



2021 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 on Monday, July 26th with a request that responses be provided to the NSPA Executive Director on or before August 4th at 2:00 PM AST. All parties met this deadline.

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:

- **Liberal** responses are listed first as the Liberals were the party that formed government prior to the election call.
- **Progressive Conservatives (PC)** responses are listed second as the Progressive Conservatives Party 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

The NSPA is a non-partisan organization. However, advocacy is among its strategic initiatives. 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: 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 (nearly 20% of NS population, expected to be 33% by 2036), as well as those with a chronic disability.

This situation is likely to be further exacerbated due to the far-reaching physical and mental impacts of COVID, (for example those who may have become more sedentary, those recovering from the virus itself and/or those awaiting cancelled surgeries).

- 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?
- 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 LGBTQIA2S+ community) in order to better serve all Nova Scotians?
- c) What specific funding will you direct toward province-wide rehabilitation services?

Liberal:

The Liberal Party is a strong advocate for increased access to health services, including mental health access. That's why Premier Rankin created the Office of Mental Health and Addictions and is committing in his platform to invest \$4 million annually to launch 8 new mental health walk-in clinics to ensure that Nova Scotians struggling with mental health issues can receive timely, appropriate, and dedicated treatment from a team of specialized professionals. We know the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult and we want to be there to support recovery physically, emotionally and economically. The Liberal Party believes that good physical health should be in reach for all Nova Scotians. A re-elected Liberal government will establish a new \$3 million grants-based program that will fund special programs proposed by organizations with the demonstrated ability to offer services with a measurable impact on the health and fitness levels of Nova Scotians.

Increases access for equity seeking groups to physiotherapy services and across our entire healthcare system is of critical importance. We recognize the disproportionate risk of adverse health outcomes within some communities and also acknowledge the impact of historic systemic racism has had on communities contributing to mistrust within the health system. We must do better, and our discussions must be community led. We will continue to work to ensure greater equity and more equal access within our health system.



PC:

- a) One of our Candidates for re-election, Barbara Adams, is a physiotherapist. She introduced legislation for concussion strategy and a frailty strategy. Our frailty strategy legislation has requirements to evaluate the current and future needs of all allied health professionals. For all Nova Scotians, and especially those 70,000 Nova Scotians without a family doctor, the PC Party will also expand telehealth to allow healthcare providers such as physiotherapists to see patients virtually to assist with timely access to primary care.
- b) The PC Party is proud to have its own Standing Committee on Diversity. Its purpose is to help guide the Progressive Conservative Party to be reflective of the modern societal make-up of Nova Scotia, inclusive and respectful of all demographics, cultural, and ethnic diversities to advance our collective growth and prosperity. We are aware that these groups need to be represented. We will do more to ensure that more people are entering our universities program, and that starts with providing the students with opportunities to learn and shadow these job roles.
- c) We are aware the previous government cut funding to rehabilitative services. Our Party has seen the impacts of this on home care and in long-term care in Nova Scotia. The previous government did not include any recommendations for increased rehabilitative services despite the long-term care panel recommendations. We recognize that acute care, home care, and long-term care need these services. Our Party has put forward the previously mentioned concussion and frailty legislation in order to address the neglect. We also recognize the frailty of Nova Scotians is increasing because we do not have family doctors or enough OR room times. We also know that our commitment to 4.1 hours of care per resident in LTC will make a huge difference, as well as our new Supportive Living level of care. We are also committed to creating a Health Ombudsman.

NDP:

- a) An NDP government will sit down with the Physiotherapy Association to jointly determine the extent of the gaps in service and a timeline to increase access to physiotherapy services.
- b) The NDP is committed to addressing discrimination in access to health services wherever it occurs. Part of this work will be implementing a community-developed African Nova Scotian Health Strategy that includes collecting race-based data in health care. Physiotherapy services would form part of this strategy. An NDP government would listen to 2SLGBTQIA communities to understand the barriers they face in accessing appropriate care and increase their access to all forms of health care, including physiotherapy. An NDP government would work on a nation-to-nation basis with Mi'kmaq communities and would address health care access in that context, and in the broader context of access to services for Indigenous people living in Nova Scotia.
- c) The NDP has not made a specific funding commitment of this nature. When looking at the gaps in universal health care, we are reminded of the recent call by the provinces and territories for an immediate increase in the federal health transfer to reach a 35% share of health costs. This would help greatly in developing the kinds of rehabilitative services that Nova Scotians need.



2: CAPACITY

As mobility experts, physiotherapists and physiotherapy assistants have a unique expertise that helps patients enjoy the freedom of movement.

- a) Given that Nova Scotia has an aging population, please explain how your party, if elected, will ensure this unique skill set is better utilized in order to offer more support to Nova Scotians.
- b) How will your party initiate and/or support recruitment and retention of physiotherapists in both urban and rural areas of Nova Scotia?
- c) Despite an open and equitable admissions process, minority groups, such as Indigenous and African Nova Scotians, as well as rural students, are underrepresented in physiotherapy education at Dalhousie University. What specific measures will you take to increase/improve upon representation?

Liberal:

The Liberal government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into health care redevelopment and revitalisation projects across the province. Creating newer, more efficient hospitals creates more space for critical services such as physiotherapy clinics for patients. Increased investment in collaborative care teams also ensures people get well rounded care. New, modern complexes will allow for increased capacity for physiotherapy, mental health and addictions, public health, as well as other services.

We are committed to supporting our seniors. We believe mobility plays an important role in aging well. Mobility plays an important role in physical healthy outcomes, as well as in emotional and mental well-being.

Recruitment and retention of health care professionals is a priority for the Liberal Party. We have invested to attract health-care professionals and also to increase educational opportunities at our universities. However, there is still work to be done and we are happy to engage in further discussions on how best to support physiotherapists so they can continue to provide high quality care throughout our province.

Examining diversity at all levels of our education system to determine the barriers that underrepresented groups might be facing and how these barriers might be addressed is imperative to improving representation within our education programs. We will continue to consult with and learn from communities in order to hear what can be done to support increased participation within our universities and college.



PC:

- a) Our proposed frailty and concussion legislation are tools that would help increase mobility. We have also introduced the Pressure Sores Accountability Act. We have already proposed revisions to the Homes for Special Care Act on March 30, 2021. We have had a focus on long-term care from the beginning with a detailed Dignity for Seniors plan which we announced well before the election was called.
- b) The PC Party is committed to a clinical health services plan. This setup will make physiotherapy in long-term care easier, and work towards solving the issues that plague our healthcare system, so people can access what they need. We are also committed to reviewing the disability claims process, which includes workers compensation and long-term disability. We know that approximately 65% of all complaints to the human rights commission are from failure to accommodate someone in the workplace.
- c) The PC Party knows that processes need to start in Junior High and High School. Underrepresented populations need to be engaged in opportunities to learn and shadow about these positions. Additionally, we are committed to meeting with Dalhousie and other stakeholders to create processes that are more equitable.

NDP:

- a) An NDP government would make physiotherapy services part of the standard of care for all long-term care facilities. As we have proposed in the legislature, the NDP is committed to making physiotherapy services part of the home care program.
- b) The NDP recognizes that retention has become a serious issue across the spectrum of health care providers. An NDP government would respect all health care providers and within the framework of free collective bargaining, pay people what they are worth. While retention is the top priority for maintaining a high quality health care workforce, an NDP government would carefully consider recruitment proposals from the Physiotherapy Association as well as suggesting that recruitment of students from underrepresented and marginalized communities be part of the strategies to create equitable access to services.
- c) An NDP government would work with those communities and with Dalhousie to adopt the lessons learned in decades of programming to ensure more equitable representation in professional programs. Time and resources are needed before a potential student reaches the application stage, with targeted recruitment and transition programs for those who are accepted to ensure they are successful in their education.



3: AGING

The results of physiotherapy services include improving balance, preventing falls, and easing pain. Of particular importance currently is ensuring timely access to physiotherapy to address the decline in people's functional abilities, especially where they were accelerated due to isolation and limited access during the pandemic.

- a) How, both in terms of directing funding and policy, will you ensure physiotherapy services are better utilized to support our aging population?
- b) What specifically will you do to ensure physiotherapy services are available to those within long-term care settings?
- c) What specifically will you do to ensure physiotherapy services are available to those who are able to age in place at home, such as public/private partnerships?
- d) What changes will you make to home care services to ensure physiotherapy is included as priority for those who need it?

Liberal:

The Liberal government is investing \$96.5 million in new long-term care beds and facilities to better serve residents, their families and for staff who care for residents and for those who provide health services in long-term care.

The Rankin Government believes that seniors and individuals who require care should be able to receive a broad range of services and supports in their community while remaining in their homes for as long as possible. Nova Scotia's budget for continuing care supports, including both home care and long-term care now stands at over **\$1 billion annually**, the highest level of investment in history.

Our government recently invested in enhancements to the Caregiver Benefit Program, extending access to services that allow Nova Scotians to stay in their homes longer while receiving appropriate care. We have also improved access to Home Care services by adjusting the low-income threshold for home care, making supports for low-income seniors more affordable which allows them to remain in their homes to receive care. Our government has worked with our federal partners to provide an additional \$3.05 million per year for these programs to improve access to home care for an additional 1600 Nova Scotians per year.

Age Friendly Community Grants program will support organizations who are working to help older Nova Scotians lead healthy and active lives and stay involved in their communities. These projects will help older Nova Scotians overcome social isolation, and help them stay active, healthy and engaged in their communities.



PC:

- a) *NSPA Note: An answer to this question was not specifically given.*
- b) We know how important physiotherapy services are in the long-term care setting. One of our MLAs Barbara Adams volunteered at a long-term care property during COVID-19 and was part of the panel that created the white paper that was submitted to MLAs and the expert panel for long-term care to increase staffing immediately in long-term care facilities. We also recognize the difference in salary equivalency across facilities.
- c) Our Frailty legislation will reveal and reduce the inequities present in acute care, home care, and long-term care. Additionally, our commitment to expanding Telehealth will also play a role in providing care to seniors, when appropriate, virtually.
- d) Our PC Party recognizes that funding has been cut steadily over the past eight years while at the same time, the emergency medical services have been funded to go around and lift people when they have a fall at home. The PC Party believes people need assisted devices, mobility aids, and physiotherapy treatment in the home to age safely in and not just emergency services with lengthy wait times. Additionally, we are committed to properly staffing the homes to ensure that care is delivered, but also that people are identified for physiotherapy.

NDP:

- a) An NDP government will ask the Department of Seniors to take the lead in reviewing this question with your association and other departments. This can help ensure that the SHIFT Strategy's reach and effectiveness are broadened. It can also be addressed by asking Community Links for their assessment of how the Falls Prevention Strategy can be improved.
- b) This will be part of the improved standards of care established by an NDP government for long-term care.
- c) An NDP government will ensure that physiotherapy is available as part of the services provided by the Home Care program. We will discuss with your association and with physiotherapists at the community level, the most effective way to ensure that physiotherapy services for home care clients are provided in a consistent and timely manner. This may mean a planned transition to the public sector for a number of physiotherapists
- d) See answer above.

4: 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 avoid 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?

Liberal:

We value the role of physiotherapists and the increased capacity they provide for primary healthcare teams. A re-elected Rankin Government is committed to engaging in dialogue on ways that physiotherapists can become more integrated in the delivery of primary healthcare in Nova Scotia. In 2016, the Nova Scotia College of Physicians and Surgeons recommended doctors cut in half how much opioids they prescribe for chronic pain. Methods for reducing the number of prescriptions for pain medication and toward alternative therapies for pain reduction and management is something that our government would be open to discussing with the Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association. Measures that serve to improve the health of Nova Scotians and prevent addiction and social issues that may arise due to substance abuse are topics that the Liberal Party would like to discuss further.

PC:

- a) The PC Party is eager to have allied health professionals excluded from the Seniors' Advisory Council of Nova Scotia (previously the Group of IX). We will open this up to include allied health professionals. Additionally, our previously mentioned frailty legislation will have to collaborate with everyone in these sectors.
- b) At this point, no physiotherapist has been hired in any collaborative health centre. We will ensure they become part of the health care model.
- c) The PC Party recognizes that the previous government allowed the chronic pain in Dartmouth to close. A PC government will establish a new Chronic Illness Treatment and Prevention Program that focuses funding on an in-home treatment model for patients with chronic illnesses, based on the INSPIRED model for COPD patients. The PC Party is also committed to removing the sales tax on assisted devices and mobility aids. We also recognize the importance of increasing access to assisted devices and mobility aids when discharged from the hospital. The previous government has focused on increasing time at home, but not physiotherapy services.



NDP:

- a) 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.
- b) The NDP observed the failure of the top-down approach taken by the Liberal government toward collaborative care. Many health care providers and their professional associations support collaborative care and prefer to work in such a setting. An NDP government would foster rather than impose this model of care, listening carefully to the views and evidence in each community where a collaborative care team or clinic is being established. An NDP government will view each complementary health care provider, including physiotherapists, as one of the providers through whom people can access primary care. An NDP government will invest in community health centres dedicated to primary care, and work with the full range of complementary health professions to gain the best value from their skills by integrating them into the spectrum of care that is provided.
- c) 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.

5: CONFIDENCE

During the COVID pandemic, locally owned private practice physiotherapy clinics experienced substantial financial hardship due to increased costs, decreased capacity and reduced consumer confidence during the three waves of this public health crisis. The province instituted a number of initiatives that supported businesses from March 2020 until present day.

- a) If elected, what will your government do to support these vital service providers as they continue to recover from the financial impact of the pandemic over the next 24-36 months?
- b) How will you actively assist the NSPA in returning confidence to Nova Scotians who do not seek treatment due to concerns regarding the COVID virus?
- c) 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?

Liberal:

There are a number of programs to support small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In May, an additional investment of \$17.2 million in the Small Business Impact Grant, Part 3, program to support small businesses affected by the ongoing provincial COVID-19 restrictions.



Nova Scotia has emerged as a global leader in effectively managing COVID-19. Our testing strategy is innovative and nimble. Well over 1 million Covid tests have been completed in the Province. In addition to primary assessment centres, our innovative testing streams include pop-up testing centres, mobile units to assist with outbreaks and rural access, and on-site testing for workers in higher-risk settings.

We are currently leading the country in COVID-19 vaccinations with over 63% of the total population now fully vaccinated. Our phased reopening plan is progressing and as Nova Scotians see things returning to a state resembling that of pre-COVID-19, their confidence will grow. During phase 4 we can continue to have more social connections and access to expanded services, activities and events. Phase 4 will allow more travel into Nova Scotia with less restrictions and increased visitation with long-term care residents.

During phase 5 we start to move into the new normal of living during COVID-19, including easing public health measures. Phase 5 looks at how public health measures will continue to keep our communities safe. This will include further plans to support businesses that were impacted by closures and campaigns in relation to the Safe Restart.

The Nova Scotia Liberal Party agrees with Doctors Nova Scotia in stating that the requirement of some private insurance providers for patients to receive a referral from a physician prior to treatment is unnecessary, costly, and inconvenient. We are interested in exploring options to reduce barriers for patients requiring physiotherapy treatment.

PC:

- a) Our measures mentioned above will give all allied health professionals a seat at the table and give their work the importance it deserves.
- b) A PC government is dedicated to working with all stakeholders and ensuring that the importance of the work physiotherapists and allied health professionals do is not underestimated anymore. The previous government has shown how non-important they think these services are. We know COVID-19 has resulted in every Nova Scotian having a reduced step count, and this has increased the frailty of many. Considering that workplace disability and back pain is the leading reason for not working, we know physiotherapy is needed to keep people fit and at work. As Dr. Ken Rockwood says: “movement is the best medicine.” We recognize that allied health professionals need to be utilized more to help address the physical and mental health needs of Nova Scotians.
- c) We will introduce legislation that removes this requirement.

NDP:

- a) The NDP will keep working with Jagmeet Singh and the federal NDP on a coordinated effort to secure fair financial support for vital businesses like physiotherapy that are threatened with closure due to the pandemic. An NDP government will consider the door open to hearing evidence of the need for further support.



- b) This is part of a wider issue as the number of Nova Scotians who are fully vaccinated reaches 75% and then 90%. An NDP government strives to rely on the advice of Public Health physicians rather than substitute political judgement for the judgement of highly trained medical experts. The high level of public confidence in Dr. Strang and his team is going to be the basis for restoring public confidence in resuming activities such as a visit to one's physiotherapist.
- c) The NDP has long worked with Doctors Nova Scotia to eliminate this kind of unnecessary requirement which simply wastes the time of physicians while delaying therapy for your clients. An NDP government will raise this issue directly with the insurance industry and, if necessary, consider disincentives for them.

CONCLUSION

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