



Nova Scotia
Physiotherapy
Association

2024 NS Provincial Election Questionnaire Responses

INTRODUCTION

The Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association (NSPA) represents physiotherapists, physiotherapy assistants, and students across the province. Among the many services we provide is advocacy, which we strive to undertake by working collaboratively with our many audiences. 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.

A questionnaire was sent to all three main provincial political parties to seek more detail regarding their awareness of and support for physiotherapy services across Nova Scotia. The questionnaire was sent to each party on Monday, November 4th with a request that responses be provided to Patricia Connors, Chief Executive Officer, NSPA on or before November 13th at 2:00 PM AST.

FORMAT

To maintain the integrity of the responses, all have been recreated below exactly as they were received. Other than collating them into one document, the responses have not been altered, including any grammar or spelling errors. Responses are listed below in order of party standing prior to the election being called, which was:

- **Progressive Conservatives (PC)** responses are listed first as the Progressive Conservatives are the party that formed government prior to the election call
- **Liberal** responses are listed second as the Liberals were the party that formed the official opposition prior to the election call.
- **New Democratic Party (NDP)** responses are listed third as the NDP were the province's third place party prior to the election call.

GOAL

Although the NSPA is a non-partisan organization, advocacy is among its strategic initiatives. Therefore, the goal of the questionnaire was to seek responses from each party on matters important to the NSPA and to then distribute those responses. In our introductory message to each political party when submitting the questionnaire, we identified that responses would be distributed to NSPA members and posted to the NSPA website and social media platforms.



QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1: CAPACITY

According to the Canadian Physiotherapy Association’s Scope of Practice statement, “Physiotherapy is the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of the human body, its diseases, disorders and conditions associated with physical function, and acute or chronic injury or pain. It includes the prevention of illness or injury and the promotion and education on health and wellness with a focus on optimal movement and function.”

Because of their unique skill set, physiotherapists have the ability to increase the capacity of the overall health system if used effectively and to their full scope of practice.

- a) If elected, what actions will your party take to enable physiotherapists to practice to their full scope, ensuring they can provide comprehensive, autonomous care that meets patient needs effectively and help offload the current healthcare system in Nova Scotia?
- b) How will your party initiate and/or support recruitment and retention of physiotherapists in both urban and rural areas of Nova Scotia?
- c) Physiotherapist assistants (PTAs) play a vital role in supporting physiotherapists in working to their full scope of practice. Since the provincial funding for the Continuing Care Assistant program began, it has become extremely challenging for employers to fill PTA positions and is impacting physiotherapy services across the province. If elected, what specific steps will your party take to support, recruit and retain qualified PTAs to address program enrollment and fulfill current workforce needs?

PC:

- a) The PC Party has a strong record of expanding the scope of practice for healthcare professionals to enable them to use their training to the fullest extent. In 2023, the PCs passed the Patient Access to Care Act to reduce paperwork, allow healthcare professionals to focus more on patient care and support healthcare recruitment and retention efforts. Physiotherapists were included in this legislation. A re-elected PC government will continue working with physiotherapists to enable them to best use their practice to care for Nova Scotians.
- b) The first pillar of the PC’s Action for Health plan is to become a magnet for health providers. This plan is making things happen by streamlining recruitment with clear and effective processes and



timelines for hiring, supporting internationally educated health providers to work in the province, including supporting their transition and integration into communities, and providing communities with funding for local recruitment and retention efforts.

- c) The PCs have a strong record of making investments, bargaining fairly, and finding innovative solutions to support recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals. A re-elected PC government will work with physiotherapist assistants to address their workforce challenges.

Liberal:

- a) A Nova Scotia Liberal government is committed to building and expanding 40 collaborative care clinics across the province, which will bring doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals under one roof to deliver care; physiotherapists included. This team-based approach to care will ensure that physiotherapists can bring their full scope of knowledge to the table and support their colleagues in delivering strong care to Nova Scotians.
- b) A Nova Scotia Liberal government will offer incentives of up to \$15,000 for allied health professionals who commit to working in a collaborative care clinic for 5+ years. This will encourage physiotherapists province-wide to practice.
- c) We understand that PTAs play an important role in the success of physiotherapy teams and if elected, will explore ways we can recruit and retain them as part of our approach to a more effective primary care system in Nova Scotia.

NDP:

- a) An NDP government will take significant steps to attach Nova Scotians to primary care, by creating 15 new doctor clinics in each of the next three years. These clinics will have a team of health care providers, including physiotherapists, who collaborate to provide the most appropriate care. They will fill the gaps in primary care that create pressure throughout the health care system.

An NDP government will work with the NSPA to address barriers to physiotherapists' practice to their full scope,

- b) The NDP recognizes that the invaluable contribution of physiotherapists is a critical part of the healthcare spectrum.

A NDP government will address the poor work-life balance and burnout that have made it particularly difficult for this province to retain health care workers. In addition to the new resources and access to care provided by the new clinics, an NDP government will work with health care providers to develop



and implement a Health Human Resources Strategy. The strategy will set the goals and actions to ensure Nova Scotia's health care system has the providers it needs, including physiotherapists.

- c) A human resources strategy addresses issues like equitable support and pay for health care providers with equivalent education, training and job demands. An NDP government will work with the NSPA and health care employers to address this new challenge as a human resources strategy is developed.

2: ACCESS

Many people in Nova Scotia have difficulty accessing physiotherapy services due to both a lack of private insurance coverage and limited availability of publicly-funded services. This is true for older Nova Scotians (22% of NS population, expected to be 33% by 2036), as well as those with a chronic disability.

- a) Given that physiotherapy services can improve physical abilities and quality of life, how will your party, if elected, increase access to these services for all Nova Scotians, particularly for those living in rural communities?
- b) What specific steps will you take to improve access to physiotherapy services for equity seeking groups (such as Indigenous populations, African Nova Scotians, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community) in order to better serve all Nova Scotians?
- c) What specific funding will you direct toward province-wide rehabilitation services? Specifically
- Pelvic health physiotherapy
 - Emergency Care
 - Primary Care
- d) Given the success of virtual care (i.e. Maple) in improving access to medical care and the research supporting virtual care for physiotherapy services, does your party have plans to incorporate allied health professionals into virtual care services?
- e) Given the link between physical and mental health, how do you plan to incorporate physiotherapy services into mental health teams?



PC:

- a) One of the priorities of the PC's *Action for Health* plan is to improve the factors affecting health and wellness. Our Party understands the importance of supporting those with chronic disabilities and those pain and mobility challenges. The \$750 Seniors Care Grant, which was introduced by the PC Party, can be used for physiotherapy services.
- b) A re-elected PC government will continue to make sustainable investments in organizations who work to advance health in diverse communities. The PC's Action for Health plan has developed a Health Equity Framework to guide targeted approaches on health equity experiences for various equity-seeking populations as well as work to coordinate the various organizations supporting these communities.
- c) The PC government has expanded access to care, including through collaboration care clinics, pharmacy primary care clinics, and urgent treatment centres. A re-elected PC Team will continue to expand access to care.
- d) The PC Party was the first party to see value in using virtual care to offer a new pathway to care for Nova Scotians. While the Liberals and NDP have repeatedly spoken out against the use of virtual care, the PCs will continue to look for ways to expand these services.
- e) Mental healthcare is healthcare. A re-elected PC government will continue working to expand mental healthcare services. Our PC government invested to bring collaborative care teams to 14 communities, with 37 more receiving funding. The PCs will continue to provide more access to mental health care as an integrated part of healthcare services.

Liberal:

- a) We know that we need to expand access to allied health professionals, including physiotherapists. One proven model for doing this is the collaborative care model, where many health professionals can practice under one roof. We're committed to building and expanding 40 collaborative care clinics across Nova Scotia so that more Nova Scotians have easier access to the healthcare they need, including physiotherapists.
- b) One of the most important ways to build trust is by ensuring that health professionals are operating in the communities they serve, and take differing perspectives into account when providing care. We look forward to working with physiotherapists and communities to ensure that everyone has access to the healthcare that meets their needs.
- c) Rehabilitation is an essential part of our healthcare system. We will work to ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to these services in our approach to improving our provincial system.



- d) We recognize that virtual care is filling gaps currently in our system, and we are highly focused on improving in-person access to primary care. We look forward to working with allied health professionals to see how we can expand access to the care Nova Scotians need.
- e) The collaborative care clinic model would include having mental health teams embedded, as we recognize the many links between physical and mental health. This way, mental health workers could work alongside physical health workers to ensure that Nova Scotians have access to wraparound care.

NDP:

- a) An NDP government will improve access by including physiotherapists on the collaborative team in the new clinics, and ensuring physiotherapists are part of the health care team providing care as attachment to primary care becomes universal.
- b) An NDP government will address access to primary care, including physiotherapy, for equity seeking groups by engaging those groups in identifying the gaps in service, the reasons for reluctance to use primary health care services and community-based action to improve the diversity of primary care services so members of equity seeking communities feel welcome.
- c) An NDP government will include rehabilitation in the primary care to which all Nova Scotians are attached as 45 new doctor clinics designed to serve 10,000 people are rolled out, and plans for universal access are implemented.
- d) Virtual care was introduced to address the shortage of family doctors, but has had positive impacts. We will focus on attaching Nova Scotians to family doctor clinics to ensure care is continuous and coordinated. An NDP government will focus on better retention of family doctors and other primary care workers, and much more accessible delivery of primary care. With the NDP model, virtual care can take place in-house rather than through subscription-based apps.
- e) An NDP government would invite the College of Physiotherapy, Mental Health and Addictions and other stakeholders to review the research on the role of physiotherapy in mental health care and recommend how physiotherapy services can be of best advantage to mental health career.



3: COLLABORATION

Nova Scotia has committed to improving primary health care through collaborative care teams, including nurse practitioners, family practice nurses, licensed practical nurses, social workers, and dietitians, being hired through a new investment from government since 2017.

Given the fact that COPD, arthritis, and back pain are among the most common chronic conditions in the province, and that musculoskeletal conditions that can be assessed and treated by physiotherapists are commonly seen in emergency departments and physicians' offices (52% of patients), please explain for our membership:

- a) How will you ensure physiotherapists become an integral part of Nova Scotia's primary health care strategy?
- b) Physiotherapists are primary health care providers and should be included in collaborative care models. How will you make this happen? How do you plan to evaluate collaborative care models with and without physiotherapy services?
- c) Physiotherapy services can drastically reduce pain medication prescriptions that contribute to the opioid epidemic. What steps will you take to ensure physiotherapists are able to help Nova Scotians, and the health system, by working collaboratively to address acute and chronic pain?
- d) Meeting regularly with healthcare leaders from across the province to discuss and determine solutions has been extremely beneficial. If elected, how will your party continue to ensure that the profession of physiotherapy has a voice at the table?

PC:

- a) The PC Party understands the importance of physiotherapists to our healthcare system. With an ageing population our government has made big investments in long-term care and support for seniors. More access to physiotherapy is an important part supporting our seniors. A re-elected PC government will work with all healthcare professionals to support them in providing care for Nova Scotians.
- b) A re-elected PC government will continue to invest to open collaborative care clinics. We will remain open to improvements that can bring more care to Nova Scotians, faster.



- c) A re-elected PC government will work with physiotherapists to enable them to work collaboratively within the healthcare system to provide care to support those with chronic pain.
- d) Yes. A re-elected PC government will continue listening to those on the frontlines of healthcare to find more ways to improve the healthcare system.

Liberal:

- a) A Nova Scotia Liberal government will include physiotherapists as allied health professionals in our building and expanding of 40 collaborative care clinics across the province, ensuring that they are an integral part of our primary health care strategy.
- b) Physiotherapists will be included as allied health professionals in our plans to build and expand 40 collaborative care clinics across the province. We will listen to the perspectives of folks working in, and accessing, the collaborative care clinics, while also evaluating Nova Scotians' access to care through the decrease in the need a family practice registry.
- c) We recognize the role physiotherapy can play in lowering people's pain, and therefore, use of medications. Through being part of our primary care plan in collaborative care clinics, physiotherapists will be able to continue to support Nova Scotians.
- d) We value the diverse perspectives of all health professionals working to make a difference in the lives of Nova Scotians, and will ensure that physiotherapists have a seat at the table when discussing our provincial approach to primary care.

NDP:

- a) An NDP government will view physiotherapists as one of the primary care providers who provide timely care through the collaborative approach that is fundamental to the 45 new clinics and steps toward universal attachment to primary care that are central to the NDP health plan.
- b) An NDP government will include physiotherapists in the delivery of primary care, as explained above. We will include physiotherapists in the creation of an evaluative model that will ensure progress and learning is ongoing as we roll out our new model of care.
- c) An NDP government will include physiotherapists on the collaborative teams providing primary care. An NDP government will invite physiotherapists to be at the table as acute and chronic pain treatment is reviewed to improve its effectiveness.
- d) The NDP recognizes the role and impact of allied health professional including physiotherapists.



A NDP government will ensure that physiotherapists are among the health care leaders at the table who gather lessons learned and develop solutions to continually improve the health care system.

Question 4: INDUSTRY

Private practice physiotherapy clinics contribute significantly to decreasing the overall burden on the public healthcare system. They provide primary care - assessing, diagnosing and treating patients appropriately. Physiotherapists are able to make an accurate physical diagnosis and refer for further investigation as appropriate.

- a) Even though it is not a legal requirement, many insurance providers require a physician referral for physiotherapy services. The referral requirement can act as a barrier or cause delay in obtaining physiotherapy services and Doctors Nova Scotia has stated that a referral is unnecessary. What measures will you take to ensure insurance providers remove this needless requirement and, thereby, improve access for Nova Scotians needing physiotherapy services?
- b) This year was the first time in 10 years that the rates for reimbursement for physiotherapy services under the motor vehicle act were increased. How will your party ensure that these rates are better reflective of the industry on an ongoing basis?
- c) Despite rates of service increases across all industries, coverage for physiotherapy services have not kept pace with inflation or practice changes. This can impact access to care as patients would be covered for fewer appointments. How will your party ensure private physiotherapy services continue to be feasible for Nova Scotians?
- d) Physiotherapists have thorough training in physical assessment and are able to refer to appropriate health care practitioners as needed. There is significant evidence to show physiotherapists refer more appropriately to orthopaedic specialists. How will your party support physiotherapists in referring to physician specialists?



PC:

- a) Our PC government has worked to reduce red tape throughout our healthcare system so that healthcare providers can focus on providing care and so Nova Scotians can access care sooner. A re-elected PC government will continue to work to find ways to reduce barriers in healthcare.
- b) A re-elected PC government will work with physiotherapists to ensure a balanced approach to fair rates and affordability for Nova Scotians.
- c) A re-elected PC government will work with physiotherapists to ensure a balanced approach to fair rates and affordability for Nova Scotians.
- d) The PC Government has a strong track record of expanding the scope of practice for healthcare providers. A re-elected PC Team will continue to find ways to leverage the full extent of training for healthcare professionals, to provide more care for Nova Scotians.

Liberal:

- a) One of the many wonderful aspects of a collaborative care team is that referral processes are made much simpler and more effective, as doctors and allied health professionals can work under one roof. This would ensure that barriers are removed for folks wanting to access physiotherapy services.
- b) We're committed to ongoing review of reimbursement rates, working closely with the NSPA, to ensure that these rates are reflective of the industry average on an ongoing basis.
- c) We must ensure that patients can get access to the care they need. We are committed to both increasing the accessibility of physiotherapy in our communities, and removing barriers that are preventing Nova Scotians from getting treatment.
- d) A collaborative care model of practice will allow for physiotherapists to make efficient referrals to folks within the care teams.

NDP:

- a) A NDP government will work alongside Doctors Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association to remove barriers to care.
- b) A NDP government will conduct regular reviews of relevant policies to ensure rates are regularly updated.



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- c) A NDP government would increase public access to physiotherapy through our primary care clinics.
- d) A true collaborative approach to healthcare requires an easier flow of correspondence across related professions. We anticipate that the federal Bill C-72, the Connected Care For Canadians Act, will pass and create a framework for safe and secure exchange of health data. We will happily work with the federal government to implement changes in the province that allow for more connected care.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, this document was developed for the purpose of sharing with the NSPA membership. However, members are free to share widely.