
Chapter 1

Key Messages from the Auditor General

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Performance Audit

Key Messages from the Auditor General

Introduction to our COVID-19 Response Work

- 1.1 In the spring of 2022, our Office was informed that the Legislative Assembly had passed a motion urging the government to request our Office perform work regarding the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The content of this current volume is our Office's first report related to this request.
- 1.2 The chapters in this volume include performance audits on COVID-19 Pandemic Response – Oversight and Pandemic Preparedness and Response in Nursing Homes.
- 1.3 As background information for the work, findings, and recommendations contained in this report, it is important to first put into context the situation and unforeseen environment that front-line workers, public servants and their leadership were asked to persevere through during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.4 The pandemic brought forward a series of firsts for the Province, including:
 - a state of emergency being declared for the first time in our province's history
 - the closure of schools and businesses for extended periods of time as a measure of protection for residents.

All efforts were aimed at safety of all while minimizing disruption to the lives of New Brunswickers. As was often heard during government press conferences, these were unprecedented times.

- 1.5 We recognize the uniquely challenging environment facing the Province during its response to the pandemic, an environment where public servants were facing many urgent, competing priorities, with a rapidly changing emergency situation, which resulted in the

creation of some accelerated decision-making processes.

- 1.6** For instance, we heard from auditees that saving lives and keeping individuals as safe and as comfortable as possible was top priority. Record-keeping or traditional bureaucratic administration may not always have been front-of-mind given other priority areas. In the early stage of the pandemic response where collaborative and rapid decision-making was critical, government's priority was to expedite care and resources to those in need, as opposed to exercising traditional government process and documentation standards.
- 1.7** The Province reacted quickly with unprecedented measures aimed at saving lives when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in New Brunswick. Difficult choices were made to protect New Brunswickers, requiring the Province to constantly pivot as the pandemic evolved.
- 1.8** Among government's key responsibilities were to:
- minimize and prevent serious illness and overall deaths
 - protect the vulnerable populations
 - stabilize the Province's health care system
 - minimize societal impacts and minimize economic disruption.
- 1.9** Many of our findings and conclusions must be kept in context of the pandemic reality and are unique to pandemic situations. Our objective of these audits is to identify improvement opportunities for the future. While some issues highlighted in our audit work may have existed before the pandemic, the recommendations based on our findings and conclusions are intended to complement ongoing and future efforts to address issues.
- 1.10** As a result of the forward-looking approach of our work, an underlying theme of our chapters in this report is preparedness. We urge government to exercise continued diligence to ensure learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic experience contribute to lessons learned and future preparedness planning in the event of another pandemic.

- 1.11** Most importantly, we want to commend the substantial efforts made by the many front-line workers and Department officials who worked long hours to help protect New Brunswickers and keep us all safe. This report is not meant to criticize those efforts, but rather to highlight opportunities for improvements as we look towards the future.
- COVID-19 Work Update** **1.12** At this time, we have completed two chapters on government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We plan to release the results of our remaining work in the December 2023 release of the Auditor General’s Report.
- Acknowledgements** **1.13** Staff in our Office worked very hard in carrying out the work reported in this volume of our report. The individual chapters of this report reflect their level of commitment, professionalism and diligence. I would like to express my appreciation for their contributions and continuing dedication to fulfilling the mandate of the Auditor General of New Brunswick.


Paul Martin, FCPA, FCA
Auditor General