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## BRIEFING NOTE

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**Meeting:** The New Democratic Party (NDP) and Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association (NSPA)  
**Prepared by:** Stephen Richey, President | NSPA  
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### Introduction

The Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association (NSPA) is a professional association representing over 750 physiotherapists and physiotherapy students in Nova Scotia (NS). We are a branch of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association which represents over 21,000 members across Canada. Our mission is to support members and advance our profession in order to improve the health and wellness of Nova Scotians.

Among the many services we provide is advocacy, which we strive to undertake by working collaboratively with our many stakeholders. Our commitment in offering this service is to raise awareness regarding the comprehensive services provided by our profession and about how physiotherapists contribute to the lives of Nova Scotians and to the healthcare system.

### Background

Physiotherapy services support Nova Scotians at all stages of their lives. No matter an individual's health status, physiotherapy supports individuals in becoming more mobile, and improving quality of life. Essentially, physiotherapy services are vital at all levels of activity and play a key role in prevention as well as rehabilitation. Given the unique set of skills within our membership, physiotherapists play a significant role in providing comprehensive, patient-focused health care.

During the most recent provincial election we submitted a questionnaire covering issues important to our membership. Our goal was to learn more about how each party understands our services and plans to utilize our skillset to better serve the needs of Nova Scotians.

The 5 topics covered in the questionnaire were Access, Capacity, Aging, Collaboration and Confidence.



**NDP campaign promises related to the priorities of the Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association:**

- The NDP government will sit down with the NSPA to determine the extent of gaps in service and a timeline to increase access to physiotherapy services.
- An NDP government would make physiotherapy services part of the standard of care for all long-term care facilities.
- Doctors Nova Scotia has proposed a multi-disciplinary task force to improve primary care. The NDP agrees with the concept, and an NDP government would ensure that Physiotherapy was one of the disciplines on the task force and therefore part of the primary care action plans arising from its work.
- An NDP government will ask the Department of Health and Wellness to prepare a plan to incorporate physiotherapy into the best practice therapies for chronic pain and pain more generally, working with physicians, pharmacists and other relevant professions as well as with physiotherapists.



## Filling the Gap

Physiotherapists in NS are in an ideal position to help fill some of the gaps in our health care system. We would like to draw your attention to 3 areas of focus we feel would have the greatest impact in today's health care climate and speak to **All** of the topics covered in the questionnaire.

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Three Areas of Focus:

### 1. Physiotherapist's vital role in NS Collaborative Care Clinics

Nova Scotia has 92 Collaborative Care Clinics (CCC) throughout the province. These teams consist of doctors, nurses, dietitians, social workers and Pharmacists. Our research has identified that none of these clinics list a Physiotherapist on staff (<https://cfpt.nshealth.ca/team-members>).

Doctors Nova Scotia has proposed a multi-disciplinary task force to improve primary care. It is imperative that physiotherapy representative be on this task force.

Physiotherapists have expertise in: assessing and treating musculoskeletal injuries, cardiovascular rehabilitation, stroke recovery, cancer care, diabetes care and education, obesity management in children and adults and much more.

Physiotherapy education includes a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration from the earliest stages of entry-level education, enabling us to fully participate in collaborative practice within our complex health care system.

Physiotherapists should be integrated into a higher proportion of these collaborative care clinics. Benefits will include: improved ability to provide same-day appointments, reducing physician workload, improved appropriateness of referral to specialists, decreased diagnostic imaging, decreased number of future visits for pain management and decreased amount of pain medications prescribed, and increased patient satisfaction.

Within collaborative care clinics, physiotherapists can be used as a first point of contact for patients. This can include assessment, diagnosis and treatment of various acute and chronic conditions (including musculoskeletal, neurological, cardiac, respiratory, arthritic, osteoporotic, and metabolic conditions, and falls) with referral to other team members as appropriate.



## 2. Physiotherapists role in Aging

COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on the cracks within the long-term care (LTC) sector. There is a significant push both provincially and nationally from politicians, family members, and clinicians and staff within the LTC sector to address the current challenges in our provincial LTC homes. The needs of residents in LTC have changed significantly in recent years with an increase in co-morbidities, frailty, and cognitive decline. Specially trained staff are needed now to provide care for these complex residents.

Physiotherapists are skilled allied health professionals who are specially trained to meet the multi-faceted needs of those now entering and living in LTC. We have the unique skill set required to work with complex residents with multiple co-morbidities and differing levels of cognitive impairment. Adequate physiotherapy services in LTC are needed to provide invaluable services that improve quality of life for residents and working conditions for staff.

Please see attached Position Statement for more details.

## 3. Improving timely access to physiotherapy services across the province

While healthcare in Nova Scotia has its challenges, we remain fortunate in our ability to access universal healthcare. However, with increasing demands on the healthcare system and the shortage of family physicians in Nova Scotia, the ability for citizens to access healthcare in a timely manner is decreasing, creating a significant problem.

Despite the challenges faced by the public healthcare system, many Nova Scotians have the option to seek physiotherapy treatment through a third party health insurance program (TPHIP), such as Blue Cross or Sun Life. However, many insurance companies still require a physician's referral to access physiotherapy and we believe this is an unnecessary burden to the system and barrier for timely access to physiotherapy services in our province.

The Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association believes self-referral benefits Nova Scotians by providing more choice, improved access to care, faster recovery, and reduced health care costs.

In Jan 2020, the Council of Family Doctors and DNS wrote the NSPA a letter of support in our efforts to reduce the requirement of a physician's referral imposed by insurance providers to access physiotherapy services.



Nova Scotia  
Physiotherapy  
Association

The NSPA believes legislation limiting or eliminating the requirement of a physician's referral for access to physiotherapy in Nova Scotia when using a TPHIP, is needed.

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