

**END POVERTY NOVA SCOTIA NETWORK**

**SURVEY OF NOVA SCOTIA PARTY LEADERS**

**ON POVERTY REDUCTION**

**ELECTION 2017**

**PARTY RESPONSES**

*Please Note that Green Party Responses will be forwarded when received.*

*The Atlantica Party was not surveyed.*

## **ISSUE: IMPLEMENTING A POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY**

Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of poverty in Canada. This issue has been of concern to numerous service based organizations and anti-poverty advocacy groups, as well as to some politicians, for a number of years. Developing a poverty reduction strategy was the subject of a community based advocacy campaign in 2007 and 2008.

In response to a government appointed Poverty Reduction Working Group report (June 2008) recommending the development of a provincial poverty reduction strategy, in 2009, just prior to the election, the government of the day published what purported to be a poverty reduction strategy in a paper entitled *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity*.

Unfortunately this fell far short of all the recommendations in the Working Group report. Goals were not well developed or comprehensive enough, and there were no timelines, outcome measures, or reporting mechanisms. It also fell considerably short of other Poverty Reduction Strategies being developed in other provinces in Canada at the time (Newfoundland; Quebec) and those that have been developed since in every province and territory, with the exception of British Columbia.

*Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity* is not now to be found on the government website and so to all intents and purposes Nova Scotia does not have a Poverty Reduction Strategy at all. Rates of poverty have not declined since 2009 and we believe that a well developed comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and plan could and should form the basis for provincial government action to reduce and end poverty in Nova Scotia.

### **QUESTIONS**

Will you, in consultation with stakeholders, develop and implement a holistic, effective, and comprehensive poverty reduction plan with goals based on the social determinants of health, clear time lines, outcome measures and reporting mechanisms?

Over what time period will you do this?

## POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

Yes, a Liberal government will invest \$20 million over the next 4 years into a plan called **the Blueprint to End Poverty in Nova Scotia**. The objective will be to break down barriers preventing low-income Nova Scotians from improving their lives and it will target the root-causes of poverty.

Areas of focus will be:

- Community oriented innovation (ex. Expanding Inspiring Communities to additional communities)
- Employment and skills development
- Targeted initiatives to tackle barriers, such as the cost of transit, communication and education

### **NDP:**

*Poverty reduction is central to the NDP platform. The NDP commits to develop and implement – in consultation with stakeholders – a holistic, effective, and comprehensive poverty reduction plan with goals based on the social determinants of health, clear timelines, outcome measures and reporting mechanisms. The plan will form the foundation of our poverty reduction strategies, policies, and programs as government. The development of the plan will begin immediately upon forming government and will be completed within one year. The implementation process will follow with an expected roll-out of 3 years.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Jamie Ballie and the Nova Scotia PC party are presenting an optimistic, pro-growth agenda that focuses on rebuilding our province, creating jobs and getting Nova Scotians back to work. Voters are tired of governments with no vision that only focus on cuts.

If elected to form the next government on May 30th, we will be prepared to work with all stakeholders, including the End Poverty Nova Scotia Network, to discuss the idea of establishing a poverty reduction strategy.

## **ISSUE: TRANSFORMING THE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT AND INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Two years ago, the Nova Scotia government, through the Department of Community Services, embarked on a process to transform the Employment Support and Income Assistance program.

This transformation is long overdue.

ESIA regulations and policies exert a great deal of control over the daily lives of income assistance recipients, provide inadequate benefits that are well below any recognized measure of poverty, poor work incentives, limited educational or training programs and supports to facilitate transitions to employment, and the program fails to adequately meet the daily needs of clients with disabilities and other health issues.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Will you, in a timely fashion, proceed with ESIA transformation in ways that will, amongst other things, make social inclusion its overall goal, reduce regulatory and bureaucratic control over the daily lives of recipients, provide better support to meet the needs of people with disabilities or chronic health conditions and better work incentives/supports to enable viable transitions to employment or education?

Will you also introduce progressive increases to income assistance that will close the large gap between welfare incomes and the Market Basket Measure of poverty?  
Over what period of time will you complete this transformation?

## TRANSFORMING THE ESIA PROGRAM: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

Yes, a Liberal Government will transform the Employment Support and Income Assistance system. Starting in 2019-2020, a Liberal government will introduce a Standard Household Rate, which will substantially increase rates for all household types. All household types would receive the fixed maximum then additional increases for 2% for clients who are able to work and 5% for clients who are unable to work. The annual dollars will ramp up to coincide with the introduction to the standard household rate.

We will also introduce a new work incentive so Income Assistance clients who are able to work can keep more of their earnings. The new work incentive will allow clients to earn \$250 per month without a reduction in their Income Assistance and it will smooth out the rate at which Income Assistance is reduced once earnings exceed \$250 per month.

While we recognize 2019-2020 is a few years off, work is needed to train staff and create the supports and programming required for the new structure. We want the new structure to be about more than dollars. We want the focus to be about working with and empowering income assistance clients to be more independent.

We have been very fortunate to enjoy a strong working relationship with advocates throughout Transformation. We want to make sure consultations continue as we implement the Standard Household Rate, new work incentive, and the supportive programming.

### **NDP:**

*The NDP will proceed with ESIA transformation with the explicit purpose to make social inclusion an overall goal, to reduce regulatory and bureaucratic control over the daily lives of recipients, to provide better support to meet the needs of people with disabilities or chronic health conditions, and to develop effective incentives and supports to enable viable transitions to employment or education.*

When the NDP is elected to government, we will ensure that the long-awaited transformation leads to significant improvements in how social services are designed, delivered, and managed within the province. It is our intention to complete the transformation process within two years of forming government. *The NDP will introduce legislation to ensure that income assistance rates are adjusted annually to keep pace with the cost of living.*

The NDP, under the leadership of Gary Burrill, has already introduced bills to make sure that income assistance rates take into account the cost of purchasing Health Canada's National Nutritious Basket ([Bill 13](#)), and that Nova Scotians have the legal right to an adequate standard of living ([Bill 24](#)). *These measures will be implemented as soon as the NDP government is elected and the legislation is passed.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Nova Scotians need a break. High taxes, high power rates, and ever-increasing prices make it impossible for too many hardworking families to get ahead. A Progressive Conservative government will give families some much needed relief:

- We will cut taxes to get the cost of living down for thousands of Nova Scotians, starting with the Nova Scotians who need it the most.
- We will freeze the Seniors' Pharmacare cost-share ratio so governments can't make seniors pay more than their fair share.
- Under a Progressive Conservative government, there will be no tolls on our roads and highways.
- Nova Scotians already pay too many taxes. A Progressive Conservative government will not impose a carbon tax.
- We will make life more affordable by raising the Basic Personal Amount by up to \$3,000 for people with incomes below \$75,000. This one move will cut taxes for 500,000 Nova Scotians.

## **ISSUE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Housing that is affordable means not spending more than 30% of household income on housing. In Nova Scotia such households include a high proportion of lone parent households, one-person households, recent immigrants, persons with a disability, Aboriginal-led households, youth households, and senior-led households.

In Halifax (HRM), households with incomes of \$29,566 or less in 2016 (20% or over 30,000 households) were not able to afford average market rents. In 2014, Metro Regional Housing Authority reported there were approximately 1,181 seniors, 666 families and 386 individuals waiting for public housing. Households with low to moderate income households (\$29,567-\$52,266 per year) also face affordability challenges.

In rural areas of Nova Scotia similar problems of affordability exist, but little evidence based research has been conducted on the problem.

With high rates of low income, especially in communities with high levels of precarious employment and unemployment, unaffordable housing appears to be a growing problem.

An aging population, especially in rural areas, also means that maintaining and repairing older homes or the ability to find appropriate alternative affordable accommodation that is safe, accessible and affordable is a problem for people with disabilities and for low income seniors.

Non-market housing alternatives (public housing; cooperative housing; rent supplements) can provide safe, accessible and affordable places to live, but the supply is not meeting the need and the existing non-profit social housing stock requires upgrading and repair.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Will you, in consultation with stakeholders, adopt an affordable housing plan that increases the supply of safe, affordable housing that meets peoples' needs?

In particular, will you strengthen the non-profit affordable housing sector, upgrade the existing stock of social housing, and seek ways to increase rent supplements?

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING: PARTY RESPONSES:

### **Liberals:**

We recognize safe and affordable housing is the foundation for economic security and better social outcomes. That is why one of our first actions in government was to unlock the \$42 million in the Deferred Federal Contribution the previous government had refused to invest and add an additional \$10 million in provincial dollars.

That investment, along with the recent cost-matched \$75 million agreement with Ottawa, will have allowed us to reduce the waitlist by 20% through 2017-2018. The cost-matched \$75 million agreement with Ottawa will allow us to invest in:

- Home repairs for over 950 households
- Over 400 rent supplements
- 5.2 million to enhance second-stage housing for victims of domestic violence
- 18.2 million to maintain and renovate our social housing stock
- 8.6 million in seniors' affordable housing

Traditionally Nova Scotia has relied on dollars from Ottawa for affordable housing initiatives. Our government is going to put \$18 million of provincial dollars into reducing the current waitlist by an additional 30% starting 2018-2019. This will mean that since 2016-2017 close to 2000 Nova Scotians will have come off the waitlist and found affordable housing.

In our platform, we outline our commitment to work with Ottawa on a National Housing strategy and ensure that Nova Scotia gets our fair share of the \$11.2 billion of housing dollars outlined in the 2017 federal budget.

### **NDP:**

*With stakeholder consultation, the NDP government will develop and implement an affordable housing plan to increase the supply of safe and affordable housing.*

We will strengthen the non-profit affordable housing sector, upgrade the existing stock of social housing, and increase rent supplements. The NDP will introduce legislation to ensure that affordable housing is available and protected.

*Under the leadership of Gary Burrill, the NDP has already introduced two bills on affordable housing. [Bill 14](#) would ensure that affordable housing built with government financial assistance must remain affordable for a minimum of 15 years. [Bill 9](#) would make explicit that the Halifax Regional Municipality has the power to negotiate development agreements that include affordable housing as a public benefit. When the NDP forms government, these bills will be passed as soon as possible.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Jamie Baillie and the PC party have an optimistic, pro-growth agenda that focuses on rebuilding our province, creating jobs and getting Nova Scotians back to work. Voters are tired of governments with no vision that only focus on cuts.

A PC government will assist low-income seniors to continue living in their homes with dignity by increasing funding home repairs. We will also enact the Safer Homes Act to make sure housing authorities make repairs to homes in a timely manner.

One thing we know for sure is that we need to rebuild Nova Scotia, especially in rural areas.

The PC jobs plan will grow the economy and create jobs by investing \$1 billion in roads, bridges and other public infrastructure.

We will work with the federal government and others so our new infrastructure investments are matched to boost the total of the Rebuild Nova Scotia Fund to \$2 billion.

## **ISSUE: HOMELESSNESS**

Homelessness has been a longstanding and visible problem in metropolitan Halifax where a number of shelters run by charities have struggled for some time to accommodate people, including some families, who otherwise would be sleeping on the street. Homelessness is also becoming an increasingly visible problem in Cape Breton and in small towns in rural Nova Scotia. There is reportedly also an increase in 'invisible' homelessness in the form of couch surfing, especially amongst youth in both urban and rural communities.

Homelessness is likely to be more prevalent in areas where the stock of affordable and safe housing, and especially of social housing, is low; but many other factors such as domestic violence, trauma, mental health and drug and alcohol abuse and the availability of wrap around social services and supports to address these issues also contribute to high levels of homelessness.

While homelessness has traditionally been addressed through the provision of casual overnight shelter it is in danger of becoming a permanent way of life for some. It is now recognized that in the long-term, housing people in shelters and increasing shelter provision is not the answer. There is a new understanding that multiple personal and systemic factors contribute to homelessness and that these must be addressed through homelessness prevention and housing first strategies that amongst other things provide support and wrap around services.

Increasing the supply of safe, affordable non-market housing options and especially rent supplementation will certainly help, but alongside this there is a need for more wrap around services and to increase the capacity of the non-profit sector to provide these services.

In addition, prevention must also ensure that better institutional protocols and practices are in place so that when they leave institutions such as a hospital, the justice system, or child/youth welfare services a viable supportive transitional housing or accommodation plan is in place for those without a place to call home.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Will you assist the non-profit sector to prevent homelessness by increasing the funding and capacity of organizations to provide supported/supportive housing and/or wrap-around services to prevent homelessness?

Will you ensure that the systemic issues in public institutions such as the healthcare system, the justice system and the child/youth welfare system are addressed and help to prevent, rather than contribute to maintaining homelessness?

Will you adopt a housing plan that will increase the number of safe affordable housing units that meet peoples' needs in both urban and rural locations (see Housing above)?

## HOMELESSNESS: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

Our government partnered with several parties (Federal Government, North End Community Health Centre, Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Nova Scotia Health Authority—Central Zone, Halifax Regional Municipality, Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia, IWK Health Centre, and United Way Halifax) to create Housing First. Housing First is a 5-year plan to house 50-60 of Halifax's chronically homeless.

Our government approved the use of rent supplements through Housing Nova Scotia to assist with the project. Additionally, we have worked with the North End Community Health Centre, the main deliverer of Housing First, to move them to a modern facility and provide more stable funding.

Furthermore, we will invest \$34 million over 4 years to create a no door is the wrong door response to mental health, including better crisis response and being the only party with a plan to address opioid use. Additionally, we will invest \$1.8 million in the 2017-2018 budget to create targeted programming for youth-at-risk.

### **NDP:**

*The NDP will assist the non-profit sector with preventing homelessness by increasing the funding and capacity of organizations to provide supportive housing and wrap-around services. We will endeavour to ensure that systemic problems in public institutions (such as the healthcare system, the justice system, and the child/youth welfare system), which contribute to the incidence of homelessness, are identified and corrected.*

We will endeavour to ensure that the affordable housing plan (described in NDP Answer #3) successfully increases safe affordable housing units in order to eradicate homelessness in urban and rural locations.

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

The election was called shortly after tabling the budget so it is difficult to know what the true financial picture might be for the province. If chosen to form a new PC government after May 30th, we will work together with the End Poverty Nova Scotia Network and others in the non-profit sector to address homelessness.

We have made a number of commitments in this election which provide real action to address systemic issues in public institutions. Some of these solutions include:

Too many Nova Scotians don't have a family doctor and have lost hope of finding one. We can deliver better care by reducing overhead and bureaucracy within the health system and investing that money in frontline services.

Our government will make Nova Scotia a leader in mental health research and innovation. We will create a Mental Health and Wellness Institute in concert with a Nova Scotia university and attract mental health experts. A Jamie Baillie government will provide all students with access to in-school mental health services. We will pass the Dignity for Victims of Sexual Violence Act that ensures survivors of sexual violence are treated with respect by the legal system and enshrines the opportunity of survivors to access legal representation if they are unable to afford it.

A PC government will begin to restore confidence in the system by requiring provincial court judges to complete comprehensive and ongoing education about sexual assault laws.

## **ISSUE: WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS**

Fewer good full time jobs and increasing precarious employment (low-waged, part-time or contract work) means that many employed people—even those working full time--still live in poverty. Being employed or finding a job is no guarantee that you will not be poor. One reason for this is that despite a doubling of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since 1977, the value of the minimum wage today is at the same level as it was then.

In Nova Scotia, the minimum wage increases yearly retroactively according to increases in the costs of living. However, when a new baseline was established for the minimum wage a few years ago, the baseline chosen was the low income cut-off (LICO) –a measure of poverty often used by governments—for a single individual working 40 hours a week and living in Sydney, Cape Breton. With the poverty line as the baseline, it is virtually impossible for someone earning minimum wage to earn enough to keep themselves out of poverty—unless they work longer hours, work two jobs, or have other sources of income. The Consumer Prices Index which is used to calculate annual minimum wage increases has been criticized as being unreliable in relation to actual living costs for lower income families because it does not weight the cost of essentials such as food.

Six percent of workers in Nova Scotia earn the minimum wage for experienced workers of \$10.85 but recent data from Statistics Canada (2016) show that 33.5% of workers (130,600) earn \$15 or less. 85% of these workers are aged 20 or older, a full 50% of whom are the household's breadwinner. Furthermore, 57% of minimum wage workers are women, so raising the minimum wage would benefit women and help very slightly to reduce the gender wage gap.

It is also the case that only 7% of low wage workers are unionized. Non-unionized workers are mostly employed in jobs in which current Labour Standards legislation define minimal working conditions. This leaves them with minimum protections and vulnerable, and with less likelihood of achieving a living wage, health benefits, family leave, or top up to statutory maternal and parental benefits.

## **QUESTIONS:**

Will you conduct an immediate review and revise the baseline and formula for establishing a minimum wage, with a view to improving wages and living standards for low waged workers?

What do you consider to be a fair and equitable minimum wage today?

Will you review all other aspects of the current Labour Standards Legislation with a view to improving working conditions for vulnerable workers?

## WAGES & WORKING CONDITIONS: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

We are committed to using the Minimum Wage Review Committee to make evidence-based decisions on minimum wage, to continue discussions with our Maritime counterparts on minimum wage

We believe the current structure, which the NDP established and tied minimum wage increases to inflation, strikes a good balance. Workers can keep up with the cost of living and businesses have predictability.

We are always committed to considering changes that will improve working conditions for workers and create fair playing field for our businesses. We tabled legislation to provide presumptive PTSD coverage for first responders, and strengthened rules around stop-work orders.

### **NDP**

The current Labour Standards Legislation and identified many ways to improve working conditions for vulnerable workers. We have presented two bills to the House which would improve the legislation, including the following:

- [\*Bill 18\*](#) to increase the hourly minimum wage to \$15.00 and to repeal the power to set a lower minimum wage for inexperienced employees.
- [\*Bill 20\*](#) to change the paid vacation that employers are required to provide to employees to three weeks each year for the first 10 years and to four weeks after 10 years.

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

The Minimum Wage Committee determines the minimum wage in Nova Scotia. The committee is comprised of both labour and business representatives.

Nova Scotia's minimum wage is set by regulations, which provide a mechanism for adjusting the minimum wage by the annual national inflation rate (Consumer Price Index). The Minimum Wage Review Committee is mandated, under the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code, to conduct an annual review of the minimum wage and submit a report to the Minister setting out its recommendations.

Since 2011, when the regulations were amended to include a formula for adjusting the minimum wage, the Committee's review has consisted of monitoring economic conditions in Nova Scotia and applying the formula.

A PC government would be open to discussion with stakeholders to determine if this process is appropriate and fair to all stakeholders.

## **ISSUE: REDUCING AND PREVENTING CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY**

The development of a Canada Child Benefit will contribute to the reduction of poverty amongst families with dependent children, but it is not expected to end child and family poverty in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia government also needs to do its part. The Nova Scotia Child Benefit for both working and non-working families is one tool to help further close the gap between income and the Low Income Measure of Poverty (LIM). However, both the income threshold and the benefit itself are too low and both need to be raised.

Another way to close the gap is to increase earning capacity of adult family members; however, low wages, especially for female lone parents, when combined with child care costs (even if childcare and a subsidy are available) can make sustainable employment a challenge. Increasing the minimum wage would help, but more needs to be done to assist low and moderate income parents to find good quality childcare and to cover more of its costs. If childcare was free for low income families (e.g., with net incomes below \$30,000) while fees for other families were linked to income, then more low income families could increase their earnings.

Early learning and childcare or early childhood education programs can contribute to child development and to better outcomes for children, especially in low income families. This is partly because they help to compensate for educational or socialization activities (e.g., tutoring, recreational programs, vacation activities, music lessons etc) that higher income families can afford to purchase in the market, but are not accessible for low income families.

This was the reasoning behind a pre-primary early learning pilot program recently offered to 4 year-olds in some Nova Scotia schools. Based on a similar program in Ontario, the pilot received good evaluations. But in proposing to expand the program, the Nova Scotia government ignored the unintended consequences that emerged (and were rectified) in Ontario, where the loss of four-year old pre-schoolers from the early learning and childcare sector—up to 50% of children in some centres—put in jeopardy the sustainability of these centres and the sector as a whole.

The quality, availability and accessibility of early learning and childcare need to be better supported through improving wages and qualifications of educators, better regulation, and more sustainable funding models—especially for the non-profit sector. More needs to be done to meet the needs of smaller, rural communities by expanding regulated family based childcare.

### **References:**

Lesley Frank, Ph.D., *37,450 Nova Scotia Children Still Waiting for Progress: 2016 Child and Family Poverty Report Card, CCPA-NS, 2016*

Lesley Frank, Ph.D., *End it Now: 2015 Child and Family Poverty Report Card, CCPA-NS, 2015*

### **QUESTIONS:**

Will you raise the income threshold and the amount of the Nova Scotia Child Benefit?

Will you rectify the unintended consequences for established Early Learning and Child Care centres of expanding the pre-primary early learning sites to more schools across the province?

Will you invest more in regulated, non-profit Early Learning and Childcare, develop a more sustainable funding model, and ensure that regulations, and the qualifications and wages of educators contribute to quality programs?

## CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

We have expanded eligibility to the Child Tax Benefit to 1,300 more families. Additionally, we were one of the first governments to declare we would not tax the Canadian Child Benefit.

We also undertook an overhaul of the Children and Family Services Act to modernize the definition of neglect and abuse and emphasize early intervention. Through the expansion of Parenting Journey to 12 additional communities and the introduction of Families Plus to Sydney, our government has focused on providing at-risk families needed support.

When children must, unfortunately, be taken into the care of the minister, we have taken steps to bolster the number of foster families, and, in the 2017-2018 budget invested over 1.2 million to provide more money to foster families so foster kids could get the same opportunity as all Nova Scotian children.

The money allocated to the plan to address poverty will also have initiatives that address the impacts of child poverty and ensure children get a better start in life (see question 1)

### **NDP :**

*In consultation with parents and early childhood educators, the NDP government will*

- *eliminate* child care fees for families with net incomes of less than \$30,000,
- create 400 new child care spaces,
- build a universal childcare system based on \$15/day.

We will advocate for a national strategy supported federal funding.

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Jamie Baillie and the PC party have an optimistic, pro-growth agenda that focuses on rebuilding our province, creating jobs and getting Nova Scotians back to work. Voters are tired of governments with no vision that only focus on cuts.

The PC Caucus has been in contact with many daycare operators who are worried that changes by the McNeil Liberals will put a strain on their businesses.

We understand how the Liberal pre-Primary announcement would add to the concern operators feel.

We believe that early childhood learning is essential for giving young people a solid foundation that will benefit them throughout their academic careers and the rest of their lives. Initiatives like pre-Primary should not rob the P-12 system of already scarce resources nor should it endanger the businesses of dedicated early childhood professionals.

We also worry about how the Liberal announcement will impact families. It sounds good but is not well thought out. A PC government is committed to robust early learning and will work with all stakeholders to ensure we are giving young Nova Scotians the best start in life.

## **ISSUE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY**

In 2015 Nova Scotia had the third highest provincial child poverty rate in Canada and the highest in Atlantic Canada. Within Nova Scotia, six communities had child poverty rates higher than 30%.

When it comes to the family composition, families led by lone parents are significantly more likely to live in poverty than couple led families. In 2015, 50.4% of lone parent families lived below the Low Income Measure-After Tax (LIM-AT) compared with 11.2% of couple led families.

Most low income lone parent families are headed by women and more female led lone parent families live on income assistance than those that are male-led. In 2011 45% of female led lone parents lived in poverty compared with 23.7% of male led lone parent families.

It is generally understood that there is a link between gender inequality in the labour market and higher rates of poverty for women, especially mothers; but what is not generally understood or widely discussed in this context is that many female lone parents are likely to be survivors of domestic violence. Many are not only vulnerable to poverty but also suffer from health and other problems.

This link between poverty and domestic violence amongst low income female lone mothers needs to be better understood and addressed. Access to childcare, transportation, safe and affordable housing, health care, supportive counselling, and education/training are some of the primary needs women face when leaving an abuser.

### **QUESTION**

What will you do to end the cycle of domestic violence and poverty in this province, particularly as this affects female lone parents and their families?

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

Our government increased base-funding to transition houses, women's centers and 2nd stage housing organizations by \$500,000 upon forming government. Recently, we partnered with Ottawa to invest \$5.2 million into infrastructure for victims of domestic violence, including a new Bryony House and housing for indigenous women and children.

Building on our investments to bolster housing for victims of domestic violence, we will introduce Standing Together: An Action Plan to Prevent Domestic Violence. The Action Plan will put in place a continuum of programming to address domestic violence, focused on primary prevention and providing victims support to rebuild their lives. To complement this program, we will pass legislation to give victims of domestic violence the right to take time off work. We will also expand the Domestic Violence Court to Halifax and make permanent the court in Sydney.

The \$20 million plan to address poverty will have a particular focus on addressing the root-causes of poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty, particularly through community-based initiatives. In the 2017-2018 budget, \$1.8 million was allocated to targeted employment programming for at-risk youth. In addition, we changed Educate to Work and Career Seek to make it easier for Income Assistance clients and their clients to attend post-secondary.

Publicly Funded Transit and Transportation: The \$20 million plan to address poverty will have targeted measures to address the cost of transit. In our 2017-2018 budget we allocated \$1.1 million extra for the School breakfast program. We believe every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential and that no child should start their day hungry.

We are proud of being the government that initiated the first ever Sexual Violence Strategy called "Breaking the Silence". We invested \$6 million into the strategy and are partnering with Universities, community groups to work to end sexual violence in the province.

A re-elected Liberal Government will pass legislation that would give victims of domestic violence the right to take time off work. We will also expand the Domestic Violence Court in Halifax and make the Sidney Court a permanent one.

### **NDP :**

*The elimination of poverty is identified in the Party's constitution as the NDP's core mission, and the Party recognizes it as an achievable goal. Income assistance rates are shamefully inadequate. The Party has adopted many resolutions to improve income assistance rates, eliminate poverty, and alleviate its impact. Under the leadership of Gary Burrill, the Party has developed a strong anti-poverty platform. The cycle of domestic violence will be broken by means of determination and political will, informed community engagement, and the provision of sufficient resources for childcare, transportation, housing, education, and supportive counselling.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Jamie Baillie has a vision for a justice system that survivors of sexual assault and abuse can count on. Too many victims of sexual crimes have lost confidence in Nova Scotia's legal system. We must act to ensure the legal system is fair and responsive to survivors of sexual violence.

We will pass the Dignity for Victims of Sexual Violence Act that ensures survivors of sexual violence are treated with respect by the legal system and enshrines the opportunity of survivors to access legal representation if they are unable to afford it. And a PC government will begin to restore confidence in the system by requiring provincial court judges to complete comprehensive and ongoing education about sexual assault laws.

## **ISSUE: LONG-TERM CARE**

Despite our aging population and the increased need for long-term care facilities, there has been a moratorium on building new homes and beds in the not-for-profit sector and the growth has been more or less limited to the private for profit sector. As a result, waiting lists to enter a non-profit home are too long. There are also reports (CBC Feb 2016) that people in hospital waiting to be admitted have been charged \$30 or \$40 a day for an “alternate level of care”.

Funding restraint, and especially the recent 2% cuts in long-term care funding, have added to these systemic problems in the sector. Recreational and other activities, allotments for food, and frontline workers or their hours have been cutback, and the lack of supervision in some facilities is also contributing to neglect.

This neglect within long-term care facilities and on the part of the government has created a crisis situation. In the process, it has also created particularly difficult problems for low and moderate income seniors currently living in, or in need of, long-term care. This is because they cannot afford to pay the higher fees to enter a private for profit care home or in many cases enhance their care in not for profit homes by paying privately for additional personal care services. They may even have trouble buying nutritious food outside the facility to substitute what is available in the care home.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Will you reverse the funding cuts of the last two fiscal years to long-term care and ensure additional funding to facilities so they can provide healthy meals and diets, and hire more trained staff (including physiotherapists, occupational therapists music therapists)?

Will you conduct a comprehensive legislative review of continuing care (including long term care), and with broad public consultation, develop a new legislative framework that includes strengthening current licensing, monitoring and regulatory review processes as well as regulations under the Protection of Persons In Care Act?

Will you move to have long-term care recognized and covered as part of the insured public health care system?

## LONG TERM CARE: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

The Liberal Governments most recent budgets invested more than \$832 million into providing care for Nova Scotian seniors whether that be in Long-term care or into homecare. We know that most seniors would prefer to stay in their homes for as long as possible.

In our last budget, we have increased the support to Long term care by \$3.2 million. That funding is designated for increased food budgets and recreational opportunities for residents. (an additional \$1.9 million for food budgets and an additional \$1.3 million for recreation)

We have invested heavily into homecare supports and reduced wait times for home support and admissions to long term care homes. Our funding has increased by \$64 million for home care supports since we came to government.

The Department of Health and Wellness is working towards the development of a new Continuing Care strategy and they will be consulting with stakeholders as they move forward.

### **NDP:**

*The NDP will create more nursing home beds and reduce wait-times for long-term care. We will open more collaborative emergency centres, and we will work with communities to develop more community- based health centres across the province. NDP has committed to reversing McNeil's \$8 million cut to nursing homes and residential care facilities and to investing in additional nursing home beds. We will work with seniors' families and care providers to develop an integrated model of care for seniors.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Nova Scotian seniors built our province. But after all their contributions, seniors are not getting the respect or support they deserve from the McNeil Liberals. Millions of dollars of Liberal cuts to nursing homes mean many seniors are eating on less than \$5 per day. That just isn't right. We will immediately reverse the cuts.

We will enshrine in law the Seniors' Bill of Rights to affirm our commitment to the health and well-being of Nova Scotians living in long-term care facilities, now and in the future. This new law will confirm our commitment to provide quality care and accommodation that is safe, comfortable and supports a high quality of life for seniors in nursing homes.

Seniors should never be asked to pay more than their fair share. A PC government will freeze the

Seniors' Pharmacare cost-share ratio to ensure no future government will download additional costs to our seniors. In addition, we will increase funding for programs to help seniors repair and stay in their own homes by \$4.5 million.

## ISSUE: MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is a growing concern because even as the issue is 'coming out of the shadows', its prevalence appears to be increasing. It is estimated that over the spectrum of mild to severe, mental illness and in any given year 20 percent of the population experience mental health problems. Lifetime prevalence is said to be 50 percent.

People with mental health issues or illnesses have a higher risk of not reaching their full earning potential due to the inability to sustain employment, gaps in education or training or to social stigma. As a result, they are more vulnerable to poverty.

At the same time, poverty (or income) is also recognized as a social determinant of health. Due to the high stress associated with living in poverty, individual health, including mental health, can be negatively impacted. According to the World Health Organization, "(B)est evidence indicates that the relationship between mental-ill health and poverty is cyclical: poverty increases the risk of mental disorders and having a mental disorder increases the likelihood of descending into poverty."<sup>1</sup>

It may be unlikely that reducing the risk of poverty across the spectrum of society will significantly reduce the incidence of serious mental disorders, but it is likely that it would have beneficial effects for many who do experience mental illness; it could also prevent some forms of mental illness amongst people living in or at risk of poverty.

At the very least, programs that address and prevent both mental health illness and poverty are important in terms of ensuring better mental health outcomes--for people presenting or living with a mental health disorder and for people who are vulnerable to or living in poverty.

## QUESTIONS

Will you increase funding for mental health care within the formal healthcare system and in the community in ways that will ensure better public education, prevention interventions, peer support and other kinds of support programs?

Will you increase funding for the development and maintenance of wrap-around services for individuals living with severe mental illness and mental health problems?

Will you ensure that these individuals will not be discharged into the community from inpatient or emergency services, unless they have a secure and safe place to live and can access appropriate community support service and that once housing and community support services are secured, they will also have access to outpatient mental health care?

---

<sup>1</sup> Mental Health, Poverty and Development, WHO  
[http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/policy/development/1\\_Breakingviciouscycle\\_Infosheet.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/development/1_Breakingviciouscycle_Infosheet.pdf?ua=1)

## **PARTY RESPONSES: MENTAL HEALTH**

### **Liberals:**

In our election platform, we have committed to investing \$34 million over 4 years to improve access to mental health services and to make sure Nova Scotians get the care that they need. As part of this plan, we have committed to hiring more than 100 mental health professionals and support staff across the province. We will also increase community based supports and expand the SchoolsPlus Program to all schools in Nova Scotia by 2019.

As well, some of the 70 collaborative care practices will see the addition of a mental health care worker to their team; depending on community need. We want to introduce a central intake system that will improve the access to services so that people in need can be seen when they need it.

We will be expanding crisis services across the province. We are committing to \$6.4 million over the next 4 years to ensure that Nova Scotians who require more than community supports but not necessarily require hospital admission get the help they require. We will also be piloting 4 Youth Health Centres. These Centres will have a focus on mental health in Schools in Nova Scotia.

We will pass our PTSD legislation that was introduced in the Legislature this past April. We will act on all the recommendations from the Minister' Advisory Panel on Innovation in Mental Health and Addictions.

### **NDP:**

*The NDP will improve access to mental health and addictions services. We will double the initial investment in the Mental Health Strategy in order to cut the wait times for community-based mental health care by half. We will reverse cuts to community organizations and provide an additional \$150,000 in funding. We will open three pilot mental health hubs in Kentville, Halifax, and Sydney.*

### **Progressive Conservatives**

We believe the next government elected on May 30th must do more to improve mental health in Nova Scotia. Some of the commitments we have already made during this campaign include:

Establishing Mental Health Crisis Response Centres to divert people undergoing a mental health crisis from Emergency Rooms to a facility, staffed by trained mental health professionals, to receive appropriate and informed treatment.

Working with the federal government to open a veteran-centred primary health care clinic to help our veterans for whom emergency rooms and clinics may trigger operational stress disorders.

Creating a \$250 direct tax rebate for Nova Scotians who, through a medical diagnosis and treatment plan, rely on a psychiatric service dog.

Providing all students with access to in-school mental health services.

Mental illness affects one in five people, many of them young people. Our government will make Nova Scotia a leader in mental health research and innovation. We will create a Mental Health and Wellness Institute in concert with a Nova Scotia university and attract mental health experts.

## ISSUE: PHARMACARE

Nova Scotia has three different Pharmacare programs for different groups of people: Seniors Pharmacare; Family Pharmacare; DCS Pharmacare. Each has different eligibility conditions, premiums, co-pay and deductible policies attached to them. In addition, there is a special program for cancer patients with very low incomes (below \$15,720) and another special program for those in palliative care. See:

<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/pharmacare/nova-scotians.asp>

In 2016 there was an attempt by the Nova Scotia government to reform the Seniors Pharmacare program with a view to making access easier for low income seniors. The proposal, however, was roundly criticized because consultation with seniors was inadequate and middle and higher income seniors felt the proposed changes were not based on a fair or rational decision making process or a well-recognized income-based approach to programs and services. The government withdrew the proposals but nevertheless, there appeared to be public support, including from seniors themselves, for a fairer income-based approach to Seniors Pharmacare.

However, there is a moral or values argument to be made for an income based approach that ensures access to prescription drugs for all low income people regardless of family composition, age or source of income. Furthermore, since the costs of administering three different income based Pharmacare programs (and four if the Cancer Patient program is included), is likely much higher than administering one income based program, there is a rational cost-based argument to be made for combining all Nova Scotia Pharmacare programs into one income based program—as long as it is fair and ensures better access for low income individuals and families.

It can also be argued that the ability to access affordable prescription drugs is essential to the health and well-being of *all* people and that a national Pharmacare program should be developed and included in the Canadian healthcare system.

## QUESTIONS:

Will you reduce administrative costs and improve Nova Scotia's Pharmacare program to create an income based program that is fair and ensures better access for low income individuals and families?

Will you cooperate with the federal government and other provincial governments to reduce the cost of prescription drugs?

Will you actively support the idea of developing a national Pharmacare program as part of Canada's healthcare system?

## PHARMACARE: PARTY RESPONSES

### **Liberals:**

A re-elected Liberal government will not be changing premiums for Nova Scotia Pharmacare for the next 2 years.

As of this past April, members of the Seniors Pharmacare program will pay 20% co-payment for each prescription which is down from the 30%. The maximum of \$382 per year for co-pay remains.

We are also working with our Atlantic partners on options available to strengthen our publicly funded pharmacare programs.

### **NDP:**

*The NDP has committed to freezing Seniors Pharmacare premiums. We will work with the federal government and other provincial governments to reduce the cost of prescription drugs. We will advocate for a national Pharmacare program.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Last year, Stephen McNeil accepted a bad healthcare deal from Ottawa. This doesn't make any sense when our aging population means health costs are rising. It simply isn't fair. A Progressive Conservative government will work with other provinces to get our fair share from Ottawa. We believe provinces that have higher healthcare costs because of aging populations should be treated fairly by Ottawa

In addition, too many Nova Scotians don't have a family doctor and have lost hope of finding one. We can deliver better care by reducing overhead and bureaucracy within the health system and investing that money in frontline services. We will rein in the Nova Scotia Health Authority by requiring real administrative savings and invest those savings in frontline care.

As one example of an action to improve access to medicine, we will reduce out-of-pocket medical costs paid by Nova Scotian cancer patients. A PC government will treat oral cancer drugs and hospital-administered cancer treatment equally, as other provinces have done.

## ISSUE: PUBLICLY FUNDED TRANSIT & TRANSPORTATION

Affordable, reliable and accessible transportation is not only a public good in and of itself, it is essential for daily living for many people and especially for most low income people and persons with disabilities. Not having access to reliable transportation affects health, one's ability to find a job, go to school or attend medical and other appointments and it makes feeding one's family more challenging. It may also cause feelings of social isolation and exclusion. Access to affordable, reliable transportation for people with disabilities and low income people wherever they live in Nova Scotia is essential to health and economic and social well-being.

In metropolitan Halifax it is affordability that is the biggest problem because free or reduced fare bus passes offered by the City are not available to everyone on low incomes. A bus pass for people living on income assistance is regarded as a 'special need' under income assistance regulations and some individuals, even those with disabilities, are routinely ruled ineligible unless they have multiple doctor's appointments.

However, it is also the *lack* of public transportation that is key to understanding what makes poverty such a difficult experience in rural Nova Scotia. Not only are comparatively more people in receipt of income assistance in rural areas, but incomes are lower and unemployment is higher.

Community Transit Nova Scotia and members of the Rural Transportation Association cooperate to address overall systemic issues and spend a lot of valuable volunteer time trying to provide services, but while interest in developing services amongst these organizations and the public is expanding, resources and licensing arrangements need to better keep up with the demand.

In addition, while some municipalities in rural areas support their local community transportation services, others do not.

**Reference:** Halifax Media Co-op "Rural Nova Scotia Facing Unique Poverty Challenges"  
(<http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/story/rural-nova-scotia-facing-unique-poverty-challenges/16574>)

## QUESTIONS:

Will you support social inclusion and ensure that the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) program includes a bus pass or money for transportation in the basic income assistance rate?

Will you support the development of Community Transportation Nova Scotia by increasing the funding envelope to enable member organizations to replace old vehicles and expand services?  
Will you allow CTAP funded services a separate license so that members could cooperate more?

Will you mandate all municipalities in the province to fund equitable, reliable and affordable community transportation services?

## **PUBLICLY FUNDED TRANSIT & TRANSPORTATION: PARTY RESPONSES**

### **Liberals:**

The Liberal Government was the first government to give direct support to municipalities to fund public transportation. In 2016, we provided Halifax Transit a \$2 million grant to help them buy 9 new accessible buses.

We have also invested in a \$13 million 3-year action plan for seniors called SHIFT. We recognize that for seniors to remain connected to their communities they must have access to affordable transportation. That is why we have committed to working with community stakeholders to improve overall access to affordable transportation in Nova Scotia, with a focus on our rural communities.

The Liberal Government also brought forward the first ever Accessibility Act to make the province more accessible. Transportation and transportation infrastructure are 1 one of the 6 standards the government in collaboration with stakeholders has committed to working on as part of this Act that will make Nova Scotia more accessible.

### **NDP:**

*The NDP will invest in sustainable transportation including stable core funding for public transit, including in smaller centres. The Employment Support and Income Assistance program needs a major overhaul to ensure that the rates are sufficient to allow all households to meet their basic needs including transportation costs. We will work towards building equitable, reliable, and affordable community transportation services in municipalities across the province.*

### **Progressive Conservatives:**

Over the next four years, a Progressive Conservative government will invest more in critical Nova Scotia infrastructure priorities. We'll create thousands of jobs in the process and maintain a balanced budget. The PC jobs plan will grow the economy and create jobs by investing \$1 billion in roads, bridges and other public infrastructure. We will work with the federal government and others so our new infrastructure investments are matched to boost the total of the Rebuild Nova Scotia Fund to \$2 billion.

Jamie Baillie's priorities for the new Rebuild Nova Scotia Fund:

- Replace the Victoria General Hospital
- Repair secondary roads
- Twin 100-series highways
- Ensure high speed internet in rural Nova Scotia
- Double the budget for rural roads
- Fund environmental reclamation and community enhancement projects