



# HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

*stronger together*

*Presentation to the Standing Committee on  
Human Resources, Skills and Social  
Development, and the Status of Persons  
with Disabilities*

May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012





# WE ARE

A not-for-profit business organization that takes a business - like approach to its operations.

Objective and non-partisan; we do not lobby for specific interests.

Funded exclusively through membership fees and fees for services we provide.

Experts in running conferences, publishing and disseminating information, helping people network, developing leadership skills, and building community capacity.

Specialists in the development and advocacy of public policy.

Not a government department or agency.

Independent from, but affiliated with, the Nova Scotia, Atlantic Provinces, and Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

A diverse organization made up of businesses that mirror the Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Canadian economies.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a best practice organization advocating on behalf of our 1600 members which represent over one quarter of the Halifax workforce.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce has been active in the discussion around the challenges facing Nova Scotia's workforce, and has been an enthusiastic advocate for addressing this issue through collaboration and cooperation between all levels of government, the business community, and other key stakeholders.

Our current strategic priorities reflect the needs of our membership, and are as follows:

- 1) Helping businesses take advantage of our provincial and city economic strategies.
- 2) Making Halifax more competitive.

Improving the labour market in Nova Scotia is certainly a key aspect of making Halifax a more competitive city in which to live, work, and play.

Since 2009, with our *At Issue: Report on Population Crisis*, the Chamber has brought awareness to our business community on Nova Scotia's labour and population shortage. At the core of this report is the need for Nova Scotia to increase - or maintain - our population but more importantly the labour market. This was not news to us. We had been aware of this situation for many years. And we have all been warned that it must be addressed for just as many years.

Simply put, Nova Scotia is facing a three-pronged problem:

- 1) Declining and aging population
- 2) A changing economy
- 3) A changing worker

According to Senior Policy Research Advisor, AIMS, Dr. Jim McNiven, "For the first time in at least a century, the number of people willing and available to work in Canada will be smaller than the number of jobs potentially available for them." This is a reality that is going to dictate how businesses operate and govern themselves. Businesses will need to quickly adapt to these changes in order to remain competitive.

According to the McNiven Report there are 3 generic solutions to the looming population and labour shortage crisis:

1. Increase productivity through improving skills and training for workers,
2. Increase the labour force participation rate by tapping into the potential of our underutilized workers, better matching skills to our needs, and

3. Find more people, through increasing population, attraction, retention, increasing the birth rate, and through immigration.

If there was anything we'd want to impress upon you today, it is that Nova Scotia is positioning itself for global growth, and with one of the oldest populations in Canada, we must actively face this challenge within our current population and with skilled immigrants to help fill this void.

***Nova Scotia faces some unique labour market challenges:***

- Our population is aging, and we've had low birth rates over the past 20 years.
- This will soon result in more retirements and deaths within the labour force than new entrants – and this refers to all kinds of labour. This is a serious problem for our province, despite the boost coming from the Shipbuilding contract.
- There are really only a few ways to address this issue: bring in more people through immigration, extend the period of time people work before retiring, or dramatically increase our productivity.
- By 2021, over 45% of NS population will be over 50 years old. Currently, 36% are over 50.

**Taking Action – What the Halifax Chamber is Doing**

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The Chamber sees a key role as a business advocate to inform and educate our members on the challenge facing us and to look for ways to assist them in responding to this challenge.

- The Chamber is taking action with a new program entitled All Ships Rise, designed to help Nova Scotia businesses, business people, and entrepreneurs take advantage of our opportunities for prosperity that will arise from the Shipbuilding contract. The initiative is also meant to ensure the shipbuilding contract is the spark that ignites a new era of sustainable prosperity for our province and region.

## **A few of the Programs of All Ships Rise:**

- Business Help Centre Advice; a small business assistance program aimed at providing live, strategic and timely advice to the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- Business Help Centre Mentoring Resources; a hands-on resource center which provides the tools, equipment and resources necessary to overcome administrative and intellectual obstacles when trying to start your own business;
- Partners for Business Success; a service for business that will enable them to better take advantage of available government programs that are designed to help them succeed. The program acts as an intermediary between business and government.

A number of these initiatives are in partnership with our provincial government. The Nova Scotia government has a Workforce Strategy and immigration strategy which are specifically trying to address labour and skills shortages in the province.

We also support the Canadian Chamber's submission entitled "Barriers to Canadian Competitiveness", which listed the top 10 barriers to our national economy. Among these barriers there are several which directly apply to Nova Scotia:

1. Getting qualified workers to meet the needs of employers. Developing domestic skills and improving access to foreign workers are vital to the continued success of business and our economy.
2. Designing better policies to help people find and keep jobs. Labour policies must encourage job creation, steer workers towards the jobs where they are the most productive, and allow employers to manage their businesses competitively.
3. Abolishing interprovincial barriers for the free flow of people, goods and services.

## **What can the Federal Government do?**

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Immigration policies must ensure Canada's continued prosperity. SMEs continue, however, to experience frustration with processing delays and the overall complexity of the immigration system. The process must be driven by business, not visa officers and the immigration system's programs must continue to be improved.

Businesses report that they are frustrated by the bureaucratic red tape and complex rules involved in hiring temporary foreign workers.

### ***Increase the Cap on Immigration in NS...***

One particular policy that should be amended is the immigration cap that has been placed on the number of allowable immigrants Nova Scotia can admit. Nova Scotia's nominee program continues to be capped well below that of other provinces. The cap is set at 500 people per year and makes up over one 1/5 of all immigrants who come to NS.

Most recently, our provincial government has requested an increase to 750 immigrants per year, but that request was denied.

**In summary**, in Nova Scotia we will focus on building on our innovative economy as a means to create high quality, sustainable jobs. To foster innovation, we must focus on:

- Building the most skilled, educated and entrepreneurial workforce in the world.
- Develop the right skills for good jobs. It is critical to equip our labour force with the right preparation and tools to participate in the labour market.
- Business needs to see that investment in workers' skills makes good economic sense, particularly our small businesses.
- Significantly improving our ability to move research breakthroughs out of the lab and into the marketplace.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today.

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