

## **Newfoundland and Labrador Coalition of Pensioners, Retirees, and Seniors Associations**

### **Questions to NL Political Leaders**

#### **HEALTH ACCORD:**

In 2004, the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments signed a 10 year agreement called the Health Accord. In this accord, the Prime Minister and the Premiers recommitted to the Canada Health Act and its 5 requirements:

- (a) Public administration.
- (b) Universal access.
- (c) Comprehensive coverage.
- (d) Accessibility without extra charge or discrimination
- (e) Portability across provinces

No talks have taken place since the expiration of the accord in 2014. The Prime Minister (of the day) has refused to meet with the premiers together on this matter. To date, the proposals that have been put forward would cut some \$36 billion from the amount of funding to provinces. This is abandonment by the Federal Government of its legislated and moral responsibility to ensure universal access to health care regardless of where people live and their ability to pay.

#### **Question:**

**If elected, will a Government under your leadership ensure that the Premiers and the Prime Minister meet to negotiate a new health accord and will it maintain the 5 principles of the Canada Health Act as a part of the New Health Accord?**

#### **SENIORS:**

Many Newfoundland and Labrador seniors cannot afford political dithering while they are left to face tough questions like “can I afford to take my prescription medication” or “buy my groceries” or “will I receive the care I need”. The demographic shift has already begun and today we are barely able to meet the health care needs of our aging population.

#### **Question:**

**What will you and your Government do to ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador seniors receive the care they need and deserve?**

## **POVERTY:**

It is a well-known fact that the entire community pays and will pay for poverty; we pay increased health care costs; there are higher crime rates; and, there are higher demands for community, social and charitable services. There is a false sense of economy in failing to act. Paying for those negative effects of poverty costs much more than dealing with it directly. It is time (to use a metaphor) to stop mopping the floors and fixing the hole in the roof. This is a critical issue in communities across this province.

### **Question:**

**Would your Government agree to a tri-partisan collaboration and action in addressing the root causes of poverty among seniors?**

## **DISPOSABLE INCOME FOR SENIORS:**

As we know, disposable income of older persons is diminishing as time goes on. Income is being eroded by inflation at a rate much higher than increases in income, especially where that income is fixed or not subject to even the basic cost of living. Our older citizens built this country and our Province and expect and deserve to live in dignity as they age. In recent years, and even now, the future is bleak, as we have seen hydro rates in this Province increase steadily over the past few years and are now predicted to increase by as much as 66% by 2020. Everyone seems to be disturbed that seniors, with limited and fixed financial resources, are having to put up with increased assessment of their properties by municipal governments, increases in the cost of electricity and increases in the cost of groceries while, at the same time being instructed as to how to eat and live healthily. Talk about stress, fear of speaking up, and frustration!

### **Question:**

**What would your Government do to alleviate some of this stress and financial burden on low income seniors to help them age at home. It is simply not good enough to say that there are energy rebate programs or home repair assistance programs or a low income seniors benefit, if those programs are non-aligned with the cost of living or if they move the low income person above the threshold for service and they lose other benefits (rent subsidy, drug card, etc.) forcing them further into poverty.**

## **POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY:**

On October 15, 2015, the Minister of Seniors, Wellness, and Social Development took pride that 43,000 seniors in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador would receive the enhanced low income seniors' benefit. While it is acknowledged that the Government should be proud that there is an enhanced low income seniors benefit program, it is absolutely appalling that they are totally missing the terrible fact that 43,000 seniors in this Province are living in a level of poverty where this support program is having to be provided. Statistics Canada 2015 gives the population of Newfoundland and Labrador as 527,756, of which 97,269 are over the age of 65. That means that the 43,000 persons to

receive the low income seniors' benefit is 44% of this province's population over the age of 65. This is shocking.

**Question:**

**Comments, please, and will you, if you form the Government, sit down with those in the know, those representing seniors organizations, to revisit the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy for a renewed focus and direction in addressing poverty amongst seniors?**

**AGING AT HOME:**

Aging in today's Newfoundland and Labrador is now focused on "the amount and quality of life we have yet to live" rather than "growing older, i.e. how many years we have left to live". A new mind set has taken hold. How we age has changed as we are living longer lives than ever in our history. Today many seniors want to age at home and in their community rather than in an institutional setting. It is much more cost effective to age at home, but it takes courage and stamina by a Government to commit to that policy direction and to work towards carrying it out. Such a direction will cost money up front but in the long term will pay dividends as our older citizens will be more productive and happier. Government will likewise benefit by a reduction in the overwhelming costs of institutional care as those beds will then only be needed and used by those frail seniors who require that level of care.

**Question:**

**What will your Government do to ensure seniors are able to age at home rather than in long term care?**

**HOME FIRST POLICY:**

Health authorities in other parts of Canada have "home first" policies which do everything in acute care to coordinate with community resources to provide the first option as discharge home rather than nursing home. Those health authorities, like ones in Nova Scotia, have reported as much as 80% success in getting patients back to their own homes. It means beefing up our community support resources.

**Question:**

**Will your Government embark upon a plan of home first as a policy which all health authorities must adhere to and report on an annual basis to Government? This way, all persons admitted to a nursing home will have had every possible option to avoid institutional placement as a first resort.**

**PRIVATIZATION OF NURSING HOMES:**

**Question:**

**Given that the operating budgets of nursing homes are estimated at 80% staffing costs, how will your Government protect the quality of staffing care to our seniors in a system which will be forced to cut pay in order to provide profit?**

## **SENIORS' ADVOCATE:**

Time and time again, seniors are treated as less deserving citizens as there is a perception, whether we wish to admit it or not, that the basic services for quality of life are not needed, as they will soon die off, so why invest? There is no watch over at-home care services; dental services are only available if you can afford to pay; home repairs have to be fronted by the senior; assistance to stay at home when health is declining is minimal at best; standards of care in long term care facilities are non-existent and now we have to trust that companies who are selling expertise in elder care and facility development for seniors will not put profit ahead of quality care.

### **Question:**

**All political parties have advised they will invest in the establishment of a Seniors' Advocate, if elected. What is the timeline for you to take this action? (all parties)**