

Nova Scotia Grief Alliance

NORTHERN REGION

ROUNDTABLE

What We Heard Summary

On Friday, September 16, the Nova Scotia Grief Alliance (NSGA) held its second regional in-person roundtable. Led by Nova Scotia Health (NSH) and Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association (NSHPCA), the NSGA hosts regional roundtables to bring together individuals and organizations involved in grief support. Roundtables provide space for those working in grief support locally to hear about grief initiatives in their area, learn about NSGA, and share insights on grief needs and opportunities.

Northern Region Roundtable Summary



Who Attended

25

Community members, from New Glasgow to Amherst.

7

Nova Scotia Hospice Palliative Care Association & Nova Scotia Health leaders.

Participants from a range of sectors attended, including:

- Community-based grief support, health care professionals, social workers, municipal staff, non-profit organizations, students, volunteers, researchers, and librarians.



Key Activities

- Nova Scotia Grief Alliance overview.
- Guest Speaker & Panel discussion.
- Presentation and small group discussion on local community grief needs, opportunities and educational needs for those working in grief.

Speaker

- Participants heard from Diane Connors, Managing Director, Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia, on her topic, *Learnings on Burnout and Healing*.

Panelists

- Jude Lightfoot - Grief and Bereavement Coordinator, NSH.
- Stacey Harrison - Executive Director, Colchester East Hants Hospice Society.
- Donna Lawrence - Regional Coordinator of Education & Outreach, Cumberland, Colchester & East Hants Alzheimer's Society.
- Chrissy Merrigan - Grief Support Leader, Cumberland Care Hospice Palliative Care Society.

Photo credit: Warwick Yang

WHAT WE HEARD – NOVA SCOTIA GRIEF ALLIANCE NORTHERN REGION ROUNDTABLE

Small Group Discussion

Kristian Suen, Community Relations and Research Lead, along with Melissa MacDonald and Rune Black, Community Grief Facilitators for NSHPCA, led a community needs-sharing and learning session to discuss grief-related needs, challenges, strengths, and educational priorities for those working in grief in the Northern Region. Themes from small group discussions on grief-related challenges, strengths, and educational needs are listed below.

Top Themes: Needs

Stigma & Awareness:

- Reducing stigma and normalizing grief.
- Increasing public understanding of available resources.

System Gaps & Coordination:

- Limited capacity and resources.
- Services operating in silos.
- Insufficient funding.

Access & Infrastructure:

- Unreliable internet and cell coverage.
- Transportation and accessibility barriers.

Education & Equity:

- Need for youth education on grief and mental health.
- Limited access to education for remote and marginalized communities.



Strengths

Partnerships & Collaboration:

- Strong interest from diverse organizations in working together for positive change.
- Opportunities to strengthen collaboration across sectors.

Existing Services:

- Palliative care support.
- Grief groups and clinics (including Northern Zone Grief Program).
- 211 as an information and referral resource.

Educational Needs For Grief Workers

Cultural & Spiritual Awareness:

- Recognizing cultural nuances around death, dying, and grief.
- Supporting spiritual needs and interfaith perspectives.

Equity & Social Determinants:

- Addressing socio-economic barriers.
- Responding to substance use and stigmatized forms of grief.

Education & Training:

- Promoting grief literacy.
- Providing trauma-informed care training.

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Evaluation

Most participants who completed the evaluation survey rated the event as **good or excellent**, and agreed or strongly agreed that:

- Content met participant expectations.
- Panelists were engaging.
- Topics discussed were relevant.
- There was sufficient opportunities for discussion.

Key recommendations from participants

- Could benefit from deeper focus on cultural diversity and humility in grief support.
- In-person discussions are preferred for meaningful dialogue, though virtual options are understood and appreciated for their convenience.
- A summit on children and youth grief would be incredibly valuable.
- A summit on cultural humility could help strengthen inclusive practices.
- Care provider burnout is a shared concern and should be addressed proactively.

Timing felt appropriate:

- “Just enough time given the time of day.”
- “Pleasantly surprised at the engagement at the table I was at.”
- “Yes.”
- “All good.”

Suggestions for improvement:

- “A bit too long — great day, but could use more opportunities to: Learn in different ways, Move our bodies, and Practice the self-care we promote as part of knowledge-sharing and training.”

Topic Suggestions for Future Grief Alliance Offerings

Cultural Diversity & Inclusion:

- Importance of cultural humility in grief support and a need for deeper focus on cultural diversity.
- Value of a summit on cultural humility to promote inclusive practices.

Youth & Grief Support:

- Recognition that children and youth grief is a critical area.
- Strong interest in a summit specifically focused on this topic.

Care Provider Wellbeing:

- Shared concern around care provider burnout.
- Recognition of the need to support those delivering grief services.
- Embedding self-care into training and professional development.

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Next Steps

Planning is underway to hold in-person roundtable events in the Central and Western regions in October.

Themes collected on needs and strengths will be incorporated into a province-wide needs assessment. The final document will be shared with Grief Alliance members.

Future grief alliance offerings (i.e. webinars and speakers) will be continue to be based on suggestions from Grief Alliance participants.

Useful Links:

Nova Scotia Grief Alliance [website](#) | Canadian Grief Alliance [website](#) | Canadian Grief Alliance National Strategy – [Next Steps and Action Plan](#) | Healing Pathways [grant funding](#)
Healing Pathways – [Grieving Well](#) | Nova Scotia Health [Life Changes](#)