



# **HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

## Newfoundland and Labrador

# **Human Rights Commission**

## **Annual Report 2023-24**



## Message from the Human Rights Commission

In keeping with the requirements of a Category 3 Entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, I am pleased to present the Human Rights Commission's Annual Report. This report covers the period from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, and reports on the objectives and indicators for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

The Annual Report summarizes the work of the Human Rights Commission in the service of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, as per the Newfoundland and Labrador **Human Rights Act, 2010**.

My signature below indicates that the Human Rights Commission accepts accountability for the preparation of this report and the actual results reported.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Smita Joshi".

Dr. Smita Joshi  
Chairperson

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## Overview

The Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is an independent government agency responsible for promoting and protecting human rights in the province. This includes:

- Administering the **Human Rights Act, 2010** (the Act)
- Investigating and resolving human rights complaints
- Giving legal information to individuals, groups and organizations who are concerned with human rights
- Preventing discrimination through education and training
- Working with community partners

The Act protects people in Newfoundland and Labrador from discrimination and harassment. The Act recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of all people; that people all have equal rights and opportunities, and that people should live free from discrimination and harassment.

Human Rights Commissioners, who have experience with human rights issues and who have an interest in and sensitivity to human rights, are appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for a five-year term. One member is designated as Chair; however, the Chair position was vacant as of March 31, 2024. Commissioners meet regularly to make decisions on the disposition of complaints, special programs and discuss the strategic direction of the Commission.

As of March 31, 2024, the Commission members were:

• Vacant., Chair	• Victor Lundrigan
• Dr. Smita Joshi, Vice-Chair *	• Colleen Simms
• Lauren Carter	
• David Oxford	
• Soraya Carrim White	

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\* Dr. Smita Joshi was appointed Chair of the Commission in April 2024.

The Commission's mandate, lines of business and vision can be found in the Commission's Activity Plan for 2023-2026. Learn more about the Commission at [www.thinkhumanrights.ca](http://www.thinkhumanrights.ca).

The Commission has 8 permanent staff and 4 contract workers that administer the Act and run the day-to-day operations of the Commission. The Commission serves the people of Newfoundland and Labrador from their office in St. John's.



Photo ID: an organizational chart.

## Complaint Statistics

**In 2023-24, the Commission received 1,139 total inquiries.** The trackable inquiries at intake can be categorized as follows:

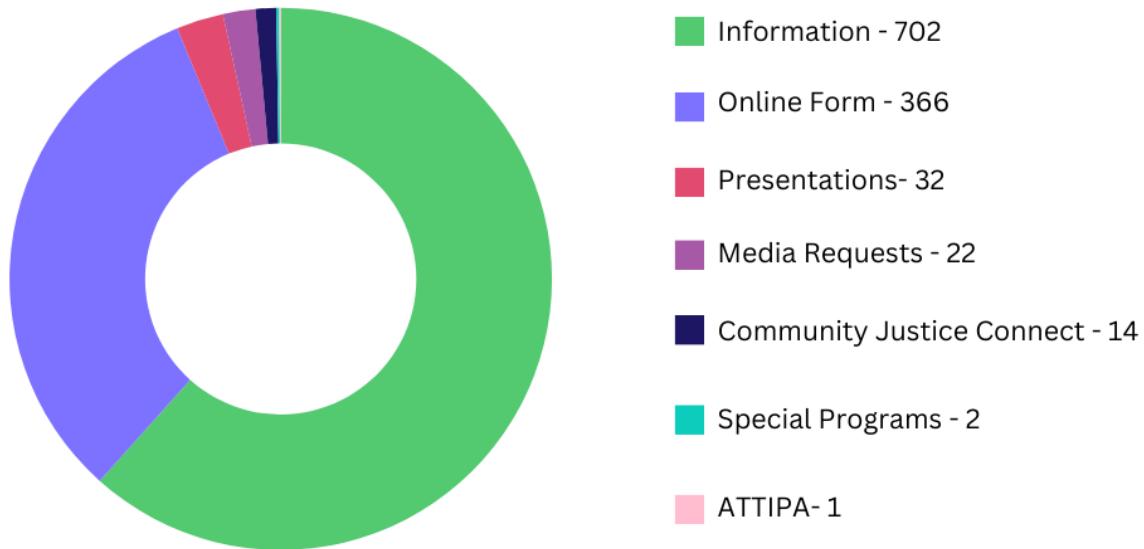


Photo ID: Colourful donut chart representing intake statistics.

Although not captured in the chart above, the Commission staff spend time listening to the concerns of those most vulnerable and connecting them to other community or government agencies for support.

The Commission has created an early assessment team that reviews all inquiries, including complaint forms, that the Commission receives. From the 366 complaint forms received, the Commission proceeded with 126 official complaints. **This is up 62 percent from the number of complaints processed last year.**

In accordance with the **Human Rights Act, 2010**, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are: race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, social origin, religious creed, religion, age, disability, disfigurement, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status, source of income, political opinion and criminal conviction (in employment only). These are the areas in which the Commission can investigate.

The chart below identifies the number of matters based on prohibited grounds received by the Commission during 2023-24.

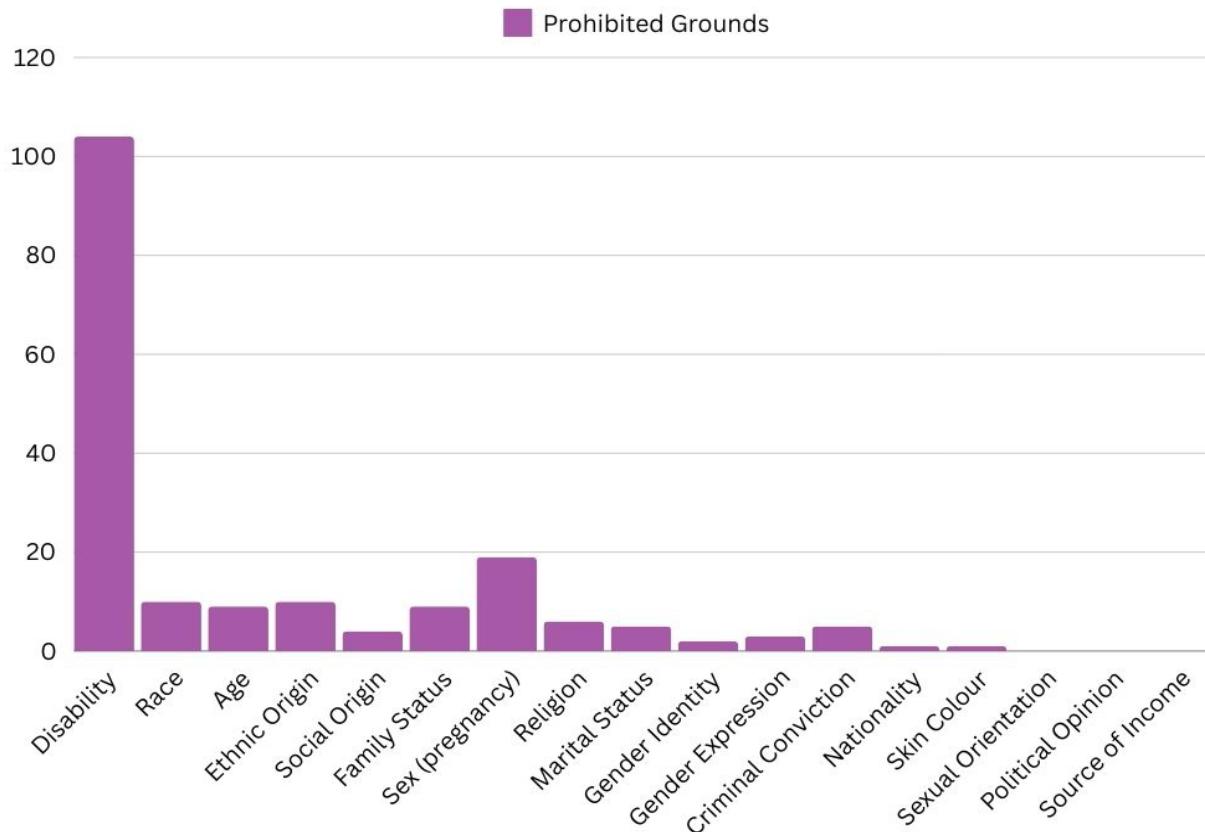


Photo ID: Bar graph detailing the prohibited grounds involved in cases of alleged discrimination/harassment.

**\*Note: some complaints can be filed under more than one prohibited ground.**

The **Human Rights Act, 2010**, protects people from discrimination and/or harassment in the following areas: employment, membership in a trade union, provision of goods and services, commercial and residential rentals, publications, and contracts.

The chart below identifies the areas where people allegedly experienced discrimination and/or harassment in 2023-24.

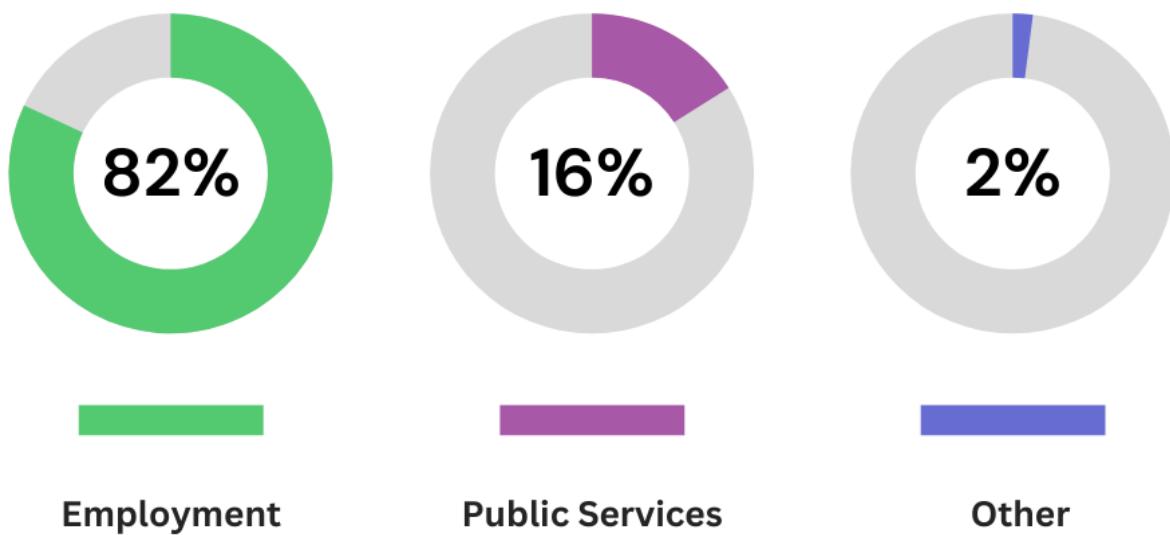


Photo ID: image of three donut charts showcasing the percentages of protected areas involved in official complaints.

## Complaint Closures

During the 2023-24 fiscal year, the Commission closed a total of **319** complaints. The chart below identifies how these complaints were closed.

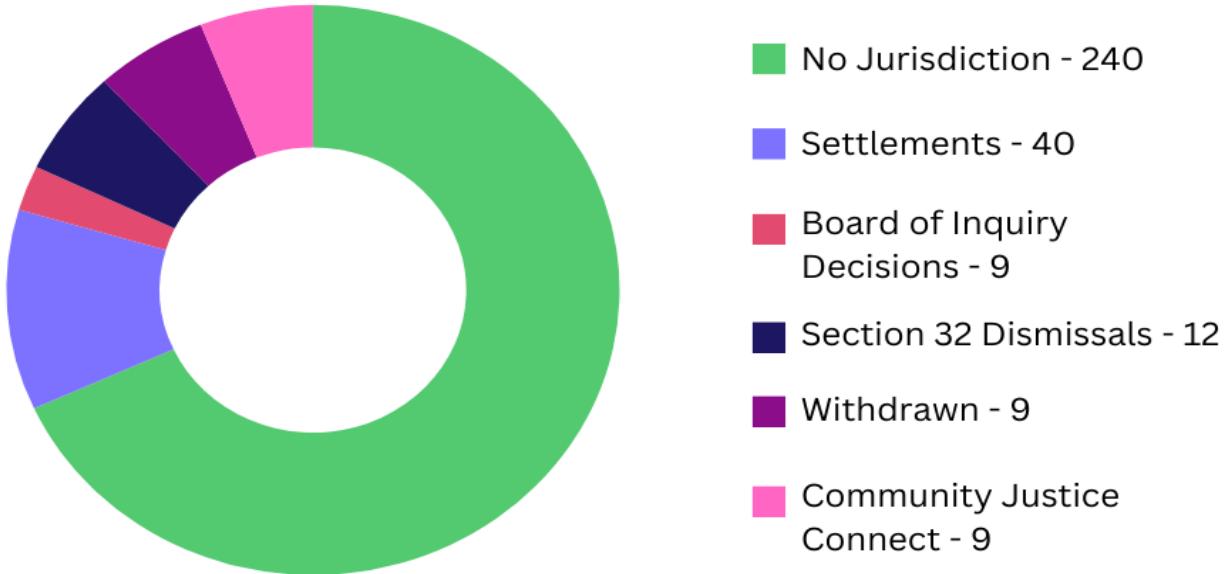


Photo ID: Colourful donut chart representing complaint closures.

The Commission notes that there has been a significant increase in people that are interested in resolving complaints through mediation. This has contributed to a backlog for early-stage mediation.

## Highlights and Partnerships

### Resource Development

Throughout the last year, the Commission has developed several resources and public facing material such as:

### **1) Statement on the Attack on Inclusive Education & 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Members: A NL Human Rights Concern**

The Commission released a statement in support of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the Provincial Francophone School District (CSFP). This statement addressed the increase in anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate that was directed at K-12 schools in the province.

## **2) Resource on 2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion and Human Rights**

The Commission worked in collaboration with Quadrangle NL to develop the “2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion and Human Rights” resource. This resource aimed to provide information about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, emphasize the rights this group has, and identify best practices that promote inclusion.

## **3) Resource on the Human Right to Food**

The Commission developed a one-page resource in collaboration with Food First NL. This resource focused on food as a fundamental human right which emphasized the limitations the Commission has when receiving complaints related to food insecurity.

## **4) Discussion Panel on Black History in Newfoundland and Labrador**

The Commission partnered with the Black Student Association (BSA) at Memorial University to host an event called “Let’s Talk Black History in Newfoundland and Labrador.” For this event, the Commission worked with Heather Barrett and Xavier Michael Campbell who are local authors of the book *Black Harbour: Slavery and the Forgotten History of Black People in Newfoundland and Labrador*. The event aimed to raise awareness of black history in the province.

## **Committee & Working Group Engagement**

The Commission is a member of various committees and working groups in Newfoundland and Labrador to promote human rights in decision making spaces such as:

## **1) YWCA Stakeholder Reference Group**

The purpose of the Stakeholder Reference Group is to provide guidance on the “Fostering Collaboration of Services for LGBTQIA+ Newcomers in NL” project.

## **2) City of St. John’s Anti-Racism Working Group (ARWG)**

The Anti-Racism Working Group (ARWG) is primarily responsible for developing and implementing a work plan that fosters anti-racism while promoting diversity and inclusion in the City of St. John’s.

## **3) First Voice Partnership Table**

The First Voice Partnership Table is a working group of organizational Partners and Community Advocates who are committed to advancing systemic change on urban Indigenous issues in St. John's, NL.

## **4) First Voice Indigenous Justice Action Circle**

The purpose of the First Voice Indigenous Justice Action Circle (the Action Circle) is to promote, support, and coordinate work to advance priority Calls for Change specific to the legal community and other actors in the justice system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **5) Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System**

The Commission also received standing in December 2022 to participate in the Inquiry Respecting the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System. The Commission has attended hearing dates in the fiscal year related to this matter.

## Community Justice Connect

Community Justice Connect (CJC) is a conflict resolution and restorative justice service open to Indigenous, racialized and religious minority communities, regardless of immigration status. Developed in 2021, CJC closed for new cases after one year of operations to re-develop the process, manage active cases and develop resources for the program.



**COMMUNITY  
JUSTICE CONNECT**



Through funding from the Department of Justice and Public Safety (JPS), CJC is now staffed with a Departmental Coordinator and a Lead Facilitator. Staffing allowed for the detailed review and re-development of the process for receiving, reviewing, and managing cases. CJC received 14 information requests and closed 9 cases. Throughout this work CJC continues to support the Commission in re-developing the human rights complaint process.

This past year CJC hosted six informal meetings and distributed a monthly newsletter to 16 volunteer Community Facilitators. CJC hosted two placement students from York University's Human Rights program who began the development of anti-racism resources. CJC received four media requests throughout the year and participated in the Grenfell Matters podcast for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In 2023, CJC presented to the Canada Centre's international conference on *Countering Radicalization to Violence: What to Measure, How to Prevent* in Ottawa and the Restorative Justice Association of British Columbia's conference *Gathering for Community, Connectivity, and Change: A Symposium on the Power of Restorative Justice* in Richmond, BC. CJC continued work from the October 2022 national gathering on accelerating the use of restorative justice in the Canadian legal system. CJC continued as a planning committee member of the 2023 National Restorative Justice Symposium virtual event and as an Advisory member to Relationships First Restorative Justice in Education.

CJC reported to the Law Society of NL and the Law Foundation of NL on funding received to develop internal and public resources. They received the final report on CJC 2.0, a legal review on if CJC can offer legal advice. CJC looks forward to the coming year and strengthening our service.

## The Commission on Social Media

### **Twitter**

From April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, the Commission has made 145,000 impressions through it's X (formally known as Twitter) platform and gained 120 followers. The Commission is currently reviewing its engagement on this platform to determine best practices in terms of usage.

### **Instagram**

This platform was developed in September 2022 and has caught the attention of community members in a positive way. Currently, the Commission has 1,000 followers on this platform.

## 2023 Human Rights Award Ceremony

The Human Rights Award is presented annually in celebration of International Human Rights Day. It recognizes an individual who has made and/or continues to make a meaningful contribution to advancing and furthering human rights in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**The Commission is pleased to announce that the 2023 Human Rights Award was presented to Courtney Clarke.** Courtney received an original painting by Grenfell Visual Arts student, Grace Prince.

Courtney Clarke (she/her) is from Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove (PHMC) and currently lives in Mount Pearl. She has been actively involved in the province's community sector for most of her life. Whether it's her work in

violence prevention, gender parity in politics, accessibility, or economic well-being, Courtney brings an intersectional, trauma-informed approach to the work that she does. In her early twenties, she was a Project Manager of an entrepreneurial boot camp for veterans called Prince's Operation Entrepreneur with Prince's Charities Canada, through Enactus Memorial, and spent time volunteering on local arts, heritage, and museum committees with her father in her hometown. When COVID-19 began and before NL had a provincial domestic abuse hotline, Courtney, while chairing Violence Prevention Avalon East (VPAE), helped the organization launch Unsafe at Home; a domestic abuse support platform supporting 100+ crisis calls from individuals isolated with abusers. They then partnered with Spirit Horse NL to provide free equestrian-based counselling to 500+ survivors, called Stable & Safe. A survivor of gender-based violence, herself, Courtney established the Jane Doe Graduate Award in Anti-Violence Research at Memorial University to support local researchers.

Chairing Equal Voice NL, Courtney helps women and gender diverse individuals get elected to all levels and parties of government. Through this role, she also sits on the NL Premier's Roundtable for Gender Equity. In January 2022, she helped Equal Voice co-author a study on sexual harassment in Canada's legislative Provincial & Federal Assemblies for the Justice of Canada and looks for any opportunity to advance gender parity in the system. Re-elected for a second term as a Director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union (NLCU), Courtney represents the financial interests of 20,000+ members. Also passionate about accessibility, Courtney was able to fundraise over \$1 million dollars towards accessibility advancements across all regions of NL, between 2019 and 2021. In January 2023, Courtney was appointed to the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Also at the ceremony, Dome Lombeida and Émile Sopkowe were named Human Rights Champions.** The Human Rights Commission grants this recognition to someone who has made a meaningful, contribution to human rights in Newfoundland and Labrador.



**Photo ID:** Commission staff, and his and her honours pictured alongside the 2023 Human Rights Award winners at the Government House in St. John's, NL. Pictured (Back Row) from left to right is: Carey Majid, Courtney Clarke, Dome Lombeida, Émile Sopkowe, and Hilary Hennessey. Front row: Her Honour, Joan Marie Aylward and His Honour, Carl Thompson.

## Report on Performance

### **Issue 1: Enhancing Community Engagement**

The Commission has a mandate to promote human rights through education and community engagement. The Commission has lacked the capacity to prioritize community engagement in the past. With the expansion of the Commission's team through the hiring of the Public Relations Specialist in 2022, the Commission has made an active effort to enhance community engagement.

**Objective 1.1:** By March 31, 2024, the Commission will have connected with community organizations across the province to inform residents, businesses, and organizations on human rights.

**Indicator:** Held discussion panels with community stakeholders and advocates on the topic of human rights.

**Results:** The Commission hosted a discussion panel for Black History Month in collaboration with the Black Student Association at MUN. The Commission partnered with the authors of *Black Harbour: Slavery and the Forgotten History of Black People in Newfoundland and Labrador* to discuss black history in the province.

In 2023, CJC presented to the Canada Centre's international conference on *Countering Radicalization to Violence: What to Measure, How to Prevent* in Ottawa. The topic of CJC's presentation was "exploring the use of restorative justice for harm when there has been radicalization to violence." The purpose of the event was to emphasize the importance of research, evaluation, and knowledge exchange between experts and practitioners for adapting prevention in complex environments. The conference brought together 320 attendees from 16 countries, including more than 100 speakers and panelists.

CJC also presented at the Restorative Justice Association of British

Columbia's conference *Gathering for Community, Connectivity, and Change: A Symposium on the Power of Restorative Justice* in Richmond, BC. The topic of CJC's presentation about "centering restorative justice, anti-racism and anti-colonial ways of being." CJC was asked to share insights on the development of CJC's model, successes and lessons learned so far in the development of restorative justice for identity based human rights complaints.

**Indicator:** Distributed resource materials to organizations and community groups across the province.

**Results:** The Commission has developed resource material in collaboration with community groups. The Commission created both the "Human Right to Food" resource, in collaboration with Food First NL, and the "2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusion and Human Rights" resource, in collaboration with Quadrangle NL, to promote human rights throughout the province. These resources were distributed at community events, in the Commission's newsletter, and through social media.

**Indicator:** Facilitated human rights presentations to inform people in Newfoundland and Labrador about services offered by the Human Rights Commission.

**Results:** The Commission has engaged in 32 human rights presentations with key stakeholders which raised awareness of the Commission, human rights, and the services available to the public. The Commission facilitated information sessions to promote human rights. Although the number of public information sessions did not increase compared to the last fiscal year, the Commission shared information with the public in alternative ways such as resources and responding to information requests. This is reflected in the increased information inquiries received. The Commission had a 182 percent increase in information requests compared to the 2022-23 fiscal year.

**Objective 1.2:** By March 31, 2025, the Commission will have increased the number of information sessions provided to people within the province.

**Indicators:**

- Facilitated information sessions that promote human rights.
- Shared information on human rights with groups and organizations throughout the province.

## **Issue 2: Review of Human Rights Policies and Resources**

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the **Human Rights Act, 2010** protects people from discrimination and harassment by recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of all people. It is essential that their internal policies and procedures are developed in a way that eliminates barriers to service. The Commission will review policies and procedures across Canada to ensure best practices with anti-discrimination laws.

**Objective 2.1:** By March 31, 2024, the Commission will have started a review of anti-discrimination policies and procedures.

**Indicator:** Completed a jurisdictional scan to determine current best practices across Canada in anti-discrimination policies and procedures.

**Results:** A jurisdictional scan was completed to determine best practices across Canada. This included conducting a media scan, reviewing human rights legislation in other provinces, and meeting with the Cross Canada Human Rights Education Committee to gather information about what other Commissions are doing to promote human rights and eliminate barriers to service.

**Indicator:** Consulted with key stakeholders to determine ways to enhance the processes established in the **Human Rights Act, 2010**.

**Results:** The Commission held meetings with the Office of the Citizens' Representative (OCR), Labour Standards, 211, Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S), the Schizophrenia Society, as well as the Newfoundland and Labrador Queer Research Initiative. This helped the Commission

understand the needs of community members and challenges to service provision experienced by other groups. The Commission also attended a number of conferences that focused on advancing equity, diversity, inclusion anti-racism (EDI-AR), accessibility, and restorative justice.

**Indicator:**

- Reviewed current practices and procedures.

**Results:** The Commission has reviewed internal practices and procedures to enhance the services they provide to the public. The Commission has updated its complaint form to gather more information from people to be able to meet them where they are. They have created an early assessment team that reviews all inquiries, including complaint forms, that the Commission receives and assigns it to a staff member that is most equipped to deal with the inquiry. This intake assessment meeting happens weekly. This has increased response time and prevented unnecessary back and forth communication. The Commission has also developed new notices for both proceeding with and dismissing complaints. Additionally, the Commission has been working to create alternative solutions for people in terms of resolving conflict. This has led the Commission to develop a pre-complaint resolution guide that will be implemented throughout the next fiscal year.

**Objective 2.2:** By March 31, 2025, the Commission will have continued the review and identified gaps in policies and procedures that are preventing people throughout the province from being protected.

**Indicators:**

- Identified gaps in policies and procedures effecting the complaints process.
- Developed an internal procedures manual to assist staff in addressing challenges identified with the complaints process.

## Opportunities and Challenges

The Commission continues to see people coming to their office in crisis. This presents a challenge for the Commission due to staff and human resource limitations, as well as little social supports available to people in crisis. This can make redirection and system navigation difficult.

The Commission has identified the need for a policy on respectful behaviour to help guide staff in promoting positive interactions with the public. The policy reinforces the commitment the Commission has made to reducing harm through communication and taking a relational approach to conflict. The Commission recognizes people come to the office in a heightened state due to being in crisis situations and intends to use this policy as a last resort. To read more about the Policy on Respectful Behaviour, please see the following link: [Policy on Respectful Behaviour \(thinkhumanrights.ca\)](http://thinkhumanrights.ca)

Based on the nature of the work the Commission engages in, it has recognized the need for additional training that is tailored to front-line service providers. Training that would enhance the service the Commission is seeking to provide to the public could include mental health first aid training, crisis intervention training, and de-escalation training. This training would allow the Commission to adequately support the mental health and wellbeing of service recipients, but also enable staff to develop safeguards.

## Financial Statements

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are un-audited and based on public information provided in the "Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the Year Ended 31 March 2024." The Commission is not required to provide a separate audited financial statement.

### HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

		Estimates	
		Actual \$	Original \$
01. Salaries		891,288	811,000
Operating Accounts:	Employee Benefits	13,218	9,300
	Transportation & Communications	17,013	10,200
	Supplies	2,983	12,000
	Professional Services	60,863	25,900
	Purchased Services	20,369	6,100
	Property, furnishings, and equipment	4,102	-
02. Operating Accounts		11,548	63,500
	Related Revenue	-	-
01. Revenue – Federal		-	-
<b>Total Human Rights</b>		<b>1,009,836</b>	<b>874,500</b>



**Alternative formats of this document are available upon request.**

**Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission**

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