

Delivering Better Service and Enforcement

Minister's Response to
the Maintenance Enforcement Program
Review Committee Report

September 2015



Delivering Better Service and Enforcement

Minister's Response to
the Maintenance Enforcement Program
Review Committee Report

September 2015

Minister's Message

My goal is to ensure that families who rely on court-ordered child and spousal support are well-served by our Maintenance Enforcement Program.

Our province is making this a priority and has put this issue on the national agenda.

We are taking a lead role to improve coordination between provinces and territories so we can trace and locate parents who owe money and live outside the province.

We all know that the breakup of a family can be a sad reality in our society. Along with the heartbreak and the pain, there remains an ongoing duty for both parents to financially support their children.

It's not easy. I have heard the frustration of parents – frustrated by the spouse who will not or cannot pay support and frustrated with the system that cannot obtain the funds they are owed.

Nova Scotia's Maintenance Enforcement Program is here to help families that are owed support. Our staff work hard on behalf of families enrolled in the program. Often the circumstances are challenging.

Earlier reports have highlighted the need to improve our services. And I agree, we need to do better. To that end, we are accepting all the recommendations put forward by the Maintenance Enforcement Program Review Committee.

The report, *Improving Client Services for Families*, identified a number of areas where we can improve. We must communicate better with clients, we must make better use of staff skills and the available technology, and we must make better use of the enforcement tools we have at our disposal.

In 2012–13, the consolidation of the regional Maintenance Enforcement Program offices had a detrimental effect on service delivery. There was a 70 per cent turnover in staff and new people had to be hired and trained. After this very challenging transition, the program has rebuilt its capacity and is now ready to move forward on these recommendations.

Our plan is to implement all of the committee's recommendations and we will not stop there.

During the course of preparing the report, clients identified areas which go further than the mandate of the review. We will step up and deal with those areas too. I am committed to improving the Maintenance Enforcement Program, and we will move forward, particularly in the area of increasing our enforcement activities.

I am also committed to reviewing legislation and making the changes necessary to strengthen enforcement and to further improve our ability to connect our clients with the community supports they need.

I want to thank members of the Maintenance Enforcement Program Review Committee, including Chair Michelle Higgins, Acting Ombudsman Christine Delisle-Brennan, Nancy MacLellan, Associate Deputy Minister of Community Services, and Samira Zayid of Nova Scotia Legal Aid. I also want to thank members of the Client Consultation Committee for their valuable input and advice.

Most of all, I want to thank the more than 300 Nova Scotians, including clients, staff, and legal professionals, who participated in the review through focus groups and an online survey.

Honourable Diana Whalen
Minister of Justice

Introduction

Nova Scotia's Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP) is a free service of the Nova Scotia Department of Justice. Its purpose is to help facilitate support for families. Until 1996 this was a civil matter enforced through the courts. The program's goal is to remove or minimize conflict from an important, and often difficult, family matter. Previously, the burden was placed on often vulnerable individuals who lacked the resources or knowledge to pursue the matter on their own.

In 2014–15, there were 14,575 cases enrolled in the program, and \$52.6 million was collected and disbursed. Currently, 63 per cent of Nova Scotians who are enrolled in the program receive full payments every month and 85 per cent of the money owed to support children is being paid. These collection rates are in line with the national average.

The program has a staffing complement of 42.5 full-time equivalent positions, most of whom work in New Waterford. Prior to 2013, staff were spread across the province in offices in Amherst, Dartmouth, Kentville, New Glasgow, and Sydney. Comparing the period before the move to the period immediately after the move, it is clear that enforcement suffered as new staff had to be hired and trained.

As of July 31, 2015, arrears totaled approximately \$61.8 million. While that number is large and alarming, it is important to note that 72 per cent of all money is owed by 20 per cent of delinquent payors.

Payors can be categorized in four ways:

- Willing and able (can afford to and do make payments)
- Willing and unable (would make payments if they could afford to do so)
- Unwilling and able (can afford to make payments but refuse to do so)
- Unwilling and unable (would not make payments even if they could afford to do so).

For every dollar spent on the program, over \$12 is collected. While the program facilitates payment to families and enforces support orders, it cannot guarantee payment. Enforcement takes effect when payments aren't being made, but no maintenance enforcement program can be 100 per cent successful. The program relies on the tools in place to ensure court-ordered child support is paid and received.

In the past, maintenance enforcement programs in Canada have been largely enforcement focused. That has begun to change. Attention is turning to focus on the needs of the family or the difficult situation they find themselves in. We will build on the strong relationships between the provinces and territories, with efforts to share best practices and coordinate on pilot projects.

To that end, Nova Scotia brought maintenance enforcement to the national agenda in July 2015 when premiers gathered for the Council of the Federation. As a result of that meeting, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Newfoundland and Labrador will work together to explore ways to strengthen the enforcement system, with a focus on tracing and locating parents who are not paying support and are living in another province. Statistics show that cases are more likely to be in arrears when the payor lives in a different province or territory than the parent caring for the child.

Highlights of Response

The *Maintenance Enforcement Program Review Committee Report* looked at five areas and made 27 recommendations.

The five areas are

- Enforcement
- Court Orders
- Communication & Program Information
- Staffing Structures & Skill Sets
- Technology

The Department of Justice accepts all 27 recommendations and is moving forward on their implementation.

The Department of Justice is fully committed to improving client services and strengthening our approach to enforcement.

Nova Scotia has renewed its focus on inter-jurisdictional collaboration. Our Premier has led a national call to action on improving outcomes for payment and enforcement of child support through collaboration. This includes working with other provinces to share experiences and implement improvements that have worked elsewhere, and coordinating enforcement better. The program has also committed to a long-term strategy to make client support and customer service a priority.

In addition to the recommendations under enforcement, we are responding to the call from families to be more aggressive and more proactive in our approach to enforcement. This moves us beyond the specific recommendations of the review to dealing with the hard-to-enforce files where the clients refuse to engage with the program or are frequently in default.

A designated investigative enforcement unit will be established to trace and locate payors who are chronically in arrears. We also intend to review the legislation that governs the program and make amendments to strengthen our enforcement options.

To hold ourselves accountable, and to be more transparent to Nova Scotians, we will begin tracking and posting key indicators on our website throughout the year. Traditionally, this information has been released annually by Statistics Canada, but could often be a year or two behind.

Steps being taken or already completed include:

Enforcement

- Since April 2015, monthly compliance meetings are scheduled with all staff to review enforcement options, focusing particularly on cases in arrears that currently have no, or limited, enforcement actions in place.
- Since April 2015, staff are also included in complex case reviews with management team.
- Monthly case file audits were initiated in August 2014 to identify gaps in case management, for follow up with individual staff as part of the performance management process.
- Training since December 2014 has resulted in a 69 per cent increase in enforcement actions for the first quarter of 2015–16 over the same time period in 2011–12, which was the reporting period prior to the move to New Waterford.
- Enforcement staff increased the use of notices of examination, which require payors to submit their financial information for review by the program, by 126 per cent (43 cases) in the first quarter of 2015–16, over the same period in 2014–15 (19 cases).

- Since the first quarter of 2011–12, we've increased the number of other enforcement actions as follows:
 - Collection calls to the payor – 118% increase
 - Default letters – 18% increase
 - Garnishments – 17% increase
- We are piloting the use of designated Department of Justice staff with investigative powers to help locate payors who are in arrears.

Court Orders

- When information is missing from the enrollment kit, Demands for Information to the Court are now being sent on newly enrolled cases for information, including mother's maiden name and payor's date of birth. This will expedite enforcement actions if a case falls into arrears.
- More education and instruction to improve court orders.

Communication & Program Information

- Plain-language fact sheets are being developed and posted on the program website.
- Simplified enrollment forms for payor and recipient are now available online.
- MEP Online is providing an Enforcement Officer/Enforcement Assistant name and phone number for the payor.
- Total payment history is now available through MEP Online for both the recipient and payor.
- The online system has been improved to allow clients to send and receive confidential communication from caseworkers.
- Information about enforcement actions taken is available through MEP Online and the Infoline.
- From the outset, an Enforcement Officer communicates with both payors and recipients to establish a relationship with families and better communicate what the program can and cannot do.
- The program is actively working with the Office of the Ombudsman to ensure it has all the information necessary to address complaints.

Staffing Structures & Skill Sets

- A live call line was initiated in 2012, staffed full-time by designated employees. This has ensured clients have access to someone on the telephone.
- Dedicated, toll-free numbers were provided for all staff in the enforcement office and the Central Enrollment Unit so that clients can call within Nova Scotia without incurring additional cost.
- Training on "Handling Conflict on the Telephone" was delivered to all staff in New Waterford in May 2015. The program's assigned Development Consultant attended the training to support the reinforcement of content in supplemental training to be scheduled during fiscal year 2015–16.
- Key Result Indicators were developed in 2014 for all positions to include expected results in demonstrating a positive client orientation. These expectations are included as part of the interview process for new hires.

Technology

- We are revising MEP software used by enforcement staff to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.
- A caseload analysis tool was launched in April 2015 to assist staff in identifying cases that need immediate attention.
- Information on payment options is available on the website and in the enrollment kit. Every cheque sent to recipients includes a detachable direct deposit application.
- Payors and recipients can view complete payment information for the life of their file on MEP Online, and hear information about the last six payments on the Interactive Voice Response System (IVR). Parents can request a Record of Payment at any time.
- The correspondence feature on MEP Online allows clients to send and receive secure electronic messages to and from MEP staff. Payors and recipients can hear information about current enforcement actions on their files by using the IVR.

How Can We Improve?

Enforcement

Facilitating court-ordered payments is the core function of MEP.

Court enforcement actions, which can be very complex, were suspended temporarily during the transition period. This will not be acceptable as we move forward.

Currently we collect 85 per cent of the funds owed, but there are many cases where collection efforts have not been successful and may never be successful for a variety of reasons. This leaves clients frustrated and disenchanted with the program. Clients need to feel that everything possible is being done to collect the money they are owed. Many clients feel this is often not the case. That must change. We are committed to ensuring that clients know we are making better use of the tools at our disposal to enforce support orders and collect payment.

MEP is committed to shifting its culture from reactive to proactive with regards to enforcement. Two pilot projects have been undertaken to target this. On intake, all new cases are sent to a single enforcement officer for initial case management and assessment. The goal is to ensure that cases are being assessed in a timely and consistent manner. As well, cases where payments are being consistently made for one or more years through garnishment are being handled by designated enforcement officers, while cases that require more complex enforcement actions and attention are being handled by others.

A strong focus is being put on dealing with those cases that are most difficult to enforce. Training has been undertaken by all enforcement staff on how to best target cases, and there is much more internal coordination to monitor these cases regularly. Staff work together to conduct regular case reviews to share expertise and identify gaps in case management. Analysis of all cases in arrears is now underway to identify cases where court enforcement can be considered.

Staff training has been a priority, and the many employees who were hired as a result of the move to New Waterford are now able to prepare for complex cases and more aggressive enforcement.

There has been a 69 per cent increase in enforcement actions for the first quarter of 2015–16 compared to the same time period in 2011–12. Fiscal year 2011–12 was the last full year before consolidation of operations to New Waterford and high staff turnover. Reports are being provided to staff so they can track the enforcement actions on their own cases and compare their work over various time periods.

To keep clients and the public informed, and to hold the program accountable, we will put in place a public reporting mechanism for key indicators, including enforcement actions. In the past, we have relied on Statistics Canada data to illustrate the performance of this program. Data could be over a year old before being published because of the way Statistics Canada reports. Providing more up-to-date information will ensure that everyone can have an accurate picture of how the program is performing.

Court Orders

We also understand that people want to know what enforcement actions are being taken on their file. This information is currently available through the MEP Online and Interactive Voice Response System.

To improve understanding of what we are doing, and what impact it is having, we will develop a report that will provide both payment and enforcement information for clients.

One of the most powerful enforcement tools the program uses is suspension of a driver's licence. This action can be difficult to carry out if we are unable to serve a payor and is used less in Nova Scotia than other reporting jurisdictions. MEP will work with the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to put a system in place that will see the refusal of licence and permit renewals when a payor in arrears goes into an Access Nova Scotia Centre. Much like speeding and parking tickets, arrears on support payments will impact someone's ability to access this important privilege. We will also continue to increase the use of this as an enforcement action. Progress has been made – there was an increase of 11.9 per cent in licence suspensions in the first quarter of this year compared to the previous year.

We have also made changes to how our staff are structured to ensure more consistent and increased enforcement. Staff are being given more specialized roles. For example, designated enforcement officers are assigned to focus their expertise on the more complex cases. Caseloads have also been streamlined. This includes segregating complex cases such as those where one party lives outside of Nova Scotia and where enforcement is limited or not currently possible (the payor is on Income Assistance, incarcerated, or lives in a non-reciprocating jurisdiction). We will continue to assess how our structure supports more enforcement and make changes as required.

When a court order is issued, families expect the program to enforce it. However, the program does not have the authority to modify the order or apply its own interpretation of the order. When an order does not quantify the amount of support, which could be the case for "special expenses" such as hockey fees, child care, extra-curricular activities, or braces, the program may not be able to enforce it. There can also be challenges because MEP must enforce the court-ordered amount even when a payor's income changes through job loss or job promotion.

The enforcement of special expenses is a problem for all jurisdictions. For MEP to enforce these costs, a support order must clearly state a specific amount. This topic is an item on the agenda when directors of maintenance enforcement across the country meet and provinces continue to work together to address this ongoing concern. Work is also underway with the Council of the Federation to improve how court orders are enforced across the country.

The Department of Justice has made improvements that allow support orders issued under the *Maintenance and Custody Act* and the *Divorce Act* to be recalculated based on change in annual income without the need to return to court. Staff have been working hard to communicate to clients that this recalculation program is now available through the department.

MEP presented to the Canadian Bar Association of Nova Scotia (Family Law Section) in April 2015 on enforceable orders and the need for these orders to be clear. Information for legal professionals has also been posted on our website, which reinforces that the program's ability

to collect maintenance is dependent on the clarity of the orders. This information was also distributed to Legal Aid, the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, and the Canadian Bar Association. To build on this, we will include this information in the video resource for our website and update the resource handbook for legal professionals.

One tool to enforce orders is asking the federal government to intercept payments and conduct searches to locate the payor. To do this, certain key information about a payor, like mother's maiden name and payor's birth date, is required but often not available when needed. This is why Demands for Information are being sent to the court for newly enrolled cases to request this information when it hasn't been provided upon enrollment. MEP will also explore whether support orders can include this additional information. We will work to ensure legal professionals understand that inclusion of this information is considered best-practice for support orders. If required, we will amend the *Maintenance Enforcement Act* to further solidify this.

Communication & Program Information

Nova Scotia's Maintenance Enforcement Program has heard loud and clear that we need to do a better job of communicating with the families who rely on us. They tell us it's difficult to get through to someone or to get information they need about our program and their file. This is frustrating for them and we are committed to doing better.

One of the key ways clients get information about or interact with MEP is through our website and MEP Online. Already, we have created new, plain-language fact sheets on a variety of subjects to help clients better understand the basics of the program. Enrollment forms for both payor and recipient have been simplified.

Previously, a number of different officers dealt with a file. This approach lacked consistency and led to frustrated clients. Since October 2014, we have undertaken a number of initiatives to improve our communication and relationships with the families we serve. We have established a more personalized intake process in which a designated enforcement officer takes the time to orient the clients and establish a strong relationship. This approach supports our goal of improving consistency with what and how information is communicated to families, helping them understand what the program can and cannot do and how to assess information.

We are also working towards ensuring that clients have better access to someone on the phone by establishing a group of trained staff to field incoming calls.

We will develop and launch an education strategy. Through this, Court Services and Maintenance Enforcement will work more closely together to ensure we are providing consistent, accurate information on MEP to families at every point of contact with the system. We will take the information that is currently accessible through online fact sheets and create an orientation video that takes viewers through the basics of how the program works. We will also create a plain-language booklet that consolidates key information about the program into one source. This booklet will be made available to clients through the program, the Courts, Access Nova Scotia Centres, community support organizations, and MLA offices. Moving forward, we will expand the program's social media presence by providing more information through the current @NS_Justice twitter account.

The program will also make functional changes to the MEP Online system that will provide more proactive information to clients. Notifications will be put in place that alert families to a new status on the enforcement of their file and what that enforcement action means. Currently, clients have to check the system for updates.

The *Maintenance Enforcement Act* mandates client confidentiality. This is vital to instilling confidence in our clients that personal information will remain private. But strict confidentiality can limit how staff serves its clients. MEP already works very closely with the Ombudsman's Office to ensure it has the information it needs to investigate complaints. We are in the process of establishing an information sharing agreement with the Department of Community Services that would better allow our staff to disclose information to that department.

We recognize that our clients need supports beyond just collecting money that is owed them. For this reason, MEP has been putting a strong focus on training staff to help them better empathize and understand the needs of their clients. Staff have also been building capacity to better refer clients to supports in the community like 211, the Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Family Law website, and other Access to Justice resources. While there are some services MEP cannot provide, our staff want to be able to connect their clients with the service providers who can.

The Department of Justice will review whether legislative changes are required to further improve our ability to connect our clients with the community supports they need, while also ensuring that their information remains confidential.

Staffing Structures & Skill Sets

Maintenance Enforcement Program staff come from diverse backgrounds with a wide range of experiences. They have one thing in common; they are committed to assisting families to get the financial support that has been ordered by the court.

The program has undergone considerable change as a result of the consolidation of enforcement offices in one central location. The significant staff turnover that occurred created a period of instability. The few experienced staff staying with the program were able to assist the new staff and together maintain operations during this period. There was, however, a negative impact on the higher end enforcement activities, as training and experience were needed to build the expertise to address complex and challenging cases.

Staff have benefited from significant training programs during the transition. We are committed to targeted training and skills development to continue to improve client service and enforcement.

To ensure this renewed commitment to improving service to families, the program will create a senior management position in New Waterford to focus specifically on client relations and enforcement. We will also monitor and do additional restructuring if required.

The program receives in excess of 1,600 calls per month on its toll-free client service line alone. As discussed earlier, one of the most frequent complaints about the MEP program is the inability to contact someone directly or quickly. With the consolidation to New Waterford, a live call line was initiated in 2012, which is staffed full time. We also initiated toll-free numbers to ensure that clients living throughout the province incur no additional costs when contacting us.

To track all inquiries that come in for a particular case, a client hub is being constructed to consolidate all inquiries about a single case received through different channels. This information will be more easily accessible to staff.

MEP staff have received training on how to handle conflict. Training and reinforcement of this skill will be ongoing. Skills in conflict resolution are also included as part of the interview process for new hires, and qualifications and job descriptions are being reviewed and modified to emphasize client orientation skills.

It can be difficult for our clients when the person who has been handling their files leaves and someone new is assigned. To address this, we are developing a policy that will put best practices in place for staff to help clients with this transition. We've also made the name and phone number of caseworkers available for payors. That is done to improve the collection rate. We realize that recipients also require the same contact information, and this will be done.

The program has also completed an analysis of caseload, which showed that they have been reduced by 25 per cent for enforcement officers since June 2012. This review also ensures that cases were in the correct case category and were being flagged for reassignment for specialization or more focused enforcement. The ongoing review of files also helps to identify gaps in payment history or enforcement action.

Technology

Technology is constantly changing. The program has improved its use of technology, including an MEP Online service and options for electronic banking. There are many more opportunities to use existing technology to deliver services more effectively.

The better that technology supports our staff, the more time they have to focus on the clients. The better that technology supports our clients, the less time they have to spend on the phone trying to get answers.

As part of our overall effort to improve communications, we will undertake a revamp of the public facing MEP website. We will do a full review of what information is on it and how it is laid out, and we will consult with stakeholders about how it can be more user friendly. Clients want to be able to get answers to general questions quickly, without having to call the program. It also benefits our staff to be spending as much time as possible on enforcement and client service activities, which will help increase our collection rate and better serve families who rely on MEP.

For staff, IT changes have been made, or are being developed, to help them better manage information. We are also working on an IT solution to better track all types of contacts from a family (including email, phone, MEP online, interactive phone system) and the nature of the questions. This helps staff understand a case and the client's needs. We've also introduced a function that makes payment transfers between cases with the same payor easier and quicker.

Our staff create a lot of formal correspondence and that can be very time consuming. Based on feedback from our employees, we're in the process of developing a tool that will help staff generate customized correspondence that will also serve to reduce time spent modifying existing form letters.

Various government programs have been moving towards full implementation of the use of online banking and payment. MEP is no different. All new recipient enrollments to the program after March 31, 2016, will be required to use direct deposit for receipt of payments, with some exceptions. Through our website, mailouts, and interactions with clients, we have been encouraging increased use of direct deposit. To supplement this, we plan to send a mailout to all current payors encouraging them to make their payments electronically.

MEP Online currently shows families (both payors and recipients) the complete payment history of their file, or hear the last six months through the IVR system. Additionally, families can request a Record of Payment at any time. To make keeping track of their file easier, we will be exploring an automatic notice to both parties when a payment is logged.

Enrollment forms to the program are already available online, but cannot currently be submitted through the website. We plan to make online enrollment available through our website, cutting down on time for our clients filling out paperwork and our staff who must process it.

Not every client is online, and not every client uses MEP Online. But the MEP Online system is a valuable resource for clients to see information about their file to get answers to their questions, and more importantly for them, to avoid spending time on the phone trying to get answers. We recognize that a better effort needs to be made to promote the use of MEP Online directly, and through our partners.

For more clients to use MEP Online and the public-facing website, it must be accessible across all platforms. Currently, MEP Online is not accessible to people using Apple products. This will be addressed.

Email communication with clients is currently quite limited due to concerns about privacy and the inability to confirm you're interacting with the right person. Many institutions, like banks and other government agencies, experience the same problem. The MEP Online system has the ability

to send secure messages to and from clients. But because our MEP Online system is not compatible with Apple products, some users only have the option to call us. We are working to find more ways to communicate via email, while also respecting privacy and the associated legislation.

Please note: *The time frame for most of these actions is 6–24 months. More complex actions, like IT enhancements, will require more time to complete. Each action is understood to include ongoing monitoring to ensure they are meeting the intended goals.*

Conclusion

We are strongly committed to improving the Maintenance Enforcement Program.

Families deserve to get better results from the program, and we will be adopting changes to ensure that happens.

The Maintenance Enforcement Program provides a valuable service to Nova Scotia families. There are challenges, but we will continue to improve staff training and the use of all enforcement tools we have at our disposal. Beyond the specific recommendations and actions in this report, we remain committed to ongoing examination of the program with the end goal of improving collection of child and spousal support.

The majority of court-ordered payments are for child support. It is children who are being harmed when payments go unpaid and uncollected. That is why we must do everything possible to get the support that is owed to children and families.

With the full support of the Premier, we will be examining all avenues to improve our rate of collection and to reduce the uncollected amount in arrears. That includes an increased use of investigation staff to work on these difficult cases.

A national effort to improve coordination and collection of inter-jurisdictional support orders is planned. Nova Scotia will co-lead this effort. As part of this effort, we are committed to reviewing and updating the *Maintenance Enforcement Act* to eliminate obstacles and increase our powers to ensure increased effectiveness of the program.

Appendix A - Summary of Action to Improve Maintenance Enforcement Program

Enforcement

Focus Areas	Actions – complete or underway	Actions – short to medium term (6 to 24 months)
<p>A – Ongoing staff training to ensure comprehensive understanding of all enforcement options.</p>	<p>Trained staff in targeting cases for enforcement.</p> <p>Regular meetings to review enforcement options, with a focus on cases in arrears with limited or no enforcement.</p> <p>Complex case reviews with staff and management team.</p> <p>Regular case file reviews to identify gaps and follow up with staff.</p>	<p>Track key indicators and initiate actions more quickly.</p> <p>Report progress publicly via the website.</p>
<p>B – Ongoing monitoring of all cases in default/arrears to ensure all possible enforcement actions are being taken in a timely manner.</p>	<p>All new cases sent to a single enforcement officer for initial case management.</p> <p>Monthly compliance meetings with staff to review enforcement options.</p> <p>Garnishment cases handled by designated enforcement officers.</p> <p>Report for staff to track enforcement actions in a given time period.</p>	<p>Formal follow up from regular staff meetings to ensure all enforcement actions are being taken.</p> <p>Analysis of cases in arrears to identify opportunities for court enforcement.</p>
<p>C – Make available to clients a running log of enforcement actions taken on each file.</p>	<p>Active enforcement actions are available through the Infoline and MEP Online.</p>	<p>Explore combining the Record of Payments with the record of enforcement actions into one statement.</p>
<p>D – Work with the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to implement a new protocol for refusing to renew licenses and permits when a payor is in persistent arrears.</p>	<p>License suspensions will continue to be used as an important enforcement tool, once payors in arrears are served with notice</p>	<p>MEP will work with the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to put a new protocol in place to refuse the renewal of licenses and permits.</p>
<p>E – Focus on building capacity to deal with complex and challenging enforcement cases.</p>	<p>Designated enforcement officers will be assigned to focus on more complex cases.</p> <p>Two pilot projects were initiated to focus enforcement – intake pilot and garnishment pilot.</p> <p>Streamlining cases by segregating cases where one party lives outside of Nova Scotia or where enforcement is limited or not currently possible.</p>	<p>Continue to explore assignment of casework for optimum efficiency, including establishing a designated investigative unit.</p> <p>Additional pilot options are being explored.</p>

Court Orders

Focus Areas	Actions – complete or underway	Actions – short to medium term (6 to 24 months)
<p>A – Work with partners to ensure there is adequate training and knowledge respecting the form of orders that can be enforced by the program.</p>	<p>Presented to the Canadian Barristers Association of Nova Scotia, Family Law Section on clarity of support orders.</p> <p>Online information for lawyers reinforcing that the clarity of the order impacts the program's ability collect.</p> <p>Support order requirements distributed to Legal Aid, Barristers' Society, and Canadian Bar Association.</p>	<p>Create a video resource for Court Officers and lawyers on enforcement support orders.</p> <p>Update resource handbook that was created for legal professionals.</p>
<p>B – Explore whether court orders could include additional information, such as date of birth, mother's maiden name, etc. to assist with enforcement actions.</p>	<p>Demands for Information to the Court are being sent when this information is missing from newly enrolled cases.</p>	<p>Explore whether support orders can include this additional information, such as date of birth, mother's maiden name, and other requisite information that will aid enforcement..</p> <p>Video for legal professionals will make clear that inclusion of this information is considered best practice.</p> <p>Consider revision to s. 42 of the Maintenance Enforcement Act.</p>
<p>C – Bring forward the issue of enforcing "special expenses" such as hockey fees, child care or braces, for discussion at the federal/provincial/territorial table of Directors of Maintenance Enforcement.</p>	<p>Provinces have mapped existing practices in the enforcement of "special expenses".</p>	<p>Work is underway at the Council of the Federation table to improve enforcement of court orders between provinces.</p> <p>Information regarding "special expenses" will be included in the resource booklet and video being developed.</p>

Communication & Program Information

Focus Areas	Actions – complete or underway	Actions – short to medium term (6 to 24 months)
<p>A – Ensure comprehensive information is available to the public about the program in a variety of ways and is shared early with families involved with the program.</p> <p>B – Help clients understand program policies and processes through use of more plain-language fact sheets.</p> <p>C – Review the website and ensure it is user-friendly, client focused and targets key groups involved in the program (lawyers, recipients, payors, etc.).</p>	<p>Fact sheets posted on the website.</p> <p>Simplified enrollment forms on the website.</p>	<p>Develop orientation video for newly enrolled families.</p> <p>Expand social media presence.</p> <p>Develop and launch education and awareness strategy.</p> <p>Develop user-friendly guide and make available online and in print.</p>
<p>D – Provide annual statement of account to clients and advise which enforcement officer/assistant is responsible for their case.</p>	<p>Total payment history available on MEP Online for payors and recipients.</p> <p>Enforcement officers communicate with payors and recipients at intake and regular intervals.</p> <p>Pilot projects underway to improve connections with families.</p>	<p>Enforcement officer/assistant name and contact information available on MEP Online for recipients.</p> <p>Annual statement from MEP Online.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of call volume and nature.</p>
<p>E – Provide targeted information to families to coincide with enforcement action taken.</p>	<p>Enforcement actions taken available through MEP Online and Infoline.</p> <p>Improve communication with families at intake and on cases where payment is received by garnishment.</p>	<p>Provide notification to families to check MEP Online for new status on the enforcement of their case.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of call volume and nature.</p>
<p>F – Explore the benefits and risks of sharing limited client information with community partners.</p>	<p>Working with Ombudsman’s Office to ensure it has information required to investigate complaints.</p>	<p>Legislative changes to improve information sharing.</p> <p>Information sharing agreement with Community Services to authorize disclosure of information.</p>
<p>G – Ensure program staff and resource information refers clients to third party community partners and supports.</p>	<p>Families referred to Nova Scotia Family Law website, 211, the Legal Information Society and other resources.</p>	<p>Staff training to improve communication with, and empathy for clients.</p>

Staffing Structures & Skill Sets

Focus Areas	Actions – complete or underway,	Actions – short to medium term (6 to 24 months)
<p>A – A permanent senior management position in New Waterford should be considered to focus on client relations and enforcement.</p>	<p>Implementation of this new position is underway.</p>	<p>Ongoing restructuring will be considered, as additional resources become available.</p>
<p>B – Have dedicated staff to respond to client telephone inquiries and direct clients and stakeholders to the appropriate resources.</p>	<p>A live call line was initiated in 2012, staff full time by assigned employees.</p> <p>Toll free numbers were put in place for enforcement and enrollment so clients can call without additional costs.</p>	<p>Examining the most efficient way of ensuring the Enforcement Officer assigned to a file is aware of all inquiries received and responded to.</p> <p>Putting a client hub in place to funnel multiple contacts by clients to one location.</p> <p>Exploring further technical expansions of the client service line, which would allow for better monitoring.</p>
<p>C – Staff should receive additional training in empathy and crisis situation de-escalation. Qualifications and job descriptions should be reviewed and modified for these skills sets.</p>	<p>Staff have received training on “Handling Conflict on the Telephone” and this content will be reinforced through supplemental training.</p> <p>Key indicators were developed for all positions to include expected results in demonstrating a positive client experience. Expectations are included as part of interview process for new hires.</p>	<p>Qualifications and job descriptions will be reviewed and modified to reflect client orientation skills.</p>
<p>D – Develop a policy to deal with file transitioning.</p>	<p>Standards developed for a well-managed caseload. Awaiting staff input.</p> <p>MEP Online provides name and phone number of casework for payor.</p> <p>At enrollment, clients are advised of the contact information for the Intake Enforcement Officer.</p>	<p>A file transitioning policy will be developed and staff will be appropriately trained on same.</p>
<p>E – Complete a file review to ensure active files are distributed appropriately among staff.</p>	<p>Analysis has segregated cases by specific categories including those requiring more analysis, closure, reassignment for specialization/focused enforcement, and compliance with program policy.</p> <p>File review was completed to ensure cases are in the correct case category. Identify gaps in payment history or enforcement actions.</p>	

Technology

Focus Areas	Actions – complete or underway	Actions – short to medium term (6 to 24 months)
<p>A – Continue to make enhancements to the case management system.</p>	<p>Changes are being made to capture all types of contacts from a family (email, phone, MEP Online) and the nature of the inquiry.</p> <p>A payment transfer function is in place to allow payment transfer between cases with the same payor.</p>	<p>Develop measurement criteria for the effectiveness of the Caseload Analysis Tool.</p> <p>Develop a Custom Letter Wizard to allow staff to generate customized letters through the Case Management System.</p>
<p>B – Actively promote the benefits of online banking with a goal of annual increases of 2-4% in automatic payments in each of the next two fiscal years. Move toward mandatory online payments for new recipients by March 31, 2016. This will mean recipients receive payments more quickly.</p>	<p>Information is available online and in enrollment kit.</p> <p>Every cheque sent to recipients includes a Direct Deposit application form.</p>	<p>A notice will be posted online that mandatory direct deposit will be required for all new enrollments effective March 31, 2016.</p> <p>Reminder letter to payors will promote electronic banking. Notice will be posted on MEP Online.</p> <p>Targeted mail out to all payors currently making payment by cheque or money order.</p>
<p>C – When a payment is received and logged into the system, both payors and recipients should be notified electronically.</p>	<p>Families (both payor and recipient) can view complete payment information for the life of their file online.</p> <p>Families can request a Record of Payment at any time.</p>	<p>Information on how to obtain payment information will be included in the promotion of MEP Online (see recommendation E below).</p> <p>Automatic notice when payment is logged will take some time to complete.</p>
<p>D – Move towards the completion and submission of the initial application online.</p>	<p>The enrollment forms are online to be downloaded and printed.</p>	<p>A fillable enrollment form will be posted online for submission electronically.</p>
<p>E – Increase awareness of MEP Online and explore opportunities to expand its accessibility.</p>	<p>Currently promote MEP Online on the website, in the enrollment kit, and through emails from NSMEP email address.</p> <p>More cohesive effort will be made to promote online, including giving more prominence on Department of Justice and partner organization websites.</p>	<p>More prominent notice online.</p> <p>Additional promotion through upgraded Interactive Voice Response System.</p> <p>Redesign of the website to make communication/interaction with the program more accessible.</p> <p>Explore accessibility to clients using various platforms.</p>
<p>F – Explore expanding communications with clients via email.</p>	<p>Program receives incoming emails from clients, potential clients and third parties via email.</p> <p>MEP Online was enhanced to permit secure messages to/from clients.</p>	<p>Additional promotion of email via Interactive Voice Response System.</p> <p>Risk analysis will be conducted on communicating with clients via email.</p>
<p>G – Ensure appropriate templates and other automated technologies are available to staff to minimize administrative time and potential errors.</p>	<p>Template letters for a variety of actions currently available through shared folders and intranet.</p>	<p>Develop a Custom Letter Wizard to allow staff to generate customized letters through the Case Management System.</p>

