

Info Sheet – Seniors’ Coalition

February 1st, 2021

Health Care

A. *“If there is true commitment to an **Aging in Place** model then this needs to change. The Coalition asks:”*

1) *“That a no cost vaccinations program be instituted that targets illnesses that impact seniors’ healthy living (flu, covid, pneumonia, shingles);”*

A robust vaccination system serves to not only reassure seniors (and others) that they are protected from illness but has the potential to save lives and healthcare dollars. In 2018, then-MHA Gerry Rogers called in the House for the government to cover the cost of pharmacists to deliver the flu shot for free, through our universal healthcare system. This is a promise made by a PC government in 2015 but then not delivered by either Liberals or Conservatives. The NL NDP supports making vaccinations part of our healthcare system.

2) *“That provision be made for timely and affordable access to cognitive testing, increased funding for adult day care, and support for at home dementia care;”*

The NL NDP is a long-time supporter of universal publicly-funded and administered home care, recognizing the importance of an Aging in Place approach. Our program would have legislated home care standards, and more resources for monitoring to ensure client and caregiver safety. This has been official NDP policy since 2008. We recognize that at-home dementia care and an increased availability of adult day care would relieve pressure on caregivers while allowing patients to stay in familiar surroundings. Timely and affordable access to cognitive testing allows for early detection of early-stage dementia conditions, which in turn facilitates earlier intervention.

We would work with seniors’ groups and health care workers to ensure that the unique needs of dementia patients are addressed in a timely manner through these programs and that they rapidly receive the care they need.

3) *“For increased access to vision, auditory, and dental care, including dental care for residents of long-term care;”*

We support the re-instatement of the dental program for seniors that the Liberals cut in 2016. See our campaign announcement here:

<https://www.nl.ndp.ca/post/new-democrats-want-dental-coverage-for-newfoundland-and-labrador-seniors>

Health care should extend to all parts of a person’s body and mind.

Appropriate vision and auditory care are essential for anyone’s day-to-day communications. We are committed to finding ways to make glasses,

hearing aids, and other assistive devices affordable and available to all who need them.

- 4) *“Review and increase the ceilings for home care and home improvement services that would have a positive impact on older persons to age in place;”*

As stated above, the NL NDP is unequivocally committed to a universal, publicly-funded and -administered home care system, where the ceilings are determined by an individual’s need rather than an arbitrary bureaucratic limit.

We have often in the past spoken about the good sense it makes for home improvements, especially accessibility modifications and home energy retrofits, that make it possible for people stay in their homes longer and keep the cost of home owning affordable.

- 5) *“That action be taken to resolve the lack of family doctors in the Province. The NL Medical Association has stated that 90,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are without a family doctor. There can be no success with any **Aging in Place** direction unless there is an accompaniment of community based medical services;”*

The NL NDP has stated for a long time that we need a new provincial physician recruitment and retention strategy and human resource plan. The evidence clearly indicates that more measures are needed to stop the drain of MUN graduates and international physicians from the province. We would look at the need for more meaningful incentives, and different delivery models, such as more team-based clinics, and increased access to locum relief when needed. Any physician retention and recruitment strategy should also include resources to help communities encourage physicians to stay; as this would differ between communities, we would consult with communities, doctors and patient representative groups to develop a meaningful model.

- 6) *“That there be changes to the medicare billing system to enable other community based medical care providers to direct bill;”*

Properly funding nurse practitioners, for example and incorporating them into healthcare delivery, would be of enormous benefit to patients, communities, and doctors everywhere in the province. The NL NDP is absolutely committed to exploring opportunities for the full scope of practice of Nurse Practitioners and other health professionals to work in the province under the publicly-funded healthcare system.

- 7) *“That all political parties commit to implementing the recommendations of the Health Accord Task Force with a focused government policy direction of **Aging in Place**.”*

While we wait with anticipation to see the recommendations, we are very supportive of the concept of Aging in Place. We hope that government’s policy direction will be supported by a budget allotment, but have concerns about whatever may be coming to our current public services, let

alone their logical extensions, once the Dame Moya Green report is received.

- 8) *“In September of 2019, the Seniors’ Advocate released her report “Long May Your Big Jib Draw: Setting Sail” and called for a paradigm shift in how seniors care is directed, managed, supported, and implemented in this Province. What and where is the commitment to action the recommendations of this report?”*

In “Long May Your Big Jib Draw: Setting Sail” the Seniors’ Advocate draws a comprehensive picture of issues affecting seniors in this province, from dementia to homelessness to issues surrounding employment. The NL NDP supports the Seniors’ Advocate office in its work towards societal equality for this growing and important segment of our society. The 25 areas for action are in many cases simply long-overdue reviews of existing (and often out-dated) policies, programs, and legislation. Our commitment to many of these is outlined in our current election platform; these include advancing inclusion for people with disabilities, the investing in home care and improving access to dental care. We would certainly endorse the recommendations in this report and will work hard to ensure they are acted upon.

Personal Care Homes

- B. *“In July of 2016, the report of Deloitte “**Provincial Home Support Program Review**” was filed with the Government and subsequently a decision was taken to action all of the recommendations. In 2020 this Coalition filed multiple recommendations for a change to a draft revision of the Personal Home Care Standards and are still waiting to review revisions to the Long term Care Standards. Will the Government (your Government) commit to implementing these recommended revisions and accelerating the review and implementation of revised standards of care for long term care?”*

The NL NDP is committed to accelerating the review process and ensuring that any government listens carefully to every concern that stakeholders such as the NL Seniors’ Coalition raise regarding personal home care standards.

- C. *“Will your Government, if elected, push the Federal government to establish a National Seniors’ Strategy? The Coalition has been calling for such a strategy now for well over five (5) years that would guide and direct how seniors’ care is provided in this country and then universally across the Provinces. What is your party’s commitment to this?”*

Yes, we would join our federal counterparts in their effort to lobby the federal government for something that we desperately need.

Electricity Costs

- D. *“The impending increase in the cost of heat and light still remains a major worry for seniors and other persons on fixed incomes. What is (or will be) the plan to set electricity rates at \$0.13 per kilowatt hour as has been promised?”*

The NL NDP is committed to keeping electricity rates affordable. We need to engage with the Public Utilities Board (PUB) and develop a realistic mitigation plan. Previous governments have ignored the important role of the PUB as a protector of consumer rights. We opposed the Conservative misuse of the PUB when they were ramming Muskrat Falls legislation through the House of Assembly. So far, the Liberals have yet to offer a plan to deal with the dramatic increase in energy costs. No one can afford the rate shock that Muskrat Falls will create when the power starts to flow.

“People living on a low or fixed income should not have to worry about being left out in the cold. The NL NDP would provide a home heating fuel rebate for seniors and low income households. You can read our recent news release about that here: <https://www.nl.ndp.ca/post/ndp-will-reduce-heating-costs-for-newfoundlanders-and-labradorians>

The NL NDP would invest in an energy efficiency program that offers direct assistance to lower and middle income households. Providing funding for retrofitting will achieve two goals, create much needed skilled jobs while helping families lower their energy bills.”

Cost of Goods

- E. *“It has been stated that the Government is keeping its eye on the cost of normal everyday goods, including food, and there is no evidence to suggest price gouging. However, one only needs to go to the supermarket to see that prices are creeping up daily. Items that cost \$1.69 or even 2 for \$9.00 and now \$2.29 or 2 for \$10.00. In addition, the quantity of products has become smaller while the price has increased. What action will you direct to control the cost of every day essential goods for the consumer?”*

A substantial portion of the cost of any goods in Newfoundland and Labrador is related to shipping. The NL NDP is opposed to profiteering of any sort and commits to seniors and others in the province to support regional fully accessible public transit systems which will allow provide affordable access to work and education, stimulate the economy, and reduce congestion and pollution while making it easier to get to stores with lower prices.

The NL NDP is keenly aware that prices are increasing while low or fixed incomes cannot keep pace. This is why we are proposing moves such as reinstating the home heating fuel rebate and increasing the minimum wage to \$15/hr, with the eventual goal of reaching a living wage in the province.

Newfoundland and Labrador needs an aggressive plan for food security and to address poverty and hunger. The province has to do significantly better in addressing our reliance on the high volume of food imports. The NL NDP would engage with farmers, fish harvesters, food experts and local organisations such as Food First NL to develop a food security plan to strengthen the province's food system. The NL NDP will invest in developing our food production system including support for a co-operative marketing agency, a cold storage network, mentorships, paid internships, a farm buy-back program leasing working farms to young farmers, support for homesteaders, and a processing fund.

Locally grown food will be cheaper and more accessible, since the cost of shipping via the ferry will not be factored in, and this plan will help ease some of the financial and logistical burdens that local food producers have to struggle with and pay for.

More than half of our seniors have low enough incomes to qualify for the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and many of the struggle with high housing costs. The NL NDP would invest in the creation of more affordable and accessible seniors' rental units as well as making rental supplements portable.

Too many people can't afford the medication they need. If you can't take your prescribed medicine, you get even sicker, costing our healthcare system millions of dollars a year. While Liberal and Conservatives both provincially and federally have implemented patchwork solutions, only the NDP has consistently called for a national public pharmacare program. Any Newfoundland and Labrador government must demand federal actions to establish pharmacare. Affordable medicines for all must be part of the Canada Health Act. The NL NDP would also review current provincial programs with the goal of making medications affordable for more people."

F. *"In addition to controlling the cost of essential goods, the Coalition asks that changes to the provincial tax brackets and increases in non-refundable tax credits, including pension non-refundable tax credits for older persons be implemented so that more income can be retained for personal living and thus redirected into the provincial economy."*

The NL NDP is committed to re-evaluating and reforming our current provincial taxation system to make it fairer. We believe that those who make more money should pay a bit more in taxes, while we lighten the burden on those who cannot pay any more.