

Coalition Meeting, Honourable Tom Osbourne
Minister of Health & Community Services
September 28, 2022, 1:00 PM, Confederation Building West Block

In attendance: Ann-Marie Cleary, Sharon Penney, Patricia Parsons, Robert Howard, Helena Bragg, Jon Soper, Winston Fiander, Don Byrne, Roland Wells, Maurice Brewster, Minister Tom Osborne, Dena Waddleton, Annette Bridgeman and Susan Elliot.

Ann-Marie Cleary, Chair for the meeting, introduced herself and her role as a Board Director with the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Sector Pensioners Association. Ann-Marie informed the Minister that Sharron Callahan was not well and she was following health directions. She next thanked Mr. Osborne for the opportunity to meet with him and his staff. Then she invited the members of the Coalition to introduce themselves, identify the group they represent and the number of members they have.

Ann-Marie informed the Minister that the Coalition of Seniors, Retirees and Pensioners request that the government establish a **National Seniors Strategy**. She commented that our government has not made a commitment on this strategy despite it having national implications. She sought a commitment from the Minister to support this initiative.

Mr. Osborne assured her that the Department of Health would engage at the Federal level, through the engagement process. He further spoke of our Seniors Advocate Office and how the Health Accord has a focus on seniors. He informed the group that other provinces are looking at what we have done here, hoping to use our experience to inform their planning. Minister Osborne indicated that the Department Health would assist in the development of a national plan as the process unfolds. Mr. Osborne indicated that the Health Accord that Newfoundland and Labrador is currently working with is 178 pages long and is therefore available in an online format only. Maurice Brewster requested a paper copy of the document and the minister said that could be arranged and sent to him.

Next Ann-Marie broached the topic of **Pharmacare** and in particular the Newfoundland and Labrador government's position on such a program. In response, Minister Osborne indicated that in November the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Health had discussions with other Departments of Health in British Columbia. At that time additional funding was further discussed. Nationally there is a desire for all provinces to be treated equitably, as the Pharmacare guidelines are developed. Jon Soper sought clarification around the universality of the Pharmacare program. Mr. Osborne indicated that our government fully supports the concept. He stated that 17 years ago the Newfoundland and Labrador Drug Plan was initiated. He now feels that there is more of an appetite for this sort of a program from a federal perspective.

Roland Wells commented that Canada is the only country with a universal Medicare plan that does not have a universal Pharmacare program. He further stated that a well-managed universal care program will save money in the long run from a health perspective. When medications are taken on time and in the correct dosages, diseases have a shorter duration and are often less severe. Other countries who already have such a plan can be looked to when formulating a Canadian plan. We can avail of others expertise, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Minister Osborne indicated that it is important that any plan be sustainable and that Federal funding extend beyond the initial stages.

Ann-Marie Cleary, addressed the Blueprint for the Health Accord for Ageing at Home.

1) She indicated that not everybody needs to see a doctor for everything, she cites that some medical practitioners such as nurse practitioners and pharmacists are not practicing to their full scope of practice, if this were permitted the demand on physicians would drastically be reduced.

2) She spoke of the blister packaging or compliance packaging as being an area of economic inequality for seniors. Blister packaging is available only in 28-day format, while drugs are usually prescribed for a month. These two do not align and those availing of blister packaging for convenience and compliance reasons are being disadvantaged, in that they need an extra prescription to account for the days missed using the 28-day dispensing format. In addition, the Blister Packaging option is only available in one 28-day supply, not like the 90-day supply that is available for non-blister packed option. Minister Osbourne will speak with the Newfoundland and Labrador Pharmacy Board about this concern.

3) Ann-Marie brought forward the issue of building code standards as a way to ensure that ageing seniors can remain in their homes longer. Simple changes to the building code for wider doors and hallways, paddle handle door knobs, and wider light switches for example would mean that houses would not need major refits to remain a liveable option longer.

4) The Coalition asked for the Government's position on vaccines such as the Shingles Vaccine and high dose flu shots, our concern is with accessibility and affordability. The Minister indicated that some vaccines are not provided universally because of budgetary restrictions and the practicality of implementation of a specific program. He indicated a willingness to review the program policy to see if it can be tweaked for expansion.

5) The status of the Dementia Care Action Plan was questioned. Dena Waddleton advised the group that the action plan for dementia care is in the draft document stage. It was developed after input was sought from caregivers across the continuum of care. The Dementia Action Council, which is composed of representatives from different fields of expertise, including families and caregivers, will make sure that needs are met, and that plans for care are enacted once developed. Two meetings have been completed, with two to three more planned to finalize the Action Plan, after which it will go through the formal approval process. Ms. Waddleton reaffirmed that the home first approach is the goal. The Home Dementia Program came into existence in late 2020 and was piloted in Central Health with two Nurse Practitioners and one Physician to provide care at home for severe dementia patients. It is scheduled to expand to Western this year. Part of the overall plan is to expand the capacity of care homes to meet the needs of patients with needs that cannot be addressed adequately in the home setting. Currently the Department of Health has three active Requests for Proposals (RFP). The first is for how to provide dementia care in Personal Care Homes. The second is how to provide dementia care in a day care setting. The third is how to provide restorative and low-level care, such as recovery from surgery in a supportive environment.

6) Roland Wells questioned the Minister as to when and if our government will establish care standards in Long Term Care Homes to ensure that seniors are not disaffected. In response Minister Osbourne assured the Coalition that our experience during COVID was not reflective of the central Canadian situation. We did a good job of protecting seniors living in congregate settings. Annette indicated that the standards are currently under review. Information was sought from a wide group of users and some changes in the standards were necessary after the information gathering stage especially since the COVID experience. Ann Marie Cleary requested a copy of the standards and questioned if the Coalition would be given the opportunity to review the Long-Term Care Standards before the Policy is written. Deena indicated that this could happen.

The Acting Chair, inquired how the government will address the situation of the low supply of certain drugs. Minister Osbourne told the Coalition members that low drug supply has not had a significant impact on the drug supply in this province. If hoarding of drugs does not occur our supply is adequate to meet our needs. Annette indicated that there is a formula in place to address this situation if it should arise. She informed us that there are regular, weekly meetings with other Health Departments and other stakeholders that identify potential supply issues and problem solve around them.

The next topic for discussion was the Federal plan to address oral care. Jon Soper indicated that the Liberal / NDP have introduced a dental care plan for students, that will expand to cover seniors and eventually to cover all. He asked for clarification as to the Department of Health's plan for dental care. Minister Osbourne said the Department would embrace a plan that included seniors, but as of yet he doesn't have any details on what that plan may look like. He stated that he hopes it would compliment the existing Newfoundland and Labrador plan, which is free and universal up to the age of 12.

Ms. Cleary next addressed the topic of digital services. She informed us that many services that are being offered as digital services only are discriminatory to seniors and those living in rural parts of the province where connectivity is an issue, or where a particular skill set is not available. If a senior does not own a computer or is not able to navigate a site they are missing out on opportunities. If a senior cannot renew their license or book an appointment because they live in a non-connected zone their lifestyle will be impacted. Seniors are identifying the proliferation of digital services as a serious concern. Minister Osbourne will discuss this with Minister Stoodley. Ann-Marie acknowledged that the Coalition has been in touch with Minister Stoodley about the use of computers for signing in for blood collection services at Major's Path and that we have heard back from Minister Stoodley and the Acting Chair of Eastern Health.

Roland Wells offered to preview any guidelines or legislation that is being proposed with an eye to eliminating any ageism speak. Minister Osbourne agrees that it is important to remove ageist language and will be cognizant of it when policies are being drafted.

Bob Howard questioned the government's commitment to the Aging at Home philosophy and its stated intent that it be the first option for seniors. Yet despite this a lot of development is occurring with Long Term Care Homes. Minister Osbourne reiterated that Home First is the preferred option, it is cheaper to keep a senior at home than it is to have them in care. He did point out that there will always be some need for Long Term Care because of extenuating physical or medical circumstances. Annette indicated that 5000 people have used the Home First program. The Regional Health Authorities (RHA) complete an assessment and arrange client specific programs. She did state that the Home Support Program needs significant improvements. She also referenced the Home Modification Program available through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing as a place where seniors can get some assistance with home maintenance and renovations to enable them to remain at home longer.

On behalf of the Coalition, Ann-Marie Cleary thanked the Minister and his staff for the meeting and their input, and offered our support and cooperation in future endeavors. She also asked that they meet again in the new year and the Minister said "yes" we would.

Recorded by

Sharon Penney