

# Mass Casualty Commission

## Community Information Package

February 2022

The Mass Casualty Commission is an independent public inquiry created to examine the April 18-19, 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia and to provide meaningful recommendations to help keep communities safer in the future. The Commission is mandated to report its findings and make recommendations by November 2022.

Starting in February 2022, the Mass Casualty Commission will publicly share detailed information about what happened during the April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia, as well as explore related issues that provide context to understand why and how the mass casualty could have happened. This package is for community members and organizations who will be following the Mass Casualty Commission's public proceedings, or supporting affected community members.

The public proceedings will continue for many months during 2022 and information released will have varying impacts on members of the public, those most affected, communities in Nova Scotia and beyond. This package is intended to help community organizations know what to expect for the upcoming proceedings. It outlines the Commission's work, how to prepare, and what to expect.

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**PLEASE NOTE:** The topics discussed in this package may cause distress. If you find yourself in distress or feeling overwhelming emotions, please contact the NS Crisis number at **1-888-429-8167**. **More information can be found below in the 'How to Prepare Section' of this document.**

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# About the Commission

## Our Mandate

The Commission’s mandate assigns specific tasks to guide its work and to let the public know what to expect. The Commission is required to establish what happened leading up to, during and after the mass casualty of April 18 and 19, 2020 in Nova Scotia. The Commission must also review certain defined issues that provide context to understand why and how the mass casualty occurred, including those listed below. Finally, the Commission must produce a report that includes these findings, lessons and resulting recommendations to help keep Canadian communities safer in the future.



Learn more: [masscasualtycommission.ca/about/mandate](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/about/mandate)

# About the Commission

## Our Work

Our work involves a series of overlapping key steps:

1

**ESTABLISHING THE FOUNDATION**  
**What Happened**  
Spring 2021 –  
Winter 2022

- **Understanding perspectives** of those most affected, participants, first responders, service providers, community members
- **Obtaining documents, analyzing information and conducting research**
- **Carrying out investigations and speaking with witnesses**
- **Holding public proceedings including activities such as hearings and roundtables**, about the facts, existing policies and other issues

2

**LEARNING & UNDERSTANDING**  
**Why & How**  
Winter 2022 –  
Summer 2022

- **Exploring the broader context** including issues like firearms access, police and service-provider responses, emergency communications and intimate partner violence
- **Holding public proceedings including activities such as hearings and roundtables** with participants, experts, policy makers and others about their understanding of causes, context, circumstances
- **Sharing initial information and insights** and seeking input

3

**SHAPING & SHARING**  
**Findings & Recommendations**  
Summer 2022 –  
Fall 2022

- **Holding public proceedings including activities such as hearings and roundtables** with participants, experts, policy makers and others about their proposed recommendations
- **Creating opportunities for input** from those most affected, those who will be responsible for implementing recommendations, and the public
- **Drafting the final report** with Commission findings and recommendations

Learn more: [masscasualtycommission.ca/about/what-to-expect](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/about/what-to-expect)

# How to Prepare for Public Proceedings

We will be sharing a considerable amount of information with the public in 2022 through proceedings, Foundational Documents and Commissioned Reports. The nature of this inquiry means that much of the information could be difficult for many people. We encourage everyone who may be affected to consider how to prepare to receive this information and ensure there are supports in place. Please do not hesitate to contact our team members as needed, continue to check our website for updated information, and access [\*\*wellness supports\*\*](#) if you need them.

## Wellness Supports

Sometimes thinking, reading or hearing about a distressing or emotionally overwhelming experience can remind us of circumstances that are upsetting and disturbing. It can bring up a specific thought pattern or memory that is difficult to think about and could cause psychological stress. Having an immediate short term effect like this would be a usual way to feel. This is often referred to in literature as having a “triggering effect” or a “flooding of distressing memories.”



**211:** If you are struggling in any way and would like help finding mental health, grief, or any wellness support, you can call 2-1-1 or visit their website [ns.211.ca](https://www.ns.211.ca). 211 offers 24/7 navigational assistance in over 100 languages. Their trained staff will be able to connect you directly to the right services for your needs. You can call for yourself or if you have concerns or questions about support for someone else.

**Nova Scotia Provincial Crisis Line:** If you are experiencing distress and overwhelming emotions **at any time**, you can call the Nova Scotia Provincial Crisis Line 24/7 for all ages at 1-888-429-8167. They can also provide the contacts for other crisis services if you or a loved one lives outside of Nova Scotia.

For individuals between the ages of 5 and 20, the **Kids Help Phone** can provide confidential support 24/7. Call: 1-800-668-6868 or Text: CONNECT to 686868.

Visit our website for a full list of supports and services available for your consideration: [masscasualtycommission.ca/support](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/support)

## Building Supportive Communities

Guided by restorative principles, the Commission has built a network of community organizations and resources to support those most affected, and the public. After preparing recommendations and presenting the final report, the Commission's work will be complete, however, we understand the lasting impact these events will have. It is the hope of the Commission that the recommendations will be supported by the community, implemented by governments, and result in improvements to community health and safety across Canada.

The Commission has been meeting with community groups from affected communities and organizations across Nova Scotia and nationally. The purpose of these meetings is to share information about the Commission's work, gather input on how best to prepare and support communities, inform recommendations, and build a network of support that will remain in place when the Commission's work is complete.

If your group is interested in meeting with the Commission please contact us at [\*\*info@masscasualtycommission.ca\*\*](mailto:info@masscasualtycommission.ca).

## Talking About What to Expect & Planning How to Receive Information

People who are following the Commission's work closely will know that public proceedings are starting February 22nd, and they may know that the opening weeks will focus on what happened during the mass casualty. Proceedings will be webcast live on the Commission's website, and available to watch afterward. There will also be documents available on our website including the Commission's Foundational Documents. We encourage everyone to consider how, when, with whom, and where to engage in the Commission's work and ensure you are making the best choices for your wellbeing.

We encourage community organizations working with populations that could be affected by hearing about the details of the mass casualty to connect in advance as much as possible. People may not be following the work of the Commission, but if they know what is coming, they can make informed decisions to prepare to receive information.

# What to Expect During Public Proceedings

Public proceedings will contribute to our fact-finding, research, policy and analytical work. The purpose of our public proceedings are to share what we have learned to date about what happened during the April 2020 mass casualty. This work will give us the foundation upon which to explore the broader context and issues in our mandate in order to make recommendations to keep communities safer.

## What is a Public Inquiry?

A public inquiry is not a criminal trial or a civil lawsuit and the Commission is not a court of law. It cannot determine whether individuals are to be found guilty of a criminal offence or whether damages should be awarded. A public inquiry is not adversarial. Unlike criminal and civil trials, which focus on narrow issues between the parties, a public inquiry is concerned with broader issues. A public inquiry conducts an independent investigation to gather facts, analyses the causes and consequences of those facts, and makes recommendations for changes in policy and legislation.

Public proceedings are an important next step in the Commission's work to develop meaningful recommendations to help keep communities safer in the future. Public proceedings will include hearings, expert roundtables, and the sharing of **Foundational Documents** and **Commissioned Reports**.

## Public Proceeding Schedule

### Dates and Times

Public proceedings will begin on February 22, and are expected to continue across much of 2022. Proceedings will take place **Monday through Thursday, starting at 9:30 am**. Most days are anticipated to end no later than 4:30 pm, although exceptions may be made.

### Location

Proceedings are planned to be primarily at the Halifax Convention Centre and will be webcast online through the Commission's website. The Commission will continue to follow all public health protocols, including capacity restrictions. If restrictions allow, the proceedings venue will be open to the media and the public. Registration in advance (including proof of vaccination) will be required and available on the Commission website.

There will be a community viewing location in Truro. The use of in-person locations will be dependent on the COVID situation. If necessitated by public health guidance and restrictions, proceedings may be entirely virtual.



The full schedule of the Commission's proceedings, including dates, times, and information about when Foundational Documents are expected to be shared with the public, can be found on our website at [masscasualtycommission.ca/proceedings/calendar](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/proceedings/calendar).

## Webcast

Livestream and recorded webcasts of the proceedings will be available on the Commission's website at [masscasualtycommission.ca/proceedings](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/proceedings).

## Sharing Foundational Documents

There will be a significant amount of information in each Foundational Document, including timelines of events, accounts of the casualties and information about police response and witness reports.

Foundational Documents organize and share the large volumes of information gathered by the Commission. To date, the Commission has gathered and analyzed more than 40,000 pages of information (including investigative files, emails, notes from first responders, transcripts of police radio communications and visuals like photographs) and approximately 1,000 video and audio files, in addition to information collected through the Commission's investigations, witness interviews and site visits.

We expect to share a series of Foundational Documents with the public over the course of several months. The content of the documents will be discussed during public proceedings and areas requiring further exploration may be analyzed or witnesses may be called to supplement information. Foundational Documents will be posted publicly in sequential order (not all at once) as they are covered in the proceedings.



The list of Foundational Documents can be found on our website at [masscasualtycommission.ca/documents/foundational-documents](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/documents/foundational-documents)

## Commissioned Reports

Commissioned Reports are an important part of the Mass Casualty Commission's work to explore the causes, context, and circumstances giving rise to the April 2020 mass casualty. These reports are prepared by independent report writers who have been engaged to research and explore topics and issues in the Commission's mandate (like access to firearms, gender-based and intimate partner violence, and police policies).



The list of Commissioned Reports can be found on the Commission's website at [masscasualtycommission.ca/documents/commissioned-reports](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/documents/commissioned-reports)

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## A Restorative Approach

Commissions of inquiry are about informing change and public policy, they are not a trial or court proceeding. Inquiries follow an inquisitorial process to understand what happened and how and why it happened to determine what needs to be different in the future. To make the best recommendations for change, inquiries require more than the facts of what happened. They also need to learn about the bigger context and issues and from those involved about what could have made a difference.

As we do our work, the Commission is guided by restorative principles because these principles will help the Commission minimize further harm, be trauma-informed and attentive to the need of and impact on those most directly affected. The Commission's forward-looking mandate is to deliver recommendations for change to help make communities safer.

Part of this work is to find out what happened on April 18 & 19, 2020 and then explore the context and issues that may have contributed. Our work is not to assign blame or liability. Knowing the mass casualty has deep and far reaching impacts, we are attentive to how we are doing this work.

This means in everything we do, we consider how we can work in inclusive, collaborative, responsive, non-adversarial and forward-focused ways to deliver on our mandate. This does not mean avoiding disagreements or not dealing with and sharing emotional and difficult information. The Commission is committed to being transparent in its process and engaging Participants and the public in meaningful ways to contribute to achieving this important public mandate.

# Public Engagement

The Commission has been working closely with the community and Participants, including those most affected individuals, families, first responders and service providers, to ensure they are prepared and well-informed before information related to them is made public. It is also important to work with the broader community to gather input to inform recommendations and make sure the full impact of the mass casualty is reflected in the Commission's final report.

In 2022, we will continue to work diligently to share the results of our investigation in a way that is accurate, respectful and compassionate, and consult with communities. Remember you can contact the Commission anytime by phone at **902-407-7532 (local)** or **1-833-0635-2501** or by email at [info@MassCasualtyCommission.ca](mailto:info@MassCasualtyCommission.ca) if you have a group that is interested in meeting with members of the Commission team, or with any questions or information you wish to share.

## Share Your Experience

From the start, the Commission has been focused on consulting and working with those most affected—families, first responders, individuals, and communities—to understand their perspectives and experiences. We also want to make sure we are speaking to the public and to hear from anyone affected by these events.

That's why we want to hear from you.

We've heard from a number of people who were unsure about speaking up because they felt there were others who were more directly affected than them. Please be assured that we want to hear from people across Nova Scotia, Canada and beyond. No matter who you are or where you are, your experience and perspective matters. There were broad and serious impacts from the mass casualty and capturing those will help strengthen our understanding and the recommendations that will help to make our communities safer.

In November, we conducted an online survey to ask you how you would like to share your stories to make sure we collect this often difficult information in a way that works best for you. Most of you told us that you were most comfortable providing your experience in writing online, but would appreciate a series of questions to help shape your responses, so we have created a survey that you can respond to. The survey can be found on our website at [masscasualtycommission.ca](http://masscasualtycommission.ca).

If you'd prefer to send your submission via email, please send it to us at [info@masscasualtycommission.ca](mailto:info@masscasualtycommission.ca). For those who need assistance or would like to set up a time to speak to someone directly either over the telephone, video call, or in person as COVID-19 restrictions allow, please contact us at 902-407-7532 (local) or 1-833-635-2501 (toll-free).

All stories and experiences gathered through this Share Your Experience process will be collected and reviewed by the Commission. They will help inform our recommendations and ensure the broad impact of the mass casualty is reflected in the final report. This process is one of the many ways the Commission is gathering information about the mass casualty; others include investigations, document review, research, public proceedings and other public engagement activities.



Learn more: [masscasualtycommission.ca/proceedings/share-your-experience](http://masscasualtycommission.ca/proceedings/share-your-experience)



# Frequently Asked Questions and Key Terms

We know the nature of public inquiries is complex and there are a lot of terms and practices with which people may not be familiar. Here are some questions frequently asked about the Commission, and some key terms. You can find more on our website: [masscasualtycommission.ca/faq](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/faq) and [masscasualtycommission.ca/key-terms](https://masscasualtycommission.ca/key-terms).

## FAQs

### Q: Why is it called the Mass Casualty Commission?

**A:** The events in April 2020 took the lives of many innocent people and left others with serious physical and emotional injuries. The scale of the loss and trauma caused fear, anger and grief in our communities, province and country. While many people refer to those events as the mass “shooting,” in addition to the gun-related deaths, there were many types of harms. While others refer to those events as the “Portapique shootings,” the impact spanned a wide geographic area of Nova Scotia. This is why we are using the term “mass casualty.”

### Q: How long will the inquiry take?

**A:** The public inquiry will take approximately two years, with a release date for the final report set for November 2022.

### Q: How are persons or groups who have been differentially impacted by the mass casualty being considered in the proceedings?

**A:** Provision e(ii) of the **Orders in Council** issued by the provincial and federal government that created the Commission state that the Commission will “give particular consideration to any persons or groups that may have been differentially impacted by the tragedy.” In assessing communities that have been differentially impacted, the contributing and contextual factors referenced in the mandate include: geographic (such as rural and urban locations); gender (including gender-based and intimate partner violence); experience related to access to firearms; experience related to police actions and police policies; and experience with a public alerting system.

### Q: Does the government have to accept the recommendations?

**A:** The Commission is an independent body, tasked by the Canadian and Nova Scotia Governments to conduct a public Inquiry and provide recommendations, but it does not have the power to require their implementation. Ultimately, it is up to the Canadian and Nova Scotia Governments and other organizations and institutions to accept and implement these recommendations.

## Key Terms

**Community Meetings:** The Commission will seek input on different aspects of its work from various groups and members of the public in affected communities.

**Hearings:** These are public sessions where Commission Counsel present evidence to the Commissioners and the public. They may involve Participants and witnesses.

**Mandate:** The Commission’s mandate assigns specific tasks to direct the work of the Commission and to let the public know what to expect. The Commission is required to establish what happened leading up to, during and after the mass casualty of April 18-19, 2020 in Nova Scotia. The Commission must also investigate and examine certain defined issues that provide context to understand why and how the mass casualty occurred. The Commission must also produce a report to the federal and Nova Scotia governments that includes these findings, lessons learned, and recommendations to help keep communities safer in the future.

**Participants:** These are individuals and groups who applied for and have been granted the opportunity for appropriate participation in the Commission’s proceedings. Participants are individuals or groups with a substantial and direct interest in the subject matter of the inquiry. In total, there are 61 individuals and groups granted the opportunity for formal participation.

**Public Inquiry:** an official independent process designed to examine issues or events that have had a significant impact on the public. It is arm's length from government, and it has the power to call witnesses to testify and to subpoena documents (i.e. require relevant information to be produced to the inquiry). The goal of a public inquiry is to gather the facts, to better understand the causes and consequences of the situation, and to make recommendations to government to keep communities safe in the future. A public inquiry does not determine guilt or assign blame, award damages, or conduct a trial.

**Restorative Principles:** This is an approach that seeks to bring people together to help determine what happened. Restorative principles are intended to create the conditions to encourage people to cooperate and participate in efforts to establish the facts about what happened and how to help protect Canadians in the future. The Commission is guided by restorative principles in order to do no further harm.

**Roundtables:** These are sessions where experts and other individuals with helpful knowledge are invited to share their perspective, experience and research on a specific theme, issue, or topic.

### Rules of Practice and Procedure

**(“the rules”):** The Rules of Practice and Procedure are developed collaboratively with Participants and ensure everyone has a common understanding of the roles, processes and approach for public proceedings—including public hearings, roundtables, witness panels and community meetings.


**Trauma-informed Approach:** The focus of a trauma-informed approach is to minimize the potential for further harm and re-traumatization, and to enhance safety, control, and resilience. For example, that is why the Commission does not refer to the perpetrator by name.

**Those Most Affected:** This language is used in place of “victims,” “witnesses,” “families,” etc. to ensure inclusivity for all. Note, there are instances, such as in the Notice to Potential Participants, where the use of the word “victim” is required, as it aligns with the formal language in the Orders in Council.

## Quick Links


The Government of Canada and the Nova Scotia Government established the Joint Federal/Provincial Commission pursuant to the federal and Nova Scotia public inquiry statutes:


- Inquiries Act, [Government of Canada](#)
- Public Inquiries Act, [Nova Scotia](#)



If you don't see what you're looking for, please visit: [masscasualtycommission.ca](https://masscasualtycommission.ca)

or send your question to: [info@MassCasualtyCommission.ca](mailto:info@MassCasualtyCommission.ca)

 **902-407-7532 (local)**

 **1 833-635-2501 (toll-free)**

# Commission Contact Info

## General Enquiries

**Email:** [info@masscasualtycommission.ca](mailto:info@masscasualtycommission.ca)

**Phone:** 902-407-7532 (local) or 1-833-635-2501

We will check messages daily from Monday – Friday, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Please leave your contact information and the reason for calling and we will respond during the next business day.

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