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Health's bursting bureaucracy

By Josh Lewis
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Health PEI's bureaucracy has swollen in size by 127 per cent since 2020-21, according to staff listings, but the expansion has not yet benefited frontline services, as PEI still lags in benchmarks of system effectiveness such as access to primary care, wait times and patients leaving emergency rooms without treatment.

Comparing changes in Health PEI staffing levels is not easy because there are variances in how some jobs are categorized each year in a quietly released budget document listing all employees for each department, agency and board. The Graphic analyzed,with the use of artificial intelligence, the documents produced for 2020-21 and 2025-26 to identify areas of expansion within health care.

The analysis discovered the number of bureaucrats working in corporate and financial services has increased by 182 positions, while the number of senior management and senior directors has approximately tripled to 45.


Green Party Leader
Matt MacFarlane

Green Party leader Matt MacFarlane told the Graphic there has been a noticeable expansion under CEO Melanie Fraser in the year and a half since she took on the job.

"It seems to be tied to the current CEO (Melanie Fraser)'s desire to build a big team around her in her role … we can't continue to spend money in this manner if it does not result in Islanders getting access to primary care."

Matt MacFarlane, Green Party leader

"(They're) huge numbers and it seems to be tied to the current CEO's desire to build a big team around her in her role, both at the assistant level but also the transformation office, and expensive interim leadership position hires through executive hiring agencies that take huge fees off the top."

The Graphic requested interviews with both Fraser and Health Minister Mark McLane, but neither was granted.

Some of the differences in staffing are not easily explained. The 2020-21 directory does not include any identifiable human resources positions, but a separate HR division was later created and by 2025-26 it had 119 employees, including 32 in its new talent management team. This year's listing also includes 75 employees in performance and innovation, a division that does not exist in the 2020-21 listing.

Spending on corporate and financial services has skyrocketed since 2020-21 along with the number of positions, going from $18.18 million to $49.28 million according to annual budget estimates, which is a rise of 171 per cent. Most of that increase, nearly $22 million, has come in the last two years under Fraser's leadership.



THE COST OF CARE

Where PEI's Health Dollars Go

- Third in a Series -

Operational costs budgeted for the CEO's office, the Health PEI board and other corporate services have shot up at an even greater rate, from $1.99 million in 2020-21 to $11.3 million this year. That number nearly doubled in the last year alone.

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Sweet catch

Claire Norrad had the time of her life at Game 2 of the Toronto Blue Jays' American League Division Series. The 11-year-old from Fredericton, NB and granddaughter of Theresa and George Johnston of Alleys Mill Road, was at the game with her dad Nick and other relatives.

Blue Jays centre fielder Daulton Varsho threw the ball up after warming up between innings during the October 5 game where the Blue Jays won over the Yankees 13 to 7.

She plans on taking the prized possession to school and said she found the fans to be absolutely terrific in their support of the Blue Jays and everyone was so happy. Watching her favorite player, Alejandro Kirk hit three home runs between the two games on Saturday and Sunday was another weekend highlight she won't soon forget.

Claire, the daughter of Sandra (Johnston) and Nick Norrad plays baseball on a boys team in her hometown. Standing to the left of Claire is her cousin Charlie who was just as excited as she was.

Former priest files for application to withdraw sexual assault guilty plea

By Kyle Cotton
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Brendon Earl Gallant, a former priest who pled guilty in August to sexually assaulting a minor in the late 80s, is now looking to withdraw his plea.

His lawyer, Peter Ghiz made the request during the October 9 sitting of Georgetown Provincial Court.

Gallant was supposed to appear in court for sentencing after the plea was entered on August 21, but wasn't present in court.

Judge Nancy Orr gave the deadline of December 5 for the application and the hearing was set for December 11.

If Orr accepts the application, it allows Gallant to change his plea to not guilty and send the matter to trial.

"I have a victim who wants this matter dealt with as well," Crown Attorney John Diamond said.

The facts, which were read when Gallant pled in August, said he was a priest in a Kings County church at the time.

More than 30 years after the offence, the victim alerted the RCMP and an investigation was launched in 2023.

In November of that year, Gallant admitted to police he had been luring the then 12-year-old into his bed for sex.

He was facing up to a maximum of 14 years of jail according to the Criminal Code of Canada.

He will continue to be on an undertaking, which he has been on since his arrest.

No plan to add pedestrian lights at Robertson Road intersection

By Pratik Bhattarai
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The town of Three Rivers and the province say there is no plan to installing more pedestrian crossing lights at the Robertson Road and Route 4 intersection.

The newly installed traffic lights have only one pedestrian crossing on the west side of the four way intersection.

"There are no sidewalks or active transportation trails on Robertson Road or the east side of Route 4, which are necessary for installing pedestrian lights and crossings. Without this infrastructure, pedestrian lights and crossings are unsafe," said Stacey Miller, the spokesperson for the Department of Transportation.

Miller said it is the town that decides where sidewalks are built and not the province.

Three Rivers' CAO John Jamieson said the town has not received any complaints regarding the lack of pedestrian lights.

"At this time, we don't have any additional plans for Robertson Road," Jamieson added.

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Corporate salaries have also risen dramatically from $1.51 million in 2020-21 to $5.4 million in 2025-26, according to budget estimates. Fraser's $350,000 annual wage is up from $268,500 for the CEO five years earlier.

The bureaucratic expansion comes at a time when the province is anticipating a $183.9 million deficit for 2025-26.

So far there has been no correlation between the extra spending and improved patient outcomes, MacFarlane said.

"For us to be so bloated at the bureaucracy and executive level management ... clearly shows Health PEI either has forgotten or is unable to deliver health care to meet the needs of Islanders," he said. "We can't continue to spend money in this manner if it does not result in Islanders getting access to primary care."

Fraser's use of consultants and HR companies to advise and fill positions on the executive leadership team (ELT) resulted in professional services skyrocketing from an estimated $573,400 in 2024-25 to a staggering $8.5 million in the budget forecast later that same year, a rise of almost 1400 per cent.

Under Fraser, Health PEI has paid almost $6 million to multinational consultants KPMG, first for a new "transformation office" and later to improve wait times and patient flow. Fraser later said it was not in the public interest to release records about that contract.



Jason Sutherland is a Professor in the Centre for Health Services and Policy Research (CHSPR) in the UBC Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health. Submitted photo

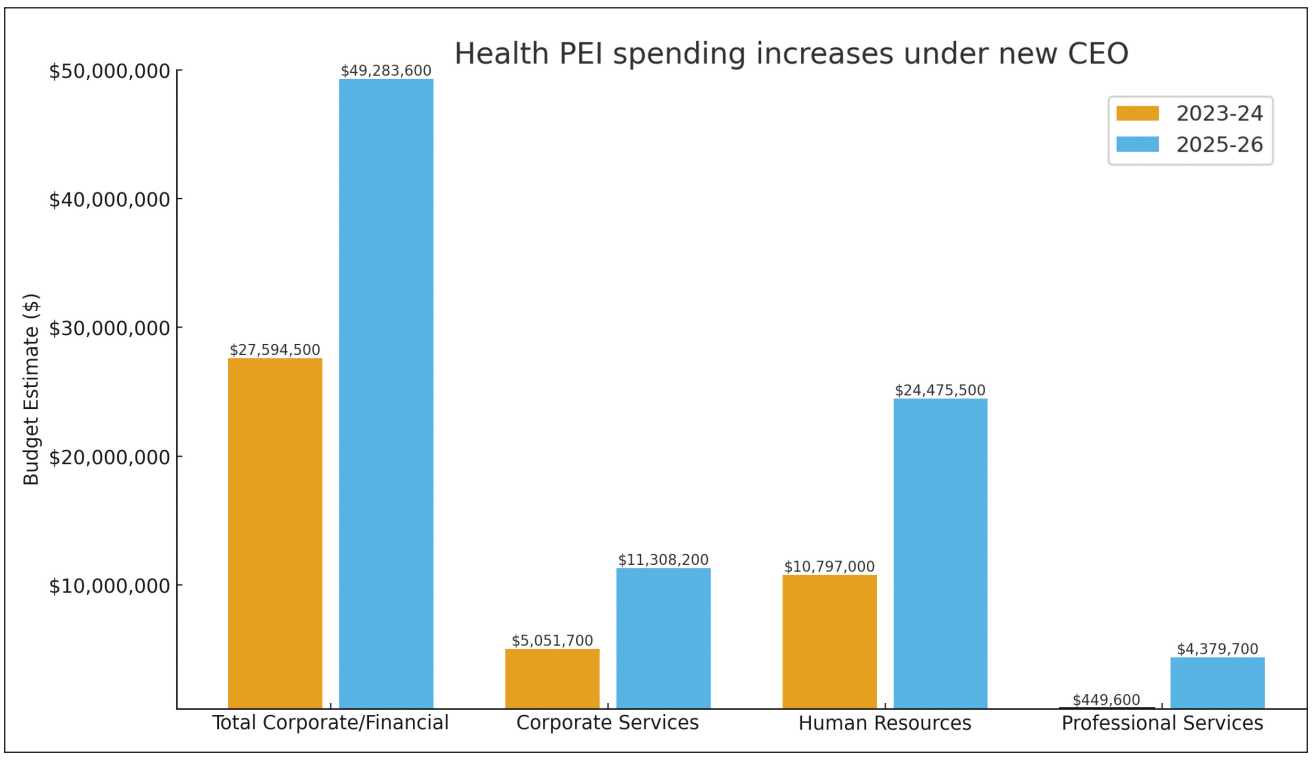
Health PEI has also paid tens of thousands of dollars per month to Odgers Berndtson to provide several interim senior managers after the government ordered its ELT be reset. That order came after previous CEO Michael Gardam increased the salaries of some executives beyond allowable treasury board thresholds. Four of the interim managers remain on the payroll.

MacFarlane said the cost of Gardam's decision was nothing compared to the money Fraser is spending on bureaucracy.

The focus on external consultants, bureaucratic growth and travel nurses is misplaced, he added, and Health PEI should instead listen to front-line providers, who want workplace improvements, competitive wages, and above all to be respected.

Political interference such as the directive to overhaul the ELT mean the government should also be scrutinized for the current situation, he said.

"(It's) to the point where I'm not sure Health PEI even has the ability to work unilaterally without calling the minister of health or the premier to find out what step to take next."



The figures in this chart are based on annual Health PEI budget estimates. 2023-24 was Michael Gardam's last year as CEO before being replaced by Melanie Fraser.

No best practices for size of bureaucracy

The size of health care bureaucracies in different provinces tends to reflect that government's philosophical preferences, because no approach has proven to be more effective or cost-efficient, says Jason Sutherland, a University of British Columbia professor who is the director of their Centre for Health Services and Policy Research.

More conservative governments tend to take a hands-off approach and thin out their health bureaucracy, while the same draw-down hasn't happened in provinces like Ontario and Quebec, he said.

"In general, I think the pendulum kind of swings around the size of it. It could be associated with elections and how the parties view that, or it could be other contributing factors like Covid, where everyone bulked up where they could," Sutherland said.

In the case of PEI, some "front-loading" is to be expected after the CEO was tasked with overhauling the leadership team, but he pointed out the use of private companies to fill positions is "notionally very expensive."

A more active hand at the till would be expected during cost-cutting efforts, but not so much if money is flowing freely, he said.

Reporting of information by governments and health authorities is "very opaque" across the board, Sutherland said, and the data that is released is generally very difficult for the lay public to understand.

More collaboration needed, says private prosthetics expert

By Pratik Bhattarai

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THE COST OF CARE

Where PEI's Health Dollars Go

In 2022 Boyd Leard's life was dramatically changed when he had his left leg amputated.

The Souris resident was struggling with diabetes and problems with blood circulation in his legs and within a year both of his legs were amputated.

First he lost his left leg below the knee. The operation occurred at Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax.

The life changing event was difficult for him. He spent the next few months adjusting into his new situation.

After six months, he went to the prosthetics department at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) in Charlottetown and received a prosthetic leg.

It is unclear if QEH makes its own prosthetics or sources them from other companies, since the Graphic could not get a response from Health PEI before press time.

Leard, who runs Lea-Mac Electronics and is the deputy mayor of Souris, said he spent the next few months getting fitted for the prosthetics and doing physiotherapy to learn how to walk.

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Boyd Leard is the deputy mayor of Souris and a former Green Party candidate. Graphic file photo

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More collaboration

It was really difficult for him to walk in the beginning.

"It took me some time to walk, but eventually I was moving well," Leard said.

A year later, the disease took his right leg below the knee. This time the amputation was carried out closer to home at the QEH. It did not take quite as long to have the second prosthetic fitted.

Leard, who also uses a scooter to help him get around, describes the experience of having the close to home care as good. He does not have to wait for a long time to get an appointment for re-visits or consultations since he's already in the system. And the entire cost was covered by the province.

Between April 2019 and March 2025 Health PEI spent $154,177 on multiple prosthetic companies according to Freedom of Information documents obtained by the Graphic. Artificial intelligence was used to analyze the payments. The top two companies listed are Myrdal Orthopedic Technologies from Winnipeg, which received $98,512, and Prosthetic Design Inc from Ohio, which received $46,539.

Health PEI does not cover the cost of prosthetic installations done by private companies, said Mitchell Visser, the owner of Atlantic Prosthetics Inc.

The Stratford company makes comprehensive prosthetic products, including hands, arms, legs and mastectomy products for Islanders. It also has a satellite clinic in Cape Breton.

The company receives 60 to 80 repeating clients every year from all over Atlantic Canada, but mostly from PEI and Nova Scotia.

He would like to see the PEI government cover the cost of prosthetics from private clinics, noting the government of Nova Scotia does.

"We would like to see that happen for patients' equality," Visser said.

The process of prosthesis making starts with "comprehensive assessment and consultation," he said. That includes a physical evaluation, such as residual limb condition, scarring, skin health, pain levels, muscle strength, and range of motion. It also includes psychosocial assessment to understand the patient's goals, desired activities, home environment, barriers, and family support system. Then the prosthetics are designed tailored to patients' needs which encompasses socket design, interface, and suspension system. After that, the shape is captured by plaster bandage, alginate or 3D scanner. Then the shapes are modified, sockets are fabricated, tested and laminated by lightweight and durable carbon fiber, fiberglass and resins. The components are attached together and fitted to the patients. Additional consultation and physiotherapy are also offered.

"The entire process can take 2-3 weeks up to 2-4 months depending on individual case complexity," Visser explained.

The cost. depending on the level of amputation, ranges from $12,000 to more than $100,000. Currently patients pay the cost out of pocket or through insurance.

Prostheses need replacing every three to five years due to limb changes and wear.

The components and raw materials for the prosthetics are sourced from all over the world, he said. Items such as leathers, hardwares, and tools are sourced locally.

Visser said his company works with Health PEI occasionally if there are critical cases.



From left are Mable Ployer, Margaret Fogarty, Janet MacLellan and Marian Trowbridge, the latter of whom awarded the three former with Three Rivers 50+ group Lifetime Membership Awards. The three recipients have been members of the group since its beginning 11 years ago. Kyle Cotton photo

Seniors honoured with lifetime memberships

By Kyle Cotton

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Eleven years ago, the Three Rivers 50+ Club was started with Margaret Fogarty, Mable Ployer, Janet MacLellan and Edna Quinn at the centre of it.

Fast forward to Wednesday, October 8, those ladies were recognized for their contributions to the group as members for the entirety of its existence by receiving lifetime membership awards. Quinn was absent from the event and is set to receive the award at a later undetermined date.

The award was created in collaboration with all seniors groups on the Island as part of the PEI Seniors Federation, said Three Rivers president Grace Blackette.

"Each and all have donated their time (and) talents, whether it was attending meetings, baking for the meetings, helping come set up or helping do the dishes as we always have food," Blackette said.

MacLellan has been on the Seniors Federation board for seven years and noted all seniors clubs are a great place for camaraderie.

"But the friendship of all of these people, some I knew before and others are new friends, has been just wonderful," she said. "Getting to know other people, seniors in my community has been very, very important."

Because many seniors moved away for work and when returning to communities, building connections within is key, MacLellan added.

Blackette pointed out speakers who are invited to every meeting bring a lot to the table.

"It might be on something legal, it might be the local RCMP, and it could be any government organization," she said. "It could be somebody from home care to demonstrate what services are available, the cost of those services and what services may be free."



Janet MacLellan speaks to a group of about 50 on why receiving the Three Rivers 50+ group Lifetime Membership was so important to her and the impact the group has on her life. Kyle Cotton photo

Fogarty said she has learned a lot from the presentations.

"It's great to see how other people and different groups tell you about different things that you probably didn't know about or where to get it," Fogarty said. "They make it really easy if you have any questions."

Ployer said it was great to be recognized for her time spent in the group.

"Old age isn't all golden like this group. We had great fun all the way through," she said.

One of the highlights of the group for her is the trips they take.

"There are times we went and stayed overnight at places, which some can never do themselves," Ployer said.

Blackette wants to remind people that seniors are a vital part to any community.

"There are older people doing wonderful things with their talents," she said.

ENTER YOUR PET IN THE Cutest Pet PHOTO CONTEST!

YOUR PET IS A STAR AND YOU KNOW IT!

And, by entering our Cutest Pet Contest, everyone else will know it too! Just send his/her cutest photo and enter to win $50 from The Eastern Graphic. All pictures will be published in The Eastern Graphic on Wednesday, October 29, 2025. Entries must be received by 5pm on October 22, 2025. Photos will be returned if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. Winner will be notified by phone.

PLEASE submit only ONE pet photo per household.

Cutest Pet Contest Entry Form
Pet's name:_____
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