. Eleanor's House, expanding the Community First Funding, enhancing the Strongest Families program, and increasing mental health supports at both UPEI and Holland College. Our government is also working with the Canadian Mental Health Association by providing \$1.3 Million to assist with enhancements to the Hope Centre program and School Mental Health programs.

We will continue to put a focus on wellness, active living and recreation to build resiliency and mental wellness. This budget commits additional funding for KidSport to ensure that children and youth can participate in sports and recreational activities. With this investment, more families will receive support as we will be increasing coverage to include those with household income less than \$60,000 per year. All eligible families will receive \$600 per child to help with the cost of registration, membership fees, or equipment required to participate. In addition, through the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, starting this summer, we will be providing a \$100 rebate on the sale of any bicycle purchased in Prince Edward Island to encourage active transportation and active living. We will also be expanding the LiveWell PEI initiative to help empower Islanders to take control of, and improve, their health, which in turn contributes to thriving and healthy communities. These investments total over \$800,000.

We will continue to put a focus on wellness, active living and recreation to build resiliency and mental wellness.

Seniors living in community care and long-term care homes have been impacted in ways we never would have imagined because of COVID-19. Limited visitors, suspension of activities, isolation, sickness, and so much more. It is time to reassess our path forward for these facilities. Our government will launch a Long-Term Care Review starting in the coming weeks to gain a deeper understanding of the widespread impacts of COVID-19 on the long-term care sector. It is expected that the Review will identify best practices, review the current state of long-term care against the proposed national standards, and deliver ideas and recommendations to meet these standards. In the meantime, we will modernize the inspection process for these facilities by investing an additional \$100,000 in the coming year.

Our Provincial Dental Care program that was launched in 2021 will receive an infusion of \$1.5 Million dollars to continue to offer free dental care to Islanders at or below the Market Basket Measure poverty line. In addition, the sliding scale applied above the Market Basket Measure captures 8,000 additional low-income Islanders and provides coverage ranging from 80 per cent, to 20 per cent. The total investment for this program in this budget is \$3.5 Million.

Good health goes beyond the clinic and hospital door. Many of us need to change our lifestyles to avoid issues and the resulting impact on ourselves and others.

This budget includes the introduction of a new tax on vaping products and an increase on tobacco taxes, that will incentivize changes for the future health and wellbeing of Islanders. These tax changes are focused on decreasing the use of addictive nicotine products which can have negative long-term health impacts.

We know the challenges of healthy eating and good nutrition are hampered by poverty. Our government has made record investments in efforts to achieve **No Poverty**. One year ago we stood united in passing Bill 107, the *Poverty Elimination Act*. We are working to meet the goals of the Act. Social Assistance rates were increased last fall, and we will

*Our Provincial
Dental Care
program that
was launched in
2021 will
receive an
infusion of \$1.5
Million dollars
...*

increase rates again next Fall based on the Consumer Price Index recognizing the rising cost of living. We will increase funding of the Employment Focus Initiative by \$150,000 with the goal of assisting 400 social assistance clients in finding meaningful employment through employment counselling and upskilling.

For clients who need additional supports, we will be working to enhance the programs and services offered at the Outreach Centre in Charlottetown. These new supports and services, offered with a fresh perspective and renewed optimism will provide the necessary wrap-around services to assist individuals in reaching their full potential.

Through the Associate Families program, our government will make updates to the rate structures, reimbursements and compensation to provide safe and welcoming homes for adults who have intellectual disabilities. An investment of \$400,000 will provide over 60 families an additional \$555 per month to assist with caring for adults with intellectual disabilities.

It is a regrettable reality that there are children in our province who go to school hungry and families that struggle with food security. We must strive for **Zero Hunger**.

Our Island-wide school food lunch program has provided over 9,500 students with 250,000 healthy meals since being launched in the Fall of 2021. The pay-what-you-can model removes the stigma associated with those who are experiencing food insecurity and has received accolades from across the continent. We will continue to provide the necessary funding to continue with the pay-what-you-can model to the PEI School Food Program that is now independently operating the school food lunch program for our province. Through the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, we will be making an additional investment of \$100,000 to our school breakfast programs in 2022-2023.

This year, we will be investing \$250,000 to launch a Seniors Food Security pilot program ...

During the most recent wave of COVID-19 in early 2022, we were able to quickly and efficiently provide lunches delivered directly to the doorsteps of children across the province while in-class learning was suspended. We delivered over 32,000 meals during the 4-week period.

We know that students are not the only ones in need. In response to the recent increased health restrictions during January and February 2022, our dedicated team in Social Development and Housing delivered over 4,700 reheatable meals to 330 seniors, representing 258 households across the province, over a 3-week period.

This year, we will be investing \$250,000 to launch a Seniors Food Security pilot program, starting in Kings County, to provide ongoing reheatable meals for aging Islanders who are experiencing food insecurity or could benefit from healthy and nutritious meals delivered to their doorstep. We hope to be able to expand this program Island-wide based on the learnings from this pilot program.

While the school food lunch program has been extremely successful, and our pivot to a seniors food security program well received – we know that we must do more.

This challenge goes beyond our province, and it is indeed sad to watch good quality potatoes being run through a snow blower and destroyed. Some potatoes were directed to food banks across Canada, but the fact that good food is deliberately wasted only adds to the frustration of the potato wart crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the aspirations we have for our children, and for our planet, can best be achieved on the base of a **quality education**.

This past summer, our province and the federal government made one of the largest investments in our early years sector in our provinces history. We have been, and will continue to be a leader in providing quality, accessible and affordable child care. This budget takes the next step forward towards an average of \$10/day childcare. With a record investment of \$27.2 Million in this budget, our government will work

with the industry to expand spaces, increase wages, designate more centers and continue to build a robust and resilient childcare system in our province. This represents a massive new investment and further demonstrates our commitment to the youth of today, who will be the leaders of tomorrow.

The K-12 system has demonstrated the skill and strength of those involved in this service striving to maintain quality education during the pandemic, the lockdowns, COVID exposures and outbreaks, and the Public Health restrictions. In this budget, we are committing an additional 40 full-time positions to the Public Schools Branch and the Commission scolaire de langue française. These positions include teachers, education assistants, student services support, and cleaning staff. In addition to these investments, the department will be adding a Social Emotional Mental Health Consultant and Youth Transitions Manager. Starting in September 2022, we will be expanding our transitions program to Kings County. This program exposes Island high-school students to a variety of career possibilities through hands-on activity-based learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

While we all know the excitement that our young Islanders have about starting a new school year each September, our government also recognizes the financial challenges it can put on families when it comes to school supplies. Starting in the 2022-2023 school year, our government will be investing over \$780,000 to provide every student from Kindergarten to Grade 9 with free school supplies.

Our student well-being teams have been a tremendous asset for our students and educators. They have provided support to students no matter what challenge or obstacle they faced. This budget provides \$106,000 to introduce a Parental Support Worker pilot program to expand supports to parents through our student well-being teams.

Starting in the 2022-2023 school year, our government will be investing over \$780,000 to provide every student from Kindergarten to Grade 9 with free school supplies.

As Islanders we pride ourselves in being welcoming and accepting, but we all have seen and heard the incidents of hate, discrimination and racism, not only here – but across our country and around the world. We know we have to do better and we will do better – by working together.

Mr. Speaker, when elected in 2019 our government committed to increasing the George Coles Bursary. Over the past two years, we have supported access to post-secondary education through investments in the Island Advantage Bursary program to help those in need. Now we are ready to make the next steps. Starting in September 2022, the George Coles Bursary will increase by \$400 per student each school year. This will bring the George Coles Bursary total to \$2,600 per student, or in some cases up to \$3,600 per student. This is another step in reducing the financial barriers towards post-secondary education and making life more affordable for students.

We are committed to expanding our understanding of and deepening our appreciation for Indigenous knowledge. Our government will be providing a \$675k grant to UPEI towards the creation of the new Faculty of Indigenous Knowledge, Education, Research, and Applied Studies.

There will also be a two percent increase in funding to UPEI, Holland College and Collège de l'Île at a cost of just over \$1 Million.

We strive to foster a welcoming province. Some instances over the past months have indicated that unfortunately there is still a distance to go in overcoming racism. As Islanders we pride ourselves in being welcoming and accepting, but we all have seen and heard the incidents of hate, discrimination and racism, not only here – but across our country and around the world. We know we have to do better and we will do better – by working together.

With the goal of **reduced inequalities**, this budget includes core funding for both the Black Cultural Society and BIPOC USHR to provide their organizations with the stability to continue their work of supporting people of colour in our province and to educate and develop anti-racism initiatives. This past year, our government hired the first Anti-Racism Policy Advisor to advance anti-racism initiatives within government and ensure that our policies have an anti-racism lens applied. We also established the first ever Anti-Racism Table for government. While their work is just getting started, we have already made progress and our

government is proud to invest just over \$120,000 towards anti-racism initiatives in this budget.

Our government is also proud to provide the recently formed Trans Network with the necessary core funding to establish their organization on Prince Edward Island. The Trans Network will be working closely with PEERS Alliance to formally establish their network to provide support to our trans community on PEI.

Funded through the Department of Education & Lifelong Learning, \$40,000 in this budget is dedicated to ensure all educational staff receive professional development about diversity, power and privilege, the construct of race, unconscious bias, and how to be an ally.

Climate action will be fostered by \$834,300 to establish the Office of Net Zero in pursuit of our Net Zero 2040 targets. As outlined in the Net Zero plan that was released last week, transportation continues to be one of our largest carbon emitters and we need to expedite the transition to cleaner methods of transportation. This budget includes \$2.1 million for the continuation of the Electric Vehicle Rebate and e-bike rebates, representing a total investment of over \$2.6 million.

As we are electrifying more with our Path to Net Zero, our government will invest \$3.8 million in electricity efficiency and conservation. A main focus of this investment will be on developing a dedicated program for assisting our agriculture industry with on-farm electricity savings.

The J. Frank Gaudet Tree Nursery is undergoing an expansion and will receive \$335,200 to support the annual increase in more trees to be planted as part of our efforts to sequester greenhouse gas emissions.

Recognizing that the impacts of climate change have and are continuing to occur, we will invest over \$1 million to develop new inland flood and erosion maps to expand efforts to share information and support decision making. The funding will complement the recently released coastal flood hazard maps and provide more robust data for analysis of coastal infrastructure vulnerability.

Our government will continue to provide the necessary programs and services to encourage Islanders to transition to clean and affordable energy.

Central to supporting our climate action plan is access to **clean and affordable energy** in our province. Our government will continue to provide the necessary programs and services to encourage Islanders to transition to clean and affordable energy. Since the heat pump rebates have been introduced, Islanders have installed over 17,000 heat pumps in their homes. Our rebate programs will continue to encourage our homes to be heated by electricity with \$5.6 million dedicated to our free heat pump program. The free heat pump program will be expanding this year with an increase in the household income threshold required to qualify. We will also continue to encourage Islanders to look at generating renewable energy through our Solar Electric rebate program. We've already seen in the short time this program has been available over 1,800 Islanders install solar systems at their homes.

These investments in clean and affordable energy are supported by revenues from the PEI carbon levy. On March 31, in keeping with the plan communicated to the federal government, our province will take the next step to increasing pricing on carbon-based fuels that are currently taxed.

The PEI Energy Corporation has large plans for creating more renewable energy through wind in the upcoming year as well. We have learned from jurisdictions around the world on best practices and implementation strategies for adding wind generation and our province will soon see some of the most progressive and innovative strategies implemented right here in Prince Edward Island.

Our lands play an important role in our economy and our identity as Islanders. Preserving and protecting **Life on Land** is at our core. Our government is committed to making the necessary investments to protect and preserve our lands.

Through the Department of Agriculture and Land, an additional \$167,200 will support development of Soil Health Improvement Plans for each irrigated field. This new program will ensure that our future is focused on maintaining soil health throughout the province.

Our government will invest an additional \$200,000 to a total of \$1.1 Million, to support the maintenance of provincial lands through forest management and enhancement. Our government will also continue to work with the Canada Nature Fund by providing them with an additional \$515,000 to continue to purchase and protect lands in our province, bringing the total funding to the Canada Nature Fund to \$815,000 in this budget.

Our volunteer watershed groups also play a critical role in protecting our lands and waterways. Our government committed to increasing their core funding year over year, and again this year we will see an increase of \$250,000 to a total of \$1.9 Million in this fiscal year.

These actions will help foster **Responsible Consumption and Production**.

Our seafood industry knows they have a part to play in reducing carbon emissions and keeping our waterways clean to protect **Life Below Water**. This budget includes \$350,000 to assist in initiatives under the Environmental Impact Reduction Strategy to ensure our fisheries and aquaculture industries are sustained for years to come. In addition, the Department of Fisheries and Communities manages over 100 shoreline access sites and four wharf structures. These access points are critical to our shellfish and aquaculture industries. In order to keep up with maintenance, an additional \$20,000 has been allocated to total of just over \$80,000 for maintaining these access points.

To help achieve **Sustainable Cities and Communities** specifically small, rural municipalities who have expressed their concerns over the past number of years about the challenges they are facing, our government has been listening and working with these municipalities on ways to ensure that autonomy and identity is maintained. This budget includes \$200,000 to establish the Small Rural Municipality Administration Support pilot program. In this program, we will work with small rural municipalities and provide grants to assist with administrative supports.

Our government recognizes the challenges with home ownership and municipalities want to play a role in helping solve the housing crisis.

Our government recognizes the challenges with home ownership and municipalities want to play a role in helping solve the housing crisis. That is why we are establishing a \$5 Million dollar fund with the Federation of Municipalities to work with municipalities to prepare lots for construction ready projects. This includes installing roadways, utilities, and site work to reduce barriers to quick construction of new units. Going forward, there is an additional \$500,000 per year to enhance and expand our partnerships with a common goal to increase housing.

We will also invest an additional \$500,000 into the suite of homeowner assistance programs which include: PEI Home Renovation program, Seniors Home Repair program, Seniors Safe at Home program, and the Renovation Program for Persons with Disabilities program. This new investment will allow for the acceleration of our government's commitment to doubling the maximum grant amount for these programs. Our government's total investments in these programs for 2022-2023 will total \$3.2 Million.

An increase of almost \$1 Million dollars to rental supports will bring our total investment to \$14.4 Million this fiscal year. This investment will include an increase to the number of mobile rental vouchers, an increase of rental supplements for private developers, non-profit, and cooperatives and provide an increase in other rental supports for seniors and families. Our government is also investing an additional \$500,000 to bring our total investment to \$4 Million to increase affordable housing grants to support construction of new units.

As a government we need to modernize and enhance building permits on Prince Edward Island. Following a review of the Land Division, this budget includes \$583,000 to staff and implement a new service model that will provide quicker and more efficient approvals for developments and new constructions, as well as land use planning resources.

Sustainability also requires a more extensive Island-wide transit system. This past Fall, our government launched what many call – Toonie Transit. Our first routes connected Kings County to Charlottetown, this

budget invests an additional \$1.5 Million to fund the routes to link communities in Prince and Queens County with our capital. The cost will remain a Toonie.

Now, Mr. Speaker - we are going further. This budget includes funding to make all current transit routes on PEI – including the rural transit routes and T3 transit routes in Charlottetown, Stratford, and Cornwall free for anyone under the age of 18. In order to reduce green house gas emissions, we know we need more Islanders to use transit and we hope to encourage our youth to get into the habit of using public transportation.

Mr. Speaker, last year I stated that as a government we would do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes to get through this pandemic. I also committed to continue to advance the agenda of our government and, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to again stand by those two statements here again today.

An extensive assortment of initiatives will support economic growth in our province with the goal of providing **Decent Work and Economic Growth**.

Our government is delivering on the commitment to let Islanders keep more of their hard-earned income. Effective January 2023, we will once again raise the basic personal income tax exemption by \$750 to \$12,000. This measure, coupled with the Low-Income Tax Reduction threshold that we raised to \$20,000 this past January, means Islanders will keep almost \$8 Million dollars in their own pockets.

Helping offset the impacts of the rising cost of living we will freeze all government fees in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

We now have the lowest small business tax in the region, 1%. This fiscal year, that will keep \$2.2 Million dollars with Island businesses to reinvest in themselves and their employees.

In order to reduce green house gas emissions, we know we need more Islanders to use transit and we hope to encourage our youth to get into the habit of using public transportation.

Our government is launching initiatives to address the labour shortage. Working with the PEI Workforce Partnership, and partnering with Holland College, the PEI Women in Industry program will provide upskilling and retraining opportunities for women who wish to reenter the workforce. There will be a focus on strategic sectors, under-represented groups and rural areas.

To support the continued growth of our Acadian and Francophone community, our government will develop a Francophone immigration strategy, which will aid in our economic recovery and address labour shortages.

To assist our seafood and agriculture sectors we will continue the Team Food Student Program to encourage students to find summer employment in these industries. Students who are entering grade ten, eleven or twelve and complete a work term of at least 250 hours will receive a \$1,000 completion bonus while students entering university or college who complete a minimum of 500-hour work term will receive a \$2,000 completion bonus.

To assist our early years sector, we will be partnering with the Early Childhood Development Association to provide up to 100 participants the necessary skills and workforce knowledge while getting hands-on experience working in the industry. This programming offered through Skills PEI represents an investment of over \$655,000 in workforce initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, while summer is still few months away our tourism industry is busily preparing for a record year in 2022. New airlines are coming, accommodation rentals are filling up, and tee times are becoming few and far between. It's reassuring, but we can't forget that the tourism and hospitality industry has suffered some of the greatest challenges during the pandemic.

To assist our early years sector, we will be partnering with the Early Childhood Development Association to provide up to 100 participants the necessary skills and workforce knowledge while getting hands-on experience working in the industry.

To ensure the next 12 months is robust for a quick recovery our government will be investing a further \$750,000 to develop tourism marketing campaigns to support our tourism operators throughout the year. Our government will also be investing \$100,000 to extend the season for provincial parks, opening earlier and closing later. We will continue to invest in our provincial park system by increasing maintenance and implementing a new reservation system with an investment of an additional \$185,000.

We also recognize that our world class beaches are pinnacle to attracting tourists to our province. To improve the safety and accessibility of our beaches, our Beach Accessibility program will provide funding to community groups and non-profit organizations to maintain our beaches, pay for garbage removal, portable washrooms and other general maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, while we work to stabilize our existing industries post-pandemic, our government sees opportunity for **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** to grow and diversify our economy.

The recently announced Clean Tech Park which brings together the environment, economy and education is a prime example. This initiative will provide PEI with the opportunity to be a leader in this new sector. To assist with business attraction and economic supports, our government is committing \$1 Million towards grants and programming to jump start the Clean Tech industry in 2022-2023.

We have learned and are applying lessons from the pandemic. Procuring vaccine was a massive effort because of the lack of domestic manufacturing. Working with the federal government PEI will now be home to a facility to manufacture mRNA vaccines. Our government will be investing \$4.1 million towards this initiative in a combination of capital expansion and labour rebates. Construction of the expansion to BioVectra's facility is already underway and the first mRNA therapeutics will be manufactured in the new facility by late in 2023.

Working with the federal government PEI will now be home to a facility to manufacture mRNA vaccines.

Last Fall, the Honorable Member from Tignish – Palmer Road brought forward a bill to cover the cost of regular well-water tests on PEI. All members of the house supported that Bill because **Clean Water and Sanitation** is critical for any place to be viable to live. The Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action has enacted this legislation and invested over \$640,000 to cover the costs to test for E. Coli and coliform every six months, and free water chemistry every two years through our provincial laboratories.

Mr. Speaker, the Interministerial Women’s Secretariat provides tremendous leadership to government and in our communities through the longstanding partnerships with organizations across the province. To further their work towards **Gender Equality**, our government will be expanding the office, funding a GDA Analyst, along with a Research and Policy Support position.

Working with the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Center, our government will provide additional funding for those who experience sexual violence, rape, or sexual assault. The funding provides for three additional therapists and support staff. The individuals accessing these programs have experienced trauma that will forever change their life, but we know that by providing access to programs and services through a trauma-informed approach, individuals can better process their emotional, physical and mental response to their past experiences. Our government will also provide additional funding to the Men Matter Program to support males who have experienced sexual violence, sexual assault or sexual abuse.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I’ve already mentioned our health care system is in a period of transition and renewal. Our government recognizes that we need to adapt our system to meet the needs of our society, especially women and gender diverse Islanders.

Last fall, the Department of Health and Wellness conducted a public engagement survey about PEI's first Women and Gender Diverse Islanders' Health Strategy. Those survey results will be shared publicly soon, but as a government, we always need to be ready to make the necessary investments to keep Islanders well. This budget includes \$500,000 of investments through the Women and Gender Diverse Islanders' Health Strategy for our health care system including initiatives relating to pelvic floor health, reducing stigma and bias, establishing a women's and gender health research network, and grants for midwives to assist with the cost of insurance.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women has made tremendous strides forward with her team in the Interministerial Women's Secretariat, and everyone in this house has heard firsthand the investments she has spearheaded to advance gender equality. Just this past Spring she stood in this house and committed to funding menstrual products in our school system and this budget contains \$50,000 to continue this program, as well as additional dollars to expand the program to shelters and the Community Outreach Center to supply products to vulnerable Islanders.

We share a desire for Peace, **Justice and Strong Institutions**.

Unfortunately, we continue to see people of color, individuals who experience trauma and live with the effects of inter-generational trauma, those suffering from substance abuse, and those with mental illnesses disproportionately represented in our justice system. As a government, we recognize the need for change. An additional \$187,000 will expedite the work towards establishing a Therapeutic Courts program in our province. In addition, a Vulnerable Population Lawyer will be added to the Legal Aid Office to provide legal support for vulnerable Islanders who need to interact with the justice system.

Over \$900,000 in investments will also be made to provide the necessary human resources to staff the new Women’s Unit at the Provincial Correctional Center that is slated to be open this Spring.

Earlier this month, our Mid-Point Evaluation of Policing Services on Prince Edward Island was released to provide a roadmap to ensure policing is sustainable in our province. This budget includes over \$350,000 in funding to work with policing agencies in our province to ensure we have diverse, sustainable and accountable policing within our provincial boundaries.

We all know that government cannot be the solution to every problem. We have community organizations and charities that do tremendous work in our province. As a government, we recognize the work of these organizations and they need to be celebrated more often. Much of what we seek to do as a government is best achieved through **Partnerships for the Goals** we set.

Our government will continue to make multi-year funding agreements with non-government organizations and non-profit organizations to avoid the uncertainty of single year funding. This budget increases the HST rebate for charities and non-profit organizations to 50% starting in January 1, 2023, fulfilling yet another of our platform commitments.

Many community groups and non-profits lost volunteers during the COVID-19 restrictions but will need them back as we ease our way out of this pandemic. To encourage volunteerism, especially with our youth, we will be increasing the Community Service Bursary from \$750 to \$1000 for high school students to volunteer and receive a bursary towards their first year of post-secondary studies.

Our government will continue to make multi-year funding agreements with non-government organizations and non-profit organizations to avoid the uncertainty of single year funding.

And, Mr. Speaker, on the topic of volunteerism, I would be remiss if I didn't speak about the upcoming 2023 Canada Games. Our government has committed over \$34 Million in support leading up to the Games that are less than a year away. We will soon welcome athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators to our province to celebrate our country through friendly competition, embracing our diversity, and creating memories that will last a lifetime. We look forward to welcoming everyone back to the birthplace of our country next February.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, while our focus shifts to sustainability in our province, we recognize there is still some uncertainty ahead of us. While we begin to start Moving On from COVID-19, there will still be impacts that we will have to deal with when we start to live with COVID-19. At the same time, our agriculture industry still hasn't received the news they need to restore their markets in mainland USA. Both situations will be closely monitored and require government Support. For that reason, we have allocated two contingency funds of \$15 million each to address these situations during the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our government said since the beginning we were going to do things differently – and although the sand beneath our feet has shifted many times since we took office, we have remained true to our word. Once again, our government has asked both the Official Opposition and Third Party for the budgetary priorities in advance of building this budget. I am proud to say that of the 58 requests received, 42 are included in this budget in full or in part.

We also provided solicited input from the general public for this budget as well. We are pleased to have heard directly from individuals and organizations over the past two months through 59 public submissions, 220 online survey responses and four engagement sessions.

We have always said – a good idea is a good idea. It doesn't matter where it comes from, and we continue to be a leader in our country and around the world in demonstrating that by working together we can achieve great things for those who we serve.

Mr. Speaker, these plans are extensive, many expensive, but all are achievable and will contribute to a better society. Working together and using our collective skills I am confident our efforts will ensure a fair and more prosperous future for every citizen of this Province.

As we undertake the role of reviewing the detailed estimates and debating this budget, I know we will do so in a spirit of respect and a shared desire for the best outcomes. Stronger partnerships are necessary – in this Assembly, our Province, our Country and our World.

Mr. Speaker, thank you as always for your indulgence.

Thank you. Merci. Wela'lin.