

NOVA SCOTIA MOMS FOR
COMPASSIONATE,
COLLABORATIVE MENTAL
HEALTH CARE

<https://families-matter-in-mental-health.com>

**Presentation by Moms Nancy Saunders and Heather
Spidell to Halifax Board of Police Commissioners
Information Sharing and Q&A
September 4, 2024**

WHO WE ARE

- Nova Scotia mothers who tried to get help for our children and loved ones when they were sick and unable to call for help themselves.
- We were repeatedly told “We can’t talk to you due to privacy laws. Your child has to call themselves or give us consent.”
- We watched our children’s health deteriorate.
- When they threatened self-harm or ran away, we called 911. Police officers in marked cars and uniforms arrived at our homes.
- Then they left. Only to return for another crisis, another day.
- Our children died by suicide. We live with the guilt and what ifs. Every day.
- We believe their deaths were preventable if only the “system” took a more personal, compassionate and collaborative approach to caring for people at all stages of their mental health/health journey, and supporting families/caregivers who desperately want to help.

LOVED ONES WE LOST

Jevon Link, 27

Aiden Mitchell, 14

Luke Brackett, 29

Cameron Haire, 26

Lucas Rushton, 19

Shay Cadham: 22

Adam McLean, 36

Cayley Fox, 21

Ben Brennan, 29

Adam Cashen, 19

Devin Kidd, 26

WHAT WE WANT: A CALL FOR CHANGE IN LEGISLATION AND ATTITUDES

The Nova Scotia Mothers made these four recommendations to the Nova Scotia government in June 2024 after consultation with health and legal experts, and advocacy groups across Canada.

1. Amend out-dated privacy legislation re: disclosure without consent, following the example of the Province of Manitoba in 2018.
2. Introduce the Nova Scotia Health Circle of Care and Circle of Support Policy and forms, advocated for by Fred and Elizabeth Fountain in 2009, so that families can have these discussions with each other and with their doctors/care providers
3. Provide families and caregivers with support, education, training in assisting loved ones with mental illness and addictions
4. Provide trauma informed training for all those in the “system” who interact with those suffering from mental illness and addictions and their families/caregivers

WHAT WE DON'T WANT

We are not asking for families/caregivers to have access to health records without consent

We are not asking for families/caregivers to know private conversations between clinicians and individuals

WHAT WE DO WANT

For families/caregivers to be able to:

- ask or and/or **escalate the urgency of healthcare requests for a loved one** because they are more ill than they are letting on, or even realize
- ask and advocate for **follow up from health care providers** when they not responding to calls or requests for help
- **share family history, medical history**, medications, traumatizing events, impact of behaviours on families and the public (eg car accidents, speeding, violence) for a more thorough assessment, safety and treatment plan and to know this information is documented and considered in treatment and safety plans.
- know when their loved ones are **taken to hospital/facility**, if they are safe, what medications or treatment has been prescribed, how the family/caregiver can support them at home, **when they are being discharged, and their safety plan**
- know the **potential side effects, behaviours to watch for, whether they should be driving, and the consequences of interacting medications with alcohol or drugs**

NOVA SCOTIA LAST PROVINCE TO CHANGE LEGISLATION

Nova Scotia has most restrictive law in Canada regarding disclosure of personal health information without consent.

NS Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) existing language:

*“The disclosure of personal health information will avert or minimize an **“imminent”** and significant danger to the health or safety of any person or class of persons”;*

Nova Scotia Mothers’ requested language, removing the word “imminent”:

The disclosure of personal health information will prevent or lessen a risk of serious harm to the patient's health or safety or that of another person.

- *Government leaders attempted to similarly amend the law 2009, 2016, 2018. They failed.*

SHARING INSIGHT AND PERSPECTIVE

- North American research discusses how asking police to be mental health care providers perpetuates the long-held stigma that people with mental health issues are criminals or a risk to public safety.
- For our children and our families, the presence of police in marked vehicles and uniforms escalated an already frightening and emotional situation.
- The presence of police in our driveways drew unwelcome attention and speculation to our homes and our families.
- In some cases, police officers were put in precarious situations of going into our children's personal spaces alone while parents were told to wait in another room.
- The NS Department of Health and Wellness offers explicit advice to call 911 in the event of a mental health crisis. This means that HRM Police have less time and resources to fulfill their mandate to keep our communities safe and risk eroding public trust in their role.

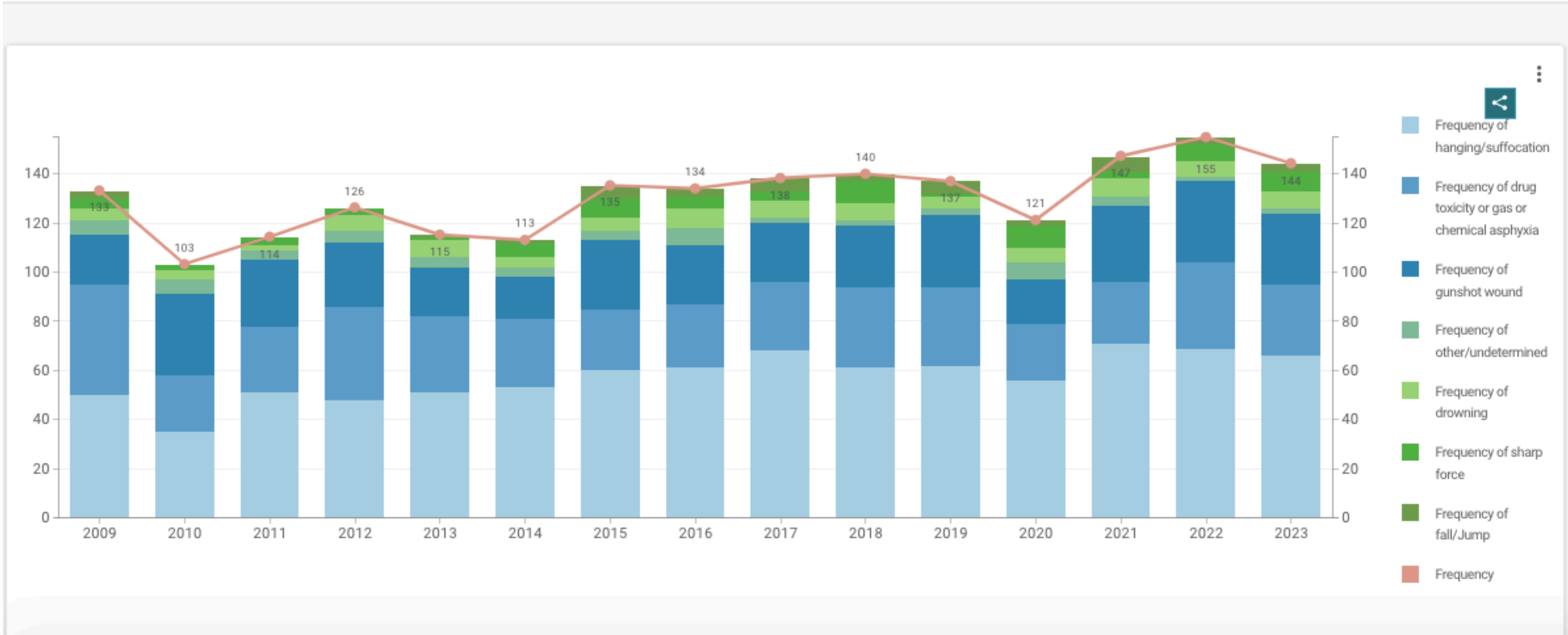
FACTS

- **In 2022, HRM Police responded to 2793 calls related to mental health distress, and 755 calls for suicide attempts.**
- **Between Jan-Oct 2023, HRM Police completed 633 wellness check calls.**

Annual Frequencies of Suicide Deaths by Suicide Method

Population And Demographics

More Info 



[Nova Scotia Suicide Stats reported to Medical Examiner](#)

NOT EVERYONE IS ABLE TO PROVIDE CONSENT

- Anogsognosia, paranoia, psychosis, can result in non-consent and withdrawal of consent.
- The system is so complex/overwhelming to navigate, lacks empathy and skill
- Family and support people are prevented from advocating for their loved ones because legislation and attitudes position them as enemies rather than critical helpers
- Complicated, time consuming processes to confirm consent deter clinicians from even trying
- Prolonged illness, escalations, crisis, attempted suicides and deaths by suicide have occurred as a result

HOW CAN WE COLLABORATE?

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences and our learnings with you.

How can we NS Moms work together and support the mission and goals of HRM Police?

Nancy Saunders, Ketch Harbour

Heather Spidell, St. Margaret's Bay

Kelly Mitchell, Yarmouth

Michele Haire, Lower Sackville

Laureen Rushton, Truro

Louann Link, Barrington

Sheila Burke, Duncan's Cove

<https://families-matter-in-mental-health.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/share/g/TkVMBA3gscGCD2Kk/>