

2022

Provincial Budget Submission

Presented to
The Honourable Ernie Steeves
Minister of Finance and Treasury Board

Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association
February 28, 2022



Canadian Life & Health
Insurance Association
Association canadienne des
compagnies d'assurances
de personnes

2022-23 New Brunswick Budget

The Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA) is pleased to provide its comments to New Brunswick Minister of Finance Ernie Steeves in advance of the 2022 budget.



Protecting 620,000 New Brunswickers

530,000 with drug, dental and other health benefits

540,000 with life insurance averaging \$166,000 per insured

190,000 with disability income protection



\$2.1 billion in payments to New Brunswickers

\$1 billion in annuities

\$0.8 billion in health and disability claims

\$0.3 billion in life insurance policies

Canada's life and health insurers play a key role in providing financial security to New Brunswickers. Additionally, the industry makes a significant contribution to the province's economy. Over 3,000 New Brunswick residents work within the sector in high value, professional jobs (as employees or independent agents). The industry is also a major investor in the province and contributes significant revenue through provincial taxes to the government.



\$42 million in provincial tax contributions

\$8 million in corporate income tax

\$12 million in payroll and other taxes

\$22 million in premium tax



Investing in New Brunswick

\$15 billion in total invested assets

96% held in long-term investments

Canada's life and health insurers have been proud to work with all levels of government throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to protect and support Canadians through health benefit plans, travel insurance and other financial security products.

The life and health insurance industry showed remarkable resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, stepping up to help employers maintain, and in some cases augment, their health benefit programs through premium reductions and deferrals. Working together with all levels of government we will continue to help maintain benefits for workers in New Brunswick and across the country. Workplace plans have shown remarkable resilience—over 26 million Canadians ended 2020 with supplementary health insurance that provided access to medications and other health care services, which is approximately the same number of Canadians who had coverage at the start of the year. The industry also paid out an additional \$150 million in disability claims above what was projected for 2020 to support workers while they recovered.

In 2020 the industry added 1,300 jobs across the country. These jobs were a result of our members' needs to add staff as we shifted to working remotely and Canadians made increased use of their health benefits, including increased virtual care options.

The industry remains financially stable, with capital reserves well above regulators' expectations and our industry will continue to work closely with all levels of government as we move towards recovery from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. SUPPORTING WORKPLACE HEALTH BENEFITS PLANS

Life and health insurers work together with employers to offer access to a wide variety of health services through employer sponsored benefit plans. In 2020, about 620,000 New Brunswickers had supplementary health insurance and \$635 million in health insurance benefits were paid.

New Brunswickers value their benefit plans that provide them with access to prescription medicines, vision care, dental care, and mental health supports. For example, in 2020 the industry paid out \$12 billion in prescription medication claims to Canadians—representing 35 per cent of national drug spending.

Support for mental health

The CLHIA commends New Brunswick on the one-at-a-time therapy program offered at community addictions and mental health clinics. We applaud initiatives like this one, which align with our industry's desire to support government in creating a citizen-focused and accessible mental health care system.

We believe that all levels of government and the private sector have a role to play in helping curb Canada's mental health crisis, which has been further challenged by the pandemic. We will continue to monitor health and disability claims across employers, but it may be several years before we understand the real impacts of the pandemic.

Supporting employees' physical and mental well-being makes good economic sense. Half a million Canadians miss work each week due to mental health reasons, and absenteeism and presenteeism results in nearly \$6 billion in lost productivity costs ([Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2020](#)). Group benefit plans provide much needed coverage that enables Canadians to access mental health services on both a short and long-term basis, helping them to remain healthy and productive.

In 2020, our industry paid out \$420 million in psychology-related claims to support mental health—representing a nearly 25 per cent increase from 2019. We have been working to improve access for Canadians who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic by supporting alternative options for care, including virtual care. We recommend continued collaboration between public and private payers to help ensure mental health care is accessible, high quality and patient focused.

As we move forward with economic recovery it will be crucial for public and private sectors to work together to create psychologically safe and healthy workplaces. For example, small and medium-sized businesses have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and would benefit from support that enables them to further invest in a comprehensive workplace mental health strategy.

In addition, each jurisdiction in Canada has its own occupational health and safety (OH&S) legislation, which outlines the general rights and responsibilities of the employer, the supervisor and the worker through an Act or statute and related regulations. The federal government has a mandate to amend the Canada Labour Code to include mental health as a specific element of OH&S and to require

federally regulated employers to take preventative steps to address workplace stress and injury. We encourage all governments to explore similar initiatives in this area.

Participation in the development of a federal rare disease strategy and pan-Canadian formulary

Canadians pay some of the highest prescription drug costs in the world—our drug prices are third highest among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and development (OECD) countries. In 2020 insurers paid out more than \$21.8 million in coverage for rare disease drugs to over 500 New Brunswick residents. From 2012 to 2019, expenditures on rare disease drugs grew by 32 per cent—more than six times the rate for all prescription medicines.

Federal, provincial, and territorial governments need to work together, along with private insurers, to find the best way to increase access to high-cost medications in a fiscally sustainable way. For example, federal, provincial and territorial governments and private insurers should work together to develop a standard formulary of medicines that all Canadians can access regardless of where they live or whether they have workplace benefits. Private insurers want to work with governments to ensure access across the country not only to this standard formulary of medicines but also to high-cost medicines used to treat chronic and rare diseases.

The life and health insurance industry is actively participating in the federal government's consultations on a rare disease strategy and pan-Canadian formulary. The federal government is developing the national strategy by collaborating with provinces, territories and other stakeholder groups. We look forward to working with the Government of New Brunswick as it considers the strategy from its own perspective.

Support for affordable prescription medicines

The Canadian life and health insurance industry strongly supports the federal Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB) reforms which have been delayed until July 2022. It is crucial that the federal government move ahead with these reforms to achieve affordability for consumers and we would encourage the Government of New Brunswick to advocate with the federal government to move ahead with these reforms, which would save taxpayer dollars.

We recommend that the government ensure that New Brunswickers continue to have access to affordable prescription drugs and mental health supports. This can be achieved by supporting workplace and individual health benefits plans that currently provide hundreds of thousands of residents with comprehensive access to a wide range of health services. Working with our industry to bring down costs and enhance access to high-cost and rare disease medicines is also imperative.

2. PENSION INNOVATION

Enhancing accumulations

Universal access to workplace pension and savings plans can help New Brunswickers achieve greater financial security in retirement. There is a significant savings shortfall and declining pension coverage for individuals at all age cohorts in New Brunswick due to multiple factors, including employees who have difficulty deciding whether to participate in their workplace pension plan. Even when employees do opt to join their workplace plans, many struggle with selecting the appropriate contribution level and investments for their needs. However, about 40 per cent of employees across Canada do not take full advantage of them, leaving as much as \$3 billion on the table annually in free company matching money.

Automatic features – which include automatic enrolment and contributions at a pre-set (or starter) rate, and automatic annual contribution escalation – have proven to be highly effective in increasing participation and savings rates. Increasingly, employees are working longer because they believe they cannot afford to retire. Helping employees retire on time, with the help of automatic features to increase accumulations, has positive economic and health outcomes for businesses, employees, and government. This is due to expected reductions in disability claims (higher risk of on-the-job injuries for older employees) and decreased financial stress or anxiety and other cost savings. The turnover through timely retirements better enables employers to plan for younger talent to train and succeed retiring employees.

We recommend that New Brunswick amend the Pension Benefits Act to enable automatic plan enrollment and automatic contribution escalation. These reforms will make it easier for New Brunswickers to achieve lifetime financial security through higher retirement income. They will also improve New Brunswick's productivity, competitiveness and health outcomes. As COVID-19 continues to impact New Brunswickers, this change would support employees in their retirement planning and enable employers to help their employees save for a secure retirement.

Enhancing Decumulation Solutions

We also support enhanced retirement income security for all New Brunswickers, including access to widely available, effective and innovative retirement income solutions. Individuals saving for retirement seldom know either the amount of retirement income they can draw from those savings or how long those savings must last.

To help address this, the federal government enacted in 2021 – Variable Payment Life Annuities (VPLAs) and Advanced Life Deferred Annuities (ALDAs), two decumulation solutions intended to help Canadian retirees.

The CLHIA continues to believe the VPLA legislation, as enacted, would only enable a select minority of Canadians participating in Defined Contribution Registered Pension Plans (DC plans) or Pooled Registered Pension Plans (PRPPs), as we estimate it requires at least 10,000 plus active members to provide the scale for a stable VPLA solution. The current measures do not take into consideration many other retirees who are members of smaller DC or PRPP plans that lack scale for a standalone VPLA solution. The CLHIA believes in standalone VPLAs that can pool funds from across DC plans, PRPPs, as well as Group RRSPs to maximize participation and provide a potentially stable income for the many hundreds of thousands of Canadians expected to retire each year.

In order to provide sustainable, affordable retirement income arrangements for older New Brunswick residents, we encourage the government to monitor and parallel federal measures to introduce ALDAs and VPLAs as new retirement income options and encourage the federal government to permit standalone VPLAs.

3. MODERNIZING AGENT LICENSING REGIME

The life and health insurance industry has been supportive of the province's intention to update its *Insurance Act* in order to remain current. We support amendments to modernize New Brunswick's agent licensing regime to better reflect current distribution models for life and health insurance. In this regard, the CLHIA recently submitted its feedback to the FCNB's consultation on proposed Rule INS-001 for Insurance Intermediaries Licensing and Obligations. As part of its feedback, the industry identified several areas the proposed Rule could be harmonized with existing legislation and other requirements. As well, we proposed a number of amendments to the proposed Rule to address

concerns related to definitions and requirements for intermediaries. Our detailed comments on these issues can be found in the [industry's submission](#) on the proposed Rule.

We support changes to the provincial Insurance Act in order to modernize the licensing regime and improve consumer protection.

4. SUPPORT PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT IN SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

We support the Government of New Brunswick taking action to reduce, mitigate and adapt to the risks of climate change. While the immediate impact of climate change—more frequent and severe storms, flooding, drought and forest fires—is obvious to property and casualty insurers, climate change also presents a complex and long-term risk to public health, and consequently to life and health insurers. As such, while managing climate change is of interest to many it is an area of significant and growing concern to the life and health insurance industry and we see it as our responsibility to support a transition to a lower carbon future. The industry [responded to the province's recent consultation](#) on the *Climate Change Action Plan*.

Infrastructure investment is a vitally important aspect of reducing, mitigating and adapting to the risks of climate change and it is also crucial to maximizing economic development and prosperity throughout New Brunswick and Canada as we compete to grow in a challenging economy and recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

The nature of Canadian life and health insurance products – routinely lasting more than 50 years – results in predictable, long-term, liabilities. As such, life insurers are ideal financial partners for long-term infrastructure projects, including public-private partnerships (P3), as they can commit to long-term financing. This inherent structural advantage makes the industry an important and stable investor in long-term assets.

As a substantial investor in the Canadian economy, the life and health insurance industry is well positioned to support the transition to a lower carbon economy through investment in sustainable financial products and assets, including infrastructure. Canadian life and health insurers already have \$55 billion invested in domestic infrastructure and more than \$75 billion invested in products or assets that integrate ESG or sustainability factors.

However, the industry is able and wants to do more. Our industry recognizes that sustainable infrastructure is crucial for adapting to and mitigating the risks of climate change but insurers' capacity to invest more is not matched by available sustainable assets.

We recommend the government leverage our industry's investment capacity in order to expand and accelerate long-term infrastructure projects by structuring projects to attract long-term investors, allowing New Brunswick to modernize its infrastructure and make the economy more productive and competitive.

The industry is available to collaborate with the government on the issue of lack of supply of sustainable assets for investment, such as infrastructure, low-carbon electricity generation and climate transition projects.

5. SUPPORTING A DYNAMIC AND INNOVATIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

New Brunswick imposes a two per cent tax on life, health and disability insurance premiums. Life insurers – and consequently insured New Brunswickers– paid close to \$22 million in premium taxes in

2020. The premium tax is outdated – it predates corporate income taxes and imposes a supplemental tax burden nearly three times the \$8 million in corporate income taxes levied on life and health insurance companies in New Brunswick in 2020.

These taxes directly increase the cost of purchasing insurance for individual policyholders and employers offering group benefits plans, making it more difficult for New Brunswickers to adequately protect themselves, their families and employees. This is problematic given that an aging population and escalating health care costs are increasing New Brunswick residents' need for income security and supplementary health care. We believe that discouraging individual responsibility for these benefits by taxing the purchase of insurance coverage is not sound public policy.

We recommend that New Brunswick develop a tangible plan to reduce, and eventually eliminate, tax on life and health insurance premiums.

CONCLUSION

The industry greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on New Brunswick's 2022 Budget. Should you have any questions, you may contact Susan Murray, Vice President, Government Relations and Policy at smurray@clhia.ca.



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