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Nova Scotia provincial legislation guide

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Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

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Introduction

This guide provides a brief overview of key employment, health and safety, privacy, and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) legislation in Nova Scotia. For each piece of legislation, we outline why it is important to employers and how it relates to DEIA, who and what it applies to, the latest date of amendment, the key requirements for employers (highlighting how the legislation specifically affects workplace practices), and the penalties for non-compliance. This guide is intended for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.

We encourage organizations to use this guide as a starting point for understanding their obligations under the law. However, this guide is not exhaustive and there are details, exceptions, and nuances in the legislation that require further reading or consultation to fully understand and apply. Additionally, while the information and links provided are accurate at the time of publication, this guide is not updated with every legislative change. Users should review the relevant legislation to confirm current requirements.

While compliance with the law is the baseline, we also recommend that organizations go beyond compliance where possible, proactively building workplaces that prioritize safety, inclusion, and equity in policies, practices, and culture.

Note that this resource covers legislation specific to one province or territory. A Canadian federal legislation guide is also available.

Accessibility Act

Why this legislation matters

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act is the province's accessibility framework law. The Act establishes a province-wide goal of full accessibility by 2030, requiring organizations to identify, prevent, and remove barriers.

Note: The Act is designed as a framework law, meaning specific obligations are introduced over time. Detailed, enforceable employer obligations will come through accessibility standards (regulations) that are still being developed.

Applies to

- Public sector bodies, businesses, and non-profit organizations across Nova Scotia.

Latest amendment

- 2017-04-28

Requirements for employers

- Public sector employers are currently required to:
 - Establish an accessibility advisory committee.
 - Develop and publish a multi-year accessibility plan.
 - Update the plan at least every 3 years.
- The first accessibility standard, which came into effect April 1, 2026, applies to the [built environment](#).
- Future accessibility standards will create regulations related to education, employment, goods and services, information and communication, and public transportation.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Non-compliance can lead to monetary penalties and compliance orders, particularly once standards are fully in force.

Further reading

- [Accessibility Act](#)
- [Accessibility Act Compliance](#), Government of Nova Scotia
- [Accessibility in Nova Scotia](#), Government of Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Human Rights Act

Why this legislation matters

The Nova Scotia Human Rights Act is the core anti-discrimination law for workplaces in the province. It prohibits discrimination in employment on [protected characteristics](#) and supports workplace accommodation and equal treatment. It is the legal baseline for inclusive policies, anti-harassment practices, and fair access to employment opportunities.

Applies to

- Employers, employees, unions, service providers, landlords, and other persons and organizations operating in Nova Scotia.

Latest amendment

- 2018-06-27

Requirements for employers

- Employers must not discriminate on protected characteristics in hiring, employment terms, promotion, discipline, termination, or harassment.
- Employers are also required to accommodate needs related to protected characteristics, such as disability or religion, to the point of undue hardship.
- Maintain a harassment free workplace, including sexual harassment.
- Employers should maintain clear complaint processes and respond appropriately to discrimination and harassment concerns.

Penalties for non-compliance

- A Human Rights Board of Inquiry can order remedies such as compensation, reinstatement, policy changes, or other corrective measures.

Further reading

- [Human Rights Act](#)
- [For Employers](#), Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission

Labour Standards Code

Why this legislation matters

The Labour Standards Code sets minimum employment standards in Nova Scotia. Fair minimum standards help reduce exploitation and unequal treatment, especially for workers who may be more vulnerable because of immigration status, precarious work, low income, or other inequities.

Applies to

- Most employers and employees in Nova Scotia, subject to sector-specific exceptions and special rules.

Latest amendment

- 2024-09-20

Requirements for employers

- The Code sets out the minimum standards for things like:
 - Wages and pay practices
 - Hours of work, rest periods, and overtime
 - Vacation, general holidays, and job-protected leaves of absence
 - Termination-related obligations
- Employers using foreign worker recruitment or hiring channels must also comply with applicable registration and protection requirements under recent amendments.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Employers may face orders to pay unpaid wages or other amounts owing, administrative penalties for violations, and prosecution for more serious or repeated offences.

Further reading

- [Labour Standards Code](#)
- [Guide to the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code \(PDF\)](#), Government of Nova Scotia

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Why this legislation matters

The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP) governs how public bodies in Nova Scotia collect, use, disclose, retain, and protect personal information. Employee and applicant information, including potentially sensitive equity-related information, must be handled lawfully, carefully, and consistently.

Applies to

- Provincial public bodies, including departments, agencies, boards, commissions, and crown corporations.

Latest amendment

- 2025-03-26

Requirements for employers

- For public-sector employers, FOIPOP governs how they collect, use, store, and disclose employee information. For example, employers must:
 - Collect only information they are authorized to collect.
 - Use and disclose collected information only as permitted.
 - Protect information from unauthorized access or disclosure.
 - Respond to access and correction requests in accordance with the Act.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Certain offences under the Act, such as knowingly altering a record after an access request or maliciously collecting, using, or disclosing personal information contrary to the Act, can result in fines of up to \$2,000, imprisonment for up to six months, or both.

Further reading

- [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)
- [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy](#), Government of Nova Scotia

Occupational Health and Safety Act

Why this legislation matters

The Occupational Health and Safety Act is the foundation of workplace health and safety in Nova Scotia. A safe workplace is part of an equitable workplace, and the Act supports participation, information-sharing, and protection for all workers, including those who may face greater risk because of language barriers, disability, precarious work, or other inequities.

Applies to

- Applies to most workplaces, employers, employees, and contractors in Nova Scotia.

Latest amendment

- 2024-09-20

Requirements for employers

- Take every reasonable precaution to ensure the health and safety of people at or near the workplace.
- Provide adequate training and supervision, inform workers of workplace hazards and safe work procedures, and ensure workers are competent to perform their tasks safely.
- Ensure proper equipment, tools, and personal protective equipment (PPE) are provided and maintained.
- Establish a joint occupational health and safety committee (workplaces with 20+ employees) or a health and safety representative (smaller workplaces).
- Develop and maintain a written occupational health and safety policy and implement a violence prevention program where required.
- Investigate and report incidents as required.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Enforcement can include orders to comply or stop work, administrative penalties, and prosecution in serious cases.

Further reading

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)
- [Health and Safety](#), Government of Nova Scotia
- [Nova SAFE](#)

Workers' Compensation Act

Why this legislation matters

The Workers' Compensation Act establishes the no-fault workplace injury compensation system in Nova Scotia. The Act supports equitable access to benefits, rehabilitation, and return-to-work supports when workers are injured.

Applies to

- Applies to most employers and workers in Nova Scotia.
- The Act is administered by the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia (WCB Nova Scotia)

Latest amendment

- 2025-10-03

Requirements for employers

- Register with the WCB and pay assessments based on payroll and industry.
- Report workplace injuries and illnesses to the WCB within required timelines.
- Support injured workers with early and safe return-to-work programs and offer suitable modified duties where possible.
- Cooperate and maintain communication with injured workers and the WCB.
- Maintain a safe and healthy work environment.
- Protect workers from retaliation for reporting injuries or filing claims.

Penalties for non-compliance

- Employers may face penalties, surcharges, collection action, or liability consequences for failing to register, report, pay assessments, or comply with return-to-work obligations.

Further reading

- [Workers' Compensation Act](#)
- [Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia](#)
- [Changes to the Workers' Compensation Act](#), WCB Nova Scotia