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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND 2023 BUDGET ADDRESS



Presented by:

Honourable Jill Burridge

Minister of Finance and
Chair of Treasury Board



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Budget Address



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Minister of Finance
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At the First Session of the
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Prince Edward Island Legislature

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Good Afternoon. Bonjour. Kwe.

Madam Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and Guests.

It is a tremendous honour to rise in the House today to present the 2023-2024 budget for consideration by this Assembly. It is my first time doing so, and I am proud to do this on behalf of my colleagues and our newly re-elected government.

First, I want to acknowledge my predecessors that have come before me. Most recently, the Honourable Member from Cornwall – Meadowbank, and before that, of course, you, Madam Speaker. Because of the leadership of both of you over the last four years, PEI has weathered some of the most challenging economic times in our province's history. Our government is in a favourable position to continue to make the necessary investments in Islanders so that this province is the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Now, I have to admit – the last five weeks have been busy. Since our new cabinet was sworn in, we have worked diligently to build the budget we are presenting to you today.

This budget builds on the Speech from the Throne that this chamber heard a few weeks ago. That vision was based on the plan we shared with Islanders during the election. Here today, I bring to you specific details of that vision. The plan that our government will put into action.

It will not surprise anyone in this chamber that the budget I present today has three key areas of focus: healthcare, housing, and affordability. But, Madam Speaker, we know that investments in other areas are also important. Whether it is our education system, the environment, growing our workforce, embracing a growing economy, investing in our seniors, investing in young Islanders, or caring for our most vulnerable. The investments in this budget are purposely interconnected – with the ultimate goal of making lives better for all Islanders.

The budget I present to you is our plan.

It's a plan that is balanced and responsible.

It's a plan that enables us to overcome the obstacles of today and unlock the opportunities of tomorrow.

It's a plan that ignores the political landmines and instead focuses on what needs to be done to build a better future for our province.

It's a plan that puts our words into action by focusing on bold measures and transformative changes.

It's a plan that incorporates ideas and suggestions from all three parties represented in this chamber; from stakeholders and Islanders who engaged with us directly; and most importantly from people on their doorsteps and at their kitchen tables, during the most recent election.

I am excited to share it with all of you here today.

Madam Speaker, despite all of the challenges we have been through over the last four years, we have so much to celebrate as a province:

- Our population continues to grow, reaching 173,954 this past January, up by 7,096 or 4.2% since the same time last year;
- Employment had grown to an all-time high of 84,200 in 2022, and shown continued growth to 89,500 by April 2023; and
- Our Island saw the strongest economic growth east of Ontario, in 2022.

Madam Speaker, because of these positive indicators, our government will make the necessary investments today, for a better tomorrow. The budget which I present to you today includes \$431 million in new spending, bringing the total expenditure to just over \$3 billion. This reflects a 16.2% increase over 2022-23. At the same time, our revenues have also grown by \$426 million or 16.6% over last year as well. This means our deficit for 2023-24 will stand at \$97.6 million.

Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, I would like to share with my colleagues some of the specific and record investments we are making in this budget.

Our Health

The healthcare system we have today was built decades ago and needs to evolve with the needs of Islanders. How we provide care, where we provide care, and who provides the care, all must be modernized and that is what our government is doing – modernizing the system to meet the needs of Islanders not just for today, but for years to come.

Madam Speaker, rebuilding our primary care system is a top priority for our government. The new Patient Medical Homes and Medical Neighborhoods is the best model for care for both patients and providers. We have had early success in rolling out medical homes, but we need to accelerate the implementation across the province.

To start, we will invest \$5.2 million to add 100 new front-line positions to support current and future medical homes. In addition, we will invest an additional \$3.7 million this year to add additional patient medical homes across the province, bringing the total investment for patient medical homes for the 2023-24 budget to \$15.6 million.

While we rebuild the primary care system, we recognize we must provide new and innovative ways for Islanders to get access to care when they need it.

In 2022, our government introduced the Pharmacy Plus program providing Islanders with the opportunity to be treated for 32 common ailments at 48 community pharmacies across the province. To date, over 24,000 Islanders have accessed care through this program. The 2023-24 budget includes an investment of \$3 million to continue to support this program over the next year and move this program from a pilot to a permanent service available to Islanders.

Individuals who are without access to primary care, also have the option to access virtual care for free. This program has been in place since July 2020 and has seen tremendous success. Our government is investing an additional \$2.4 million to expand access to virtual care to Islanders. This will include introducing new access points, providing virtual care through existing platforms, and launching new platforms and virtual care tools to provide care to Islanders.

For those who cannot be treated through virtual care, in 2022 our government implemented Primary Care Access Clinics where unaffiliated patients can be treated after being referred through our virtual care platform. In the last 8 months, these clinics have seen 3,400 patients. During the election, we committed to expanding these Access Clinics to West Prince and Kings County as well as increasing capacity in Summerside and Charlottetown. This budget includes \$3.2 million to launch two new sites and add additional staff to increase access to care for those without a primary care provider.

This budget includes almost \$10 million to help Islanders access prescriptions at more affordable rates. Working with the federal government, our government will invest \$6.4 million this year in adding new drugs to the formulary. In addition, our government will also introduce \$5 co-pays for over 150 medications used in the treatment of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and mental health treatments for those Islanders eligible for the Seniors Drug Program, Family Health Benefits Program, Generic Drug Program, and diabetes program. Our government will also invest \$250,000 to make contraceptive prescriptions free for all Islanders.

As promised, my government will also invest \$250,000 to create a Chronic Pain Management Strategy with the goal of opening a Chronic Pain Management Clinic to provide care for Islanders living with chronic pain. \$500,000 will be invested to expand the Eye See Eye Learn program to ensure children have access to eye exams and eyeglasses. For those Islanders living with diabetes, over \$400,000 will

be invested to launch a foot care program. Last, an additional \$1.4 million will be invested in 2023-24 to bring the total investment to \$4.9 million to date to provide seniors and low-income Islanders access to dental care through the Provincial Dental Care program that was launched in 2021.

Our government has made record investments over the last four years when it comes to mental health and addictions. To date, 2 of the 4 facilities on the mental health campus are operational, with more facilities under construction. That includes the Emergency Department and Short Stay Unit attached to the QEH Emergency Room which is scheduled to be completed this calendar year. To operationalize this facility, our budget includes over \$500,000 to support the hiring of staff to work in this specialized unit. We will also hire two new Nurse Practitioners to support unaffiliated mental health clients in accessing the services they need quicker and more efficiently. We will also invest \$2.4 million to renovate, solidify staffing and offer comprehensive, evidence-based programming to clients at both Brackley Stables and our Small Options Homes.

Our government will be investing \$2.7 million to introduce new Flexible Assertive Community Treatment Teams, which more commonly will be called FACT Teams to assist Islanders with complex mental health needs in the community, where they reside. These teams will be multidisciplinary, comprised of social workers, occupational therapists, social service workers, peer support workers, and mental health nursing professionals and will provide community support, referrals and wrap-around services to clients with serious mental illness to prevent the need for acute care admissions. In addition to these teams, our government will continue to fund the operation of our 24-hour Mental Health and Addictions access line and our Mobile Mental Health Response Teams which served over 3300 Islanders last year alone.

To grow our healthcare workforce, our government will immediately deliver on our commitment to expand our free tuition program for RCWs to include LPNs and paramedic students. We will also invest in upskilling programs for RCWs who wish to become LPNs. Combined, our government is investing \$1.35 million this year to launch these programs for the Fall of 2023. We will also invest \$125,000 to introduce health bursaries for students studying to become LPNs, RNs, and paramedics that pursue their studies off-Island.

Madam Speaker, our government is working with UPEI to establish the Faculty of Medicine so we can train more doctors right here in Prince Edward Island. This budget includes almost \$4 million to begin to operationalize the faculty and an additional \$17.9 million to invest in a capital grant to build the school. At the same time, we are investing \$810,000 into Health PEI to prepare our current workforce for the introduction of medical students to our healthcare setting by creating an Office of Academics and increasing Medical Education Physician Leadership programs and Medical Education Support staff.

To support our current physicians practicing throughout the system, we are investing over \$3.3 million to provide staff resources to physicians so they can be more efficient and effective in seeing patients. We are also investing \$1.5 million to reduce ophthalmology wait time, \$1.5 million in General Surgery Physicians and supports, and \$2.9 million to hire additional physicians in the areas of gastroenterology, dermatology, OB/GYN, and hospitalists at both the PCH and QEH.

Our government is also making investments in programs to support Islanders to get the care they need from the comfort of their own home. Almost \$2 million will be invested into programs such as: COACH, Care at Home, Home Based Restorative Care, and Urgent Home-Based Respite. We will also invest \$620,000 into hiring Nurse Practitioners for unaffiliated patients and \$650,000 into launching a remote patient monitoring program.

Madam Speaker, our government is making unprecedented investments in our healthcare system in this province with this budget, with over \$144 million in new spending bringing our total investment in the healthcare system to more than \$1 billion for the first time in our history.

Housing

Housing availability and attainability have been a growing challenge not only in Prince Edward Island but across our entire country. Inflation, the rising cost of living, supply chain disruptions, and economic uncertainty have not helped, but the root of the problem is that for decades housing has been underfunded and fallen behind. Our government is committed to making the necessary investments now, and into the future, to increase the availability and attainability of housing on our Island.

To start, our government is increasing the Housing Challenge Fund by \$50 million, providing private developers with two percent financing for projects that are construction ready to spur immediate development. We will also launch a four-year, \$25 million Infrastructure Fund through the Federation of PEI Municipalities to work with communities outside the capital area to develop construction-ready lots for Islanders to purchase and use for future homes.

Madam Speaker, our government also committed to reducing barriers to home ownership and finding new pathways to home ownership in the last election. To do this, we are investing \$1 million in a Rent-to-Own program to provide financing options through Finance PEI to first-time homeowners to rent a property with the intent to purchase within 24 months. We will also launch a Closing Cost Housing Support program to provide first-time home buyers with up to \$2,500 towards the closing costs of purchasing their first home. Our government will also invest \$1 million to create Tiny Home communities in rural PEI where Islanders can purchase smaller more attainable homes to build equity rather than paying rent.

To support local ownership of housing developments through co-operatives and non-profit organizations, the Department of Housing Land and Communities will be investing \$125,000 this year to provide mentorship and support to foster greater uptake on tenant and non-profit-owned housing developments across the province.

In October 2022, our government introduced a record investment in public housing in the 2023-2024 capital budget, committing to almost \$151 million over five years to create an additional 465 housing units. To support the acquisition and operation of these publicly owned units, our government is investing in the necessary operational resources to support the upkeep and maintenance of the units as well as adding resources to better support the tenants. These resources include a Construction Manager, Housing Development Manager, trades and maintenance workers, a Housing Navigator, and a Seniors Outreach Worker.

For low-income Islanders who currently own their own home but are having challenges keeping up with repairs and maintenance, our government will invest a further \$250,000 this year to launch a Low-Income Home Repair Grant, building on existing programming through the PEI Home Renovation Program.

Making Life More Affordable

Inflation, interest rates, global instability, supply chain disruptions, the pandemic, hurricanes, and climate change have all impacted the cost of living in our province. Our government responded with an unprecedented package of programs and support for Islanders over the last number of years and today, I'm proud to say that we will continue with many of those supports – and more.

To start, our government will implement several tax measures that will result in more than \$14 million remaining in the pockets of hardworking Islanders. In the coming days, I will table a bill to amend the *Income Tax Act* to implement these first steps toward our commitments.

Starting this year, the basic personal amount will increase by \$750 to \$12,750 and by a further \$750 to reach \$13,500 in 2024. In addition, the income threshold for the low-income tax reduction program will rise by \$750 in both 2023 and 2024.

Also beginning this year, the tax credit for Island seniors aged 65 and older will increase to \$4,679 and the income threshold will be raised to \$30,879. For 2024, the amount will rise to \$5,595 and the income threshold be further raised to \$33,740.

In addition, we will implement income tax reform measures. Beginning in 2024, the current three brackets and rates, plus the surtax that acts like a fourth bracket, will be replaced with a five-bracket system.

I am pleased to say that almost all tax-paying Islanders will benefit from savings due to the proposed higher bracket thresholds and lower tax rates in each of the first four brackets. These changes will mark the first time since 2000 that provincial personal income tax rates were reduced, and tax brackets indexed since 2008. We are committed to reviewing this on an annual basis.

In 2022, adjustments were made to the Home Heating Assistance program to support more Island households. Our government will continue with this support by investing an additional \$4.5 million in this program in 2023-24.

Every year since 2020, our government has offset property tax increases for homeowners to support Islanders during challenging economic times. Our government will introduce legislation to reset assessment rates to levels equivalent to 2020, to prevent a sharp rise in property taxes in 2024. These measures will result in \$6 million in savings for Islanders for the 2023 tax year.

Our government will increase the Fitness and Activity Tax Credit to \$1,000 for registrations or membership fees to artistic, cultural, recreational, or physical activity programming starting in 2024.

To date, our government has installed over 5,000 free heat pumps in Island households. This budget includes an additional \$16.8 million to continue to provide free heat pumps in households earning less than \$75,000 in income, with a plan to expand the program to households earning less than \$100,000 in 2024. In addition, we will invest \$764,000 in the Free Hot Water Electrification program and \$2.5 million in the Free Insulation program to reach more Island households.

Both provincial and federal governments have recognized over the last two years that the cost of childcare needed to be reduced. Working with the federal government, our government under the leadership of the Minister of Education and Early Years, signed a historic agreement to get childcare fees to an average of \$10 a day by 2025. But, as a government, we felt we could do more – faster. This budget includes \$4 million to expedite the reduction of fees to \$10 a day for all children enrolled in designated centres before the end of 2023.

To support students, we will invest \$1.25 million to increase the George Coles Bursary to \$3,000 for the Fall of 2023. Our government will also continue to reduce transit fees across the province by investing an additional \$750,000 to keep fares at \$2, and monthly passes reduced to between \$10 and \$20. The total investment to make our transit the most affordable system in the country is \$3.2 million.

Our government will also follow through with our commitment to launch a Medical Transportation Assistance Program by investing \$150,000 to launch the program this year. This program will build on existing programs such as HOPE Air and our partnership with Maritime Bus.

In total, through these 10 initiatives, our government is investing \$51 million to make life more affordable on Prince Edward Island.

Growing our Workforce

Through our new Department of Workforce, Advanced Learning, and Population our government will make strategic investments in programs and services to help transition new graduates to the workforce and help reskill and upskill individuals to fill vacancies in key sectors.

Our government will invest \$2 million over four years to establish the Workplace Adaptation Fund to encourage employers to retrofit workplaces to make them more accessible for those who have physical and intellectual disabilities to participate in the workforce either remotely or in person.

We will also create new opportunities for graduates to gain work experience by investing \$250,000 to create internships where students get to work with sector and industry groups to gain practical work experience with multiple companies or organizations in the same field.

To level the playing field for gig economy workers, contract employees, or seasonal workers, our government will invest \$400,000 to begin the work to establish a Portable Health Benefits program to provide health, dental, and medical insurance for those who are not covered by an employer-sponsored plan.

For industries and sectors that are experiencing chronic labour shortages, our government will invest \$150,000 to develop online training tools to provide ongoing professional development, and upskilling opportunities, or to allow for quicker onboarding of new graduates and employees into critical roles.

We will build up investments and increase the Post-Secondary Student Employment Program by \$1.5 Million and the Jobs for Youth program by \$300,000 to maintain a similar level of support we have had in the past number of years to ensure our post-secondary students have gainful employment during the summer months.

Working with the Construction Association of PEI, we will provide \$85,000 to expand the Discovery Carpentry program. We will also work closely with the association and employers in the industry to improve apprenticeship pathways, better support workers in the trades to achieve their Red Seal designation, and build capacity on international recruitment for new workers to join the construction workforce here on Prince Edward Island.

We have invested \$1.5 million in the Newcomer Work Ready Program, which supports the participation of newcomers in our labour market. This is particularly important to support internationally trained healthcare professionals who may want to live and work in PEI.

Embracing a Growing Economy

Right now is the perfect opportunity to invest in growing and emerging sectors to diversify our economy. Our bioscience sector continues to grow and we have become a global player in the industry. To further develop this sector, our government will invest \$4 million towards the construction of the new Bioaccelerator Facility in the BioCommons Research Park, an additional \$500,000 increasing labour rebates available to industries to support job growth.

Our government is also attracting global attention for our investments in the Clean Technology sector. With the commitment to build the Clean Tech Park in Georgetown where education, innovation and entrepreneurship will all co-locate in one space, we have tremendous opportunities to attract global companies to establish themselves right here in Prince Edward Island. To support the development of the Clean Tech sector, our government will invest \$10 million.

Our community and non-profit sectors are also growing and now employ approximately 3500 Islanders. To support this sector in doing important community work and advocacy, our government will invest \$500,000 to establish a shared service model to fund positions that can provide corporate support to multiple non-profit organizations to ensure

longevity and sustainability for these organizations that do important work in our communities.

Our regional development corporations are critical in leveraging funding from all levels of government to make local projects viable by leveraging funding, expertise, and support from stakeholders. To renew the focus of existing and establish new regional development corporations our government is investing \$150,000 to help with assessing new economic projects within their communities.

Primary Sectors

While we invest in new and emerging sectors, we must not forget the traditional sectors that are the backbone of our economy: fishing, farming, and tourism.

To support our fishing industry, we will invest \$250,000 to help the sector establish an industry-owned dredging service and an additional \$125,000 to develop a made-in-PEI e-log solution to comply with the mandate from DFO to have an electronic log system by 2024. We will also invest \$100,000 in promoting and marketing our seafood products to new and existing markets as well as an additional \$50,000 to fund exploring technological advancements to reduce waste in processing and create value-added products for the sector.

Madam Speaker, our agriculture sector has had a challenging few years. To support them, we will invest \$750,000 to implement recommendations laid out in the Climate Adaptation Plan, in addition to \$250,000 to explore controlled environment farming and indoor farming through state-of-the-art greenhouses, tunnels, hydroponics and enhanced storage and refrigeration infrastructure.

An additional \$400,000 will be invested to begin a biorefinery feasibility project, expand mental health resources for our farming community, support the diversification of crops, and continue to focus on healthy soil initiatives. Through the Agriculture Insurance Corporation, \$980,000 will be invested to increase the AgriStability Program compensation rate

from 70% to 80% and increase the unit price of potatoes by \$2.50 in the AgriInsurance Program. It is widely anticipated that 2023 will be another record tourism year for our province, especially with hosting the Canada Winter Games just a few short months ago. To support the industry in moving towards a 4-season market, our government is investing \$750,000 to market season extensions and expansions into the Winter months to build on the shoulder seasons of Fall and Spring.

We will invest \$250,000 to plan for shoreside power for the Charlottetown Port Authority to provide clean energy while at the port and broaden opportunities to welcome larger ships to our province. We will also establish labour incentives by investing \$250,000 to assist tourism operators in staffing hard-to-fill positions, especially those required in the shoulder season. Our government will also spend \$75,000 to explore opportunities to create interactive tourism products in rural communities, with a focus on embracing our Confederation Trail system.

Protecting our Environment

Madam Speaker, protecting our environment and fighting climate change is not the job of one person or one government. It comes down to collective leadership from individuals, corporations, organizations, and governments at all levels to do their part to achieve our goals.

Through the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action our government is investing \$4.5 million to expand the multi-unit residential building energy rebates program to speed up the transition to have multi-unit buildings more energy efficient. Our government will also continue to provide interest-free loans for Islanders looking to upgrade their home heating systems by investing over \$650,000 to offset borrowing costs. An additional \$2.5 million will be invested to provide energy assessment and to support the Home Insulation Program and the New Home Construction Rebate program.

To begin to action our province's Climate Adaptation Strategy, we will invest \$1.3 million. To ensure recommendations from the Emergency Task Force are implemented, our government is investing \$250,000, in addition to \$600,000 for woodlot clean-up efforts. To restore the trees lost because of Hurricane Fiona, our government is also investing over \$640,000 in reforestation efforts through the 2Billion Trees Program and increasing nursery tree production by 30 percent.

With so many woodlots still being cleared after the destruction of Fiona, we are at a higher risk of forest fires during the warmer months. To mitigate and prepare for this, our government is investing \$550,000 in forest fire safety equipment.

Through the School of Climate Change and Adaptation, our government will begin the work of the 25-year coastal management plan by investing \$100,000 this fiscal year.

Madam Speaker, protecting our environment is important. Government has a role to play, and through the budget, we have demonstrated our commitment to safeguard our environment, our landscape, and our way of life.

Investing in Young Islanders

Young Islanders are the future of this Province. Our government recognizes that we must make investments in the industry to expand the sector and create more spaces.

First, our government will work towards designating six more Early Learning Centres before the end of 2023. This means more parents will receive reduced childcare fees and more workers will be paid on the EYC wage grid. We will also create a \$20 million dollar Infrastructure Fund to provide grants to Centres to expand and create more spaces. We will invest \$200,000 to provide private developers grants to build childcare centres into future multi-unit buildings in areas where the province needs more childcare spaces. Working with the sector, we will

also launch a pilot to offer extended-hour childcare at facilities near our hospitals to support our healthcare workforce.

Working with the Early Childhood Development Association, we will provide \$75,000 to launch a national recruitment campaign to recruit trained Early Childhood Educators to live and work in Prince Edward Island.

There is also a growing need for after-school programming across the province. Working with stakeholders, the Department of Education and Early Years will begin to explore viable options for a universal afterschool program for students up to and including grade six.

Through our public school system, our government has – and will continue to make – record investments in support of front-line staff to ensure children province-wide receive a high-quality education. This budget contains an investment of \$6 million dollars that will be dedicated to adding 100 front-line positions including teachers, educational assistants, youth service workers, counsellors, and mental health support workers. A fund will also be established to provide \$750,000 for a school resource officer pilot to build stronger community relationships.

Working with the PSB and CSLF, \$500,000 will be invested into creating a roadmap to enhancing the English as an Additional Language (EAL) curriculum with the growing population of EAL students.

An additional \$750,000 will be invested in school maintenance initiatives to renew our learning environments and \$100,000 will be invested to fund the service costs of community use of schools in communities large and small, rural and urban.

We will also keep our commitment made in the recent election to expand vocational training opportunities, promote and educate about the importance of social-emotional learning, develop a Healthcare Career Pathway Pilot, establish a school bus monitoring program, and add a Speech Language Pathologist to our system.

In 2023-24, our government is investing \$38 million in our education system, bringing the total investment in education by this government over the last four years to \$112 million – another record investment.

Caring for our most vulnerable

Islanders take their social responsibility to care for and support others seriously, and so does our government. This budget includes \$6.7 million in investments in social assistance rates to annualize the increase that was made in December 2022 – the fourth increase to social assistance rates that our government made in less than four years.

The Honourable Member from Kensington – Malpeque created a 51-bed shelter facility in record time to support our homeless population. This budget includes over \$2 million to annualize the operation of the Park Street Shelter services to ensure no one is left without a bed to sleep in at night. The budget to support the critical services being provided at the Community Outreach Centre will increase by almost \$800,000. Also included in this budget are continued grants to other shelters such as Lifehouse, Chief Mary Bernard Shelter, Blooming House Women's Shelter, and the Men's Shelter operated by the Native Council of PEI.

As promised, our government will also invest \$75,000 to review and promote our foster parent program to ensure that more children in need are being placed in the best temporary care. In addition, we are investing \$25,000 to start the work on the Cyber-Bullying Action Plan, \$250,000 to establish a Community Legal Clinic, \$800,000 to expand support to victims of family violence including 2 full-time and one part-time victim service workers, a new Family Law Navigator, and additional funding for Community Legal Information.

To improve food security in our province, our government is investing \$2.2 Million to continue to fund the pay-what-you-can hot, healthy lunch program province-wide. We are also investing \$55,000 to expand existing breakfast programs in schools and explore the opportunity to implement a universal breakfast program in our schools. In addition, our

government will invest \$25,000 to begin to create a Food Waste Reduction Strategy.

Embracing Diversity & Culture

With a shifting and growing population, the culture and diversity of our province have also grown. We must embrace these changes and provide the necessary tools, resources, and supports to make every Islander comfortable in our great province.

To create more inclusive communities, we will increase base funding to 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations to continue their work in promotion, education and advocacy.

Through Executive Council, our government is investing \$460,000 to begin to implement the soon-to-be-released Anti-Racism Action Plan for our province; the first in our province's history. Our government will also invest over \$500,000 to enhance the Abegweit and Lennox Island Education Service Agreement, in addition to \$245,000 to scope, develop and negotiate the Treaty Education Work plan, a result of the Treaty Education MOU signed by Premier King, Chief Gould, and Chief Bernard in November 2022.

Building on the success of our province participating in Destination Acadie last month in France and Belgium and meeting with over 510 francophone candidates inquiring about opportunities in healthcare, education and tourism sectors, our government will make the necessary investments to action the Francophone Immigration Strategy which will be released in the coming weeks. Our government will also invest \$250,000 in 2023-24 to incentivize bilingual training to expand government services offered in French.

To support our rebounding arts community, our government will invest \$250,000 to promote and grow Island talent and assist the artists in promoting their offerings both locally and nationally. In addition, working with Innovation PEI, our government will take the first steps in

creating a Music City program by investing \$100,000 to develop a plan with stakeholders and venues.

Supporting our Seniors

With the rising cost of living, we know those on a fixed income are feeling it the most. I've already spoken to many initiatives our government is launching to make life more affordable, but our government is taking additional steps to assist seniors, especially those who want to continue to live in their own homes.

Our government is investing over \$2.2 million in expanding existing seniors' programs. The Seniors Safe at Home program will increase from \$10,000 to \$15,000 and the Seniors Home Repair Program will increase from \$4,000 to \$8,000 in grants available under these programs. We will also expand the Seniors Independence Initiative to provide up to \$2,500 in assistance for those with a household income of up to \$40,000 for a single individual or up to \$50,000 for a couple. Our government will also deliver on our commitment to double the Seniors Hearing Aid Rebate program from a maximum of \$3,000 to \$6,000 per individual.

We will also begin the work to launch the Primary Caregiver Grant of up to \$1,500 a month to support families who choose to keep their loved ones at home by investing \$5.2 million this fiscal year. Eligibility will start with those currently on community care or long-term care waitlists. We will also invest \$300,000 to provide rebates up to \$500 per year for Home-Based Medical Alert systems.

Our government will also invest \$2.8 Million into Community Care and \$2.7 million into private long-term care facilities after successfully negotiating a deal with operators in February 2023.

In total, our government is investing over \$12.9 Million in our seniors who have given so much to our province.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker, as I said at the beginning – this is our plan.

And, to borrow a line from you – these plans are extensive; and many of them are expensive but are all necessary to improve the lives of all Islanders.

Before I conclude, I want to take a moment and thank the hundreds of people who have contributed to this budget – my first budget as Minister of Finance. I especially want to thank the many officials in the Department of Finance and throughout Government who worked tirelessly over the last five weeks to get us to where we are today.

This is a budget that I am proud of, this is a budget I know our government is proud of, and I am sure this is a budget that Islanders will be proud of.

Madam Speaker, thank you for your indulgence.

Thank you. Merci. Wela'lin.