

Which provincial party is committed to a sustainable pharmacy system in this province?

The past three years have been a tumultuous and challenging time for pharmacists in Nova Scotia. Government cuts to the funding model for pharmacies combined with the passage of new legislation and regulations that expand pharmacists' scope of practice have made it more important than ever to have a government in Nova Scotia that is committed to a sustainable pharmacy system in this province.

The challenges that face the health care system in this province are complicated. By working collaboratively with government,



pharmacists are uniquely positioned to provide solutions to some of these challenges by improving access to health care and improving patient health outcomes.

In an effort to understand and clarify each political party's level of commitment to pharmacy and the role that pharmacists should play in our health care system, the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia sent a questionnaire to the leaders of the three major parties in Nova Scotia. These are their responses.

QUESTIONS

1. How would your government support a collaborative approach (working with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia and its member pharmacists) to design and implement pharmacy services for all Nova Scotians that would improve access to health services in more efficient and effective ways?
2. Under current government policy, limited advanced pharmacy services are

available to a small percent of Nova Scotians through publically funded programs. Would your government support expanding the funding for pharmacist provided services for all Nova Scotians? What additional advanced pharmacy services would your government fund?

3. What roles do you think pharmacies and pharmacists should play in the

delivery of health care in Nova Scotia and improving patient care? How would your government support this?

4. What measures would your government take to ensure pharmacists are able to work to their full scope of practice?
5. What initiatives would your government implement to ensure a healthy and sustainable pharmacy network in Nova Scotia?

ANSWERS

1. **Liberal Response:** For the past four years, the relationship between the NDP government and the pharmacy profession has been strained. Legislation was passed without simultaneously negotiating a tariff agreement. Once the agreement was negotiated and signed, pharmacists were unable to provide enhanced services due to either government's inability or unwillingness to produce policies which would have made these services publicly available. A Liberal government would re-establish a joint working group with the Pharmacy Association in order to maximize the benefits that can be achieved by better utilizing pharmacists without causing any more instability in this vital and accessible health care sector.

NDP Response: Patients need their health-care providers to be working together to ensure they get the care they need. But traditional health care hasn't always encouraged a team approach. The NDP believes that encouraging collaboration begins even before health professionals enter the work force.

That is why the NDP government supported the construction of a new building for future doctors, kinesiologists, pharmacists and nurse practitioners to be ready for fall 2015 at Dalhousie University. Students will learn together just as they will work together to help their patients after graduation, which will ultimately lead to better diagnoses, better treatment, and ultimately better outcomes for patients in Nova Scotia.

The NDP has focused on collaborative practice and expanded scope of practice for all health professionals – through innovative new care options like Collaborative Emergency Centres and expanded services like flu shots provided through pharmacies, as well as legislation authorizing the network of self-regulated professions. This focus will continue through new programs like nurse managed clinics which will incorporate team work, including community pharmacists, into a model to provide better care for Nova Scotians

PC Response: A Progressive Conservative government recognizes that pharmacists play an important role in the delivery of health care in Nova Scotia. We heard from pharmacists who presented at Law Amendments for Bill 17 that Nova Scotians often reach out to pharmacists first when they have a question about their health.

In our platform, Change that Works, the PC party committed to passing new regulations to provide pharmacists with similar health care responsibilities as are in place in other provinces. A PC government would work closely with pharmacists to ensure Nova Scotians get timely and cost effective care.

2. **Liberal Response:** The Nova Scotia Liberal Party worked to ensure senior medication reviews were available in this province. A new Liberal government will ensure medication reviews are modernized and done properly. Today, only seniors on multiple prescriptions qualify for the review. To make matters worse, this NDP government charge seniors a fee (the co-pay) to have their medications reviewed. Beyond ensuring more seniors are able to participate, we need to look at other settings where they can be performed – i.e. nursing homes and whether certain chronic diseases such as diabetes should be reviewed for adherence. Other provinces are doing this and are saving their health care systems money. Perhaps the biggest disappointment with this NDP government was their unwillingness to implement a policy to allow pharmacists to administer flu vaccines. Since passing legislation three years ago, pharmacists will, for the first time this flu season, be able to administer flu vaccines at a lower cost to our system. The problem is that pharmacists have only been allocated 5% of the vaccine supply - once their stock is depleted, pharmacies will either need to get more vaccine from other pharmacies or go to the Public Health Office. This is clearly poor planning and execution on the

part of the NDP government and a Liberal government will ensure this never happens again.

NDP Response: New services and expanded scope of practice are relatively new to Nova Scotia. The NDP made changes to regulations this year that allow pharmacists to give flu shots, and administer other drugs such as travel vaccines, which customers pay for. The regulations also give pharmacists the authority to order and interpret tests to help manage a person's drug therapy, such as blood tests to monitor and adjust the dose of blood thinners. Changes are not happening overnight, but they are being accomplished in a balanced and sustainable way through consultation.

PC Response: Pharmacists are highly trained professionals who can provide cost effective and excellent care to Nova Scotians. Recent changes to regulations allow pharmacists to give flu shots, and perform a number of other services. We recognize that many of the services pharmacists can now provide are not reimbursed by government, such as assessing and prescribing for minor ailments. A PC government would work with pharmacists and others to determine which services are safest and most cost effective for pharmacists to provide.

3. **Liberal Response:** Pharmacists are among the most accessible health care professionals and as a result are often the first contact for patients when experiencing problems with managing medications or their disease. Pharmacists are medication experts. They have the knowledge and training to advise their patients on the proper use of medications and how to properly manage side-effects. They are uniquely positioned to provide an enhanced service to Nova Scotians that will not only benefit our health care system with immediate cost savings, but will reduce pressures on other segments of our health care system; namely emergency rooms, the acute care sector and our primary health care system. An investment in pharmacy will yield great returns not only for our health care system but for Nova Scotians as well. The Liberal Party values the role pharmacists play in our health care system and a new Liberal government will ensure that we work in partnership with pharmacists moving forward. There are immense opportunities by making an investment back into the pharmacy profession which will yield a more cost effective, patient-focused health care system. The benefits far outweigh the costs.

NDP Response: Pharmacists are trusted advisors for patients and they need to be recognized and valued as the front line health care workers they are. The NDP has supported this and has changed legislation, regulations and funding to reflect it. A bill passed by the NDP in 2011, allow licensed pharmacy technicians to dispense certain types of prescriptions and do more technical work under the direction of pharmacists. This gives pharmacists more time to focus on counseling patients and ensure medications are prescribed safely and appropriately to Nova Scotians.

PC Response: We would be prepared to consider any role where the training of a pharmacist would result in safe, high quality, more convenient care and which frees up financial and human resources for other health care.

4. **Liberal Response:** Many legislative changes have been passed which go a long way to expanding the pharmacists scope of practice in our province. Nova Scotia needs a government that recognizes that in order for pharmacists to deliver more accessible health care to Nova Scotians, an investment will be required back into pharmacy. Data obtained from the Department of Health and Wellness shows that government saved about \$19 million over the last three fiscal years in the seniors' pharmacare program yet we have had very little, if any of this money reinvested to save the healthcare system more money.

NDP Response: Jurisdictions across Canada are learning from each other about best practices. And the organizations representing health professionals, like PANS, have innovative ideas about what possibilities are out there to provide better patient care. According to information provided by the Canadian Pharmacists Association, Nova Scotia now offers among the broadest scopes of practice in the country. The NDP will work with pharmacists to determine what further services can be included.

PC Response: The Progressive Conservative Party is the only party to include the provision of new regulations for pharmacists in its election platform. After consultation, a PC government will empower pharmacists to increase their scope of practice, as is done in other provinces.

5. **Liberal Response:** There are several initiatives currently before government that should be implemented. While the NDP government had these opportunities previously presented to them, they have not seen fit to move forward. Included in these initiatives is the mental health care pharmacy program which targets adherence rates for patients with mental illness; a trial prescription program and treatment for minor ailments. A Liberal government will sit down with PANS and all other pertinent stakeholders for the purpose of moving forward with implementation. There are tremendous opportunities to create a more accessible and sustainable health care system by working with pharmacists. A Liberal government will partner with pharmacists to ensure they are utilized to their full scope of practice.

NDP Response: The NDP is encouraging more collaboration between health professionals and is committed to involving pharmacists in collaborative practice initiatives which will strengthen pharmacy services across the province. Other provincial programs like the Drug Information Network help patients and pharmacists by providing a complete, up-to-date list of a patient's medications.

As well, prescribers will be able to see immediately what prescriptions patients already have, which can help avoid overprescribing, especially important in dealing with narcotics and other regulated drugs. PANS, as an active partner, will have other ideas to help provide better care and the NDP welcomes that input.

PC Response: Keeping thriving pharmacies in small communities and neighbourhoods is a must. Pharmacies are one of those services which, when lost, result in irreparable harm to communities and in tremendous inconvenience and increased cost to Nova Scotians. Loss of a pharmacy also means people don't get medications and services when they need them, resulting in poorer health outcomes. Pharmacies are small businesses which create jobs in every corner of the province. So, a PC Government will embrace pharmacists as a key part of our fabric. We will take a refreshing view of the many ways pharmacies contribute to Nova Scotia, regard pharmacists as a source of solutions to challenges and modernize regulations to reflect that.



The Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia is the advocacy body for more than **1300 practicing pharmacists** in Nova Scotia.

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