



Introducing Social Workers

When someone you care for is experiencing serious mental illness or crisis, a mental health social worker may become an important point of connection. A respectful, collaborative approach can help build trust, support communication, and strengthen care.

Social workers often recognize caregivers as part of the broader circle of care. Your observations can help social workers provide care that is more informed, compassionate, and responsive to what the person needs.

Where You May Connect with Social Workers

Caregiving mothers may connect with social workers at different times in the mental health system, such as during admission, discharge planning, follow-up care, urgent appointments, crisis supports, or community-based services.

Social workers may also be part of care in emergency departments, inpatient units, outreach teams, housing supports, income assistance, and other community resources.

Caregivers are encouraged to ask whether a social worker is involved and to reach out directly. Your observations and concerns matter, and it is okay to call again when new questions, worries, or important information arise.

How can Social Workers Help You

Social workers can listen to caregiver concerns and receive information that may help with assessment and care planning. They may also share general information that does not identify the person, such as information about mental health conditions, available services, and ways caregivers can offer support.

Caregivers often notice changes first. For example, you may notice changes in sleep, eating, mood, medication use, or daily routines. Social workers can listen and help share your concerns with the care team.

Privacy is important, but **it does not mean caregivers cannot be heard**. With care and respect, social workers can protect privacy while still communicating in a thoughtful and compassionate way.

What to Say: Ask questions and share the changes you are noticing, such as changes in behaviour, mood, sleep, eating, medication use, safety, or daily routines. Ask what supports may be available and explain why you feel the person may need more help. Ask how to keep your loved one safe.

Why It Matters: In Nova Scotia's public mental health system, social workers can help you understand what support may be needed, what support may be available, connect people with services, communicate with hospitals, community programs, and other members of the care team.

Being Heard: It is important for you to be part of the helping team. You have so much to offer. Speaking calmly and respectfully can help you build a positive and cooperative relationship. This helps the social worker to better understand your concerns for your loved one and to offer support that includes you as part of the team. Remain connected. Do not be afraid to call the social worker when you have concerns or need help in keeping your loved one safe.

What Social Workers Can Do

- work with trusted caregivers as part of the circle of care and support system
- act as a bridge between the person, trusted caregivers, and the health care system

- provide health information to a trusted caregiver that does not identify the person [s.37 PHIA]
- listen to caregiver families without violating confidentiality [NSH Information Sharing Guidelines]
- record collateral information from trusted caregivers that may need to be considered by a physician to provide timely and appropriate care [s.31c PHIA]
- report observations and red flags to a treating physician when there may be reasons to assess capacity [s.3c PHIA, s.18 PHIA]
- protect the source of collateral information when sharing the source could create a risk of serious harm to treatment, recovery, or another person's mental or physical health [s.72(1)(f) and (g) PHIA]
- provide general information, such as location, presence, and condition, to trusted caregivers [s.37 PHIA]

Where You May Connect with Social Workers

Social workers, often called health care social workers, can help connect medical care with the practical, social, and legal needs of a family.

Key Sources: Nova Scotia Health Social Work; Nova Scotia College of Social Workers; Official Job Descriptions of Health Care Social Workers.

For caregivers of individuals with serious mental illness, social workers may act as navigators, therapists, and advocates.

Clinical and Hospital Settings: In collaborative care clinics, such as NSEPP, social workers may provide family psychoeducation, help caregivers understand a diagnosis, and help navigate support for “affected others.”

Mental Health and Addictions Clinics: Social workers may provide individual or group therapy and help document social history so the care team can better

understand the person's home environment or they may be present in community-based services such as outpatient clinics and outreach teams.

Acute Care and Inpatient Psychiatric Units: Social workers may support discharge planning, coordinate the transition home, assess housing stability, and connect families to continuing care.

Step-down Programs and Day Hospitals: Social workers may facilitate life-skills groups and support transition-to-community planning.

Emergency Departments: Social workers may help with risk assessment and provide immediate crisis support for the person and caregiver.

Mental Health and Addictions Intake Service: When you call the provincial intake line, **1-855-922-1122**, social workers may help screen, triage, and direct families to the right level of care.

Provincial Crisis Team:

Social workers may be part of mobile units across the province to de-escalate and provide on-the-spot referrals.

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team: In HRM, social workers may be part of mobile units that attend community crises in person to de-escalate and provide on-the-spot referrals.

CARE Teams, Crisis Assistance and Response: In Halifax and Dartmouth, CARE Teams provide an alternative to police-led wellness checks, with social workers and peer supporters offering trauma-informed response.

- Information in this pamphlet is based on the actual experiences of many caregiver moms. It is not legal advice or medical advice. It is practical advice based on experience with the Nova Scotia Health System. NSMoms accepts no responsibility for how you choose to use, or not use, this information.



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Important

- Emergency: call 911.
- Mental Health Mobile Crisis: 902-429-8167.
- This Moms website helps caregiver moms who need support communicating with doctors and the Nova Scotia Health System: NSMoms.ca

Read This Information

- For medical advice, contact a registered physician.
- For legal advice, try [Dalhousie Legal Aid Service](https://DalhousieLegalAidService.ca) or contact a lawyer.