THE EASTERN Graphic
THE LIVELY ONE

P.O. Box 790, Montague, PE C0A 1R0
Tel: (902) 838-2515
Toll Free: 1-800-806-5443
Paul MacNeill - Publisher
email: paul@peicanada.com

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To Whom It May Concern:

In 2019 the Eastern Graphic received an Excel database of all expenditures made by Health PEI in the fiscal year. It contained thousands of rows of data, totalling tens of millions of dollars in spending.

Our small newsroom lacked the database management skills required to manipulate the numbers in ways that would offer insight into where and how taxpayer money is spent. The spreadsheet sat unused for five years.

In 2025 we used Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy to access an additional five years of data. AI was used to identify trends in spending over the five years. This information provided a starting point for a multi-week series titled The Cost of Care, Where PEI's Health Dollars Go that told stories ranging from the soaring cost of travel nurses to how much PEI spends on blood products.

Reporter Josh Lewis took the data one step further. PEI is among the most restrictive provinces in Canada when it comes to public disclosure of who works for the provincial government, what their job is and how much they are paid. There is no sunshine list.

Routinely in the dying hours of a legislative session, government quietly tables an annual document simply titled 'Budget Handout.' It is a listing of every job, with accompanying salary range, within the public service. It is never publicly promoted. Lewis used this information to show how the PEI health bureaucracy had grown massively over the five years – with no offsetting improvement in access to care.

In all cases, Lewis meticulously confirmed the validity of data, including manually counting job titles in specific areas of the health bureaucracy.

Both Island Opposition Parties used the series as Question Period fodder over the five-week publication period, as well at the Legislative Committee level. Most importantly, the Graphic shone a vital light on the biggest cost item in our provincial budget. Health care accounts for more than 40 per cent of our total $3.5 billion budget.
Because of Lewis' initiative and investigative skills, the series offered Islanders a rare glimpse into where and how health care dollars are spent. I believe his work is worthy of consideration.

Sincerely,



Paul MacNeill
Publisher
Eastern Graphic