

Module 1 — Video 2

Why Wait Times Are So Long + Regional Differences & Accessibility (Nova Scotia)

This document is a quick “cheat sheet” to help you understand **why long waits happen**, how access differs **in cities vs rural areas**, and what you can do **practically while you’re waiting** so you don’t feel “stuck.”

1) Why there are long waits in Canada and Nova Scotia

Long waits are a **system-wide reality** - it is **not your fault**, and it doesn’t mean you are being ignored.

Reason	What it means in plain language
Population aging	More people need regular care and tests, especially for chronic conditions.
Healthcare staffing shortages	When there aren’t enough Family Doctors, Nurse Practitioners, nurses, and diagnostic technicians, the whole system slows down at every step.
Referral-based system	Many specialists and tests (MRI/CT/ultrasound, consultations, etc.) require a referral, which creates wait lists (and helps prioritize urgent cases).
Triage / prioritization	More urgent cases may be seen faster even if you booked earlier.

2) What usually takes the longest (and why)

The longest waits are often for:

- a **regular primary care provider** (Family Doctor / Nurse Practitioner)
- **specialist consultations** (dermatology, cardiology, etc.)
- **diagnostic testing** (MRI, CT, ultrasound, endoscopy)
- **non-urgent planned surgeries/procedures**

Simple reason: demand is often higher than the number of available appointments, staff, and time.

3) Regional differences: city vs rural (urban vs rural)

Access can differ depending on where you live:

- **Cities (Halifax/Dartmouth):** usually more services and clinics, but also higher demand → waits can still be significant.
- **Rural/remote areas:** fewer providers and longer travel distances → it can be harder to get an appointment and physically reach services.

It's helpful to know which **Nova Scotia Health management zone** you live in (Central, Eastern, Northern, Western):

- <https://www.nshealth.ca/about-nova-scotia-health/management-zones>

4) Accessibility: common barriers (besides wait times)

Barrier	Examples	What can help
Language	hard to describe symptoms or understand the care plan	request an interpreter (covered in a separate module)

Transportation	no car / far distances / difficult to get to services	211 + transportation support programs (see links below)
Financial	medications, dental care, vision care, etc.	Pharmacare / Income Assistance / private insurance (covered in separate modules)
Mobility / disability	hard to travel physically / need accessibility supports	ask about accessibility at booking and request accommodations
Digital barriers	difficulty with online booking, email, apps	ask for phone options, use community supports (211, settlement services)

5) Practical steps: what to do while you're waiting

This is the most important section - what actually helps.

1) If you don't have a regular provider, register on the registry

Need a Family Practice Registry (waitlist for provider "matching"):

- <https://needafamilypractice.nshealth.ca/>
Registry info:
- <https://www.nshealth.ca/clinics-programs-and-services/need-family-practice-registry>

2) If you're unsure where to go, use 811

811 helps you choose the right path (home care / clinic / Emergency Department):

- <https://811.novascotia.ca/>

3) If you have a referral, ask for a “what’s next” plan

Questions to ask:

- “When should I expect a call/contact?”
- “Who should I contact if I don’t hear back within 4–6 weeks?”
- “Which symptoms mean I should seek care sooner?”

4) Keep a short list of symptoms and dates

Especially helpful if:

- you’re following up again
- you see a different provider/clinic
- you need to explain how symptoms changed over time

Minimum format: **date → symptom → severity → what helps/what makes it worse.**

5) Check official sources for wait times

- Emergency Department wait times (estimated):
<https://www.nshealth.ca/emergency-care/emergency-department-wait-times>
- Provincial wait times (tests/procedures):
<https://waittimes.novascotia.ca/>

6) If transportation is a barrier, look for support programs

This is covered in more detail in a separate transportation video, but you can start here:

- Northern Zone Transportation Support (NS Health):
<https://www.nshealth.ca/clinics-programs-and-services/transportation-support-northern-zone>
- In-Province Travel Assistance Pilot Program (Government of Nova Scotia):
<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/in-province-travel-assistance-pilot-program.asp>
- 211 Nova Scotia (local options):
<https://ns.211.ca/>

6) If your condition gets worse - don't "wait your turn"

If you develop new or concerning symptoms, re-check your best route through **811** or go to the **Emergency Department**. If it is life-threatening, call **911**.
(Crisis contacts are listed in the "**Help Now**" section on the page.)

7) Mini message template (copy/paste)

How to politely check the status of a referral:

Hello, I'm calling to check the status of my referral to **[specialist / test]** that was sent on **[date]**.

Could you please confirm whether the referral was received/accepted, what the estimated wait time is, and what I should do if my symptoms get worse?

Disclaimer

This material is for **educational and informational** purposes only and is intended to help you navigate the Nova Scotia healthcare system. It does **not** replace medical, legal, or crisis support. Rules, services, and contact information may change - always confirm details using the **official websites** listed in this document. If your situation is urgent or dangerous, use the "**Help Now**" section on the page and seek immediate help.