

**Federal Elections
2021 Voting Toolkit**
presented by **Autism Nova Scotia**

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The 2021 Canadian federal election is taking place on September 20th, 2021. This election will determine which political party will lead Canada's federal government and oversee the creation of laws and the management of programs and policies that affect the whole country.

The autism community identified the following four areas of focus for the federal government:

1. National Autism Strategy

In December 2019, the federal government announced its endorsement for the development of Canada's first ever National Autism Strategy. However, the greater autism community is now concerned with the lack of movement for the development of this strategy and needs concrete action to improve their quality of life. ***Will the winning party invest in the National Autism Strategy and provide a concrete timeline to see this strategy implemented by 2023?***

2. Employment

In Canada, there are approximately 500,000 working age adults with autism or an intellectual disability, but only 25% are employed. Canada cannot afford the costs of exclusion and employers cannot afford to overlook this talented yet untapped workforce. ***Will the winning party invest in robust funding to support employment opportunities for Autistic adults and persons with disabilities, including re-funding successful national employment initiatives such as the Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) program?***

3. Housing

Canada is in a major housing crisis. The situation is even more dire for persons with disabilities. As a country, we must enact plans to evaluate disability housing and create concrete action that addresses home ownership, community living arrangements, & small option homes to improve the quality of life for the disability community. ***How will the winning party invest in diverse housing options and necessary support structures to support the growing needs of Autistic Canadians?***

4. Disability Tax Credit

The disability tax credit (DTC) is a non-refundable tax credit intended to recognize the effect of disability-related costs on a person's ability to pay tax. A valid DTC certificate also allows access to more than a dozen tax-related programs and benefits.

The current DTC assessment process is cumbersome and creates undue barriers for the autism community. There is also a prevalent misconception that people with autism/Autistic individuals "grow out of their autism diagnosis". This misconception needs to be addressed in the DTC reassessment process. ***How will the winning party improve the support offered by the DTC and alleviate the application burden on Autistic Canadians?***

Background

In preparation for the upcoming election, the Provincial-Territorial Autism Network (P-TAN) – of which Autism Nova Scotia is a member- [sent a letter](#) to all major federal parties seeking clarity on their commitment to a National Autism Strategy.

Autism Nova Scotia created this federal election toolkit to share the answers P-TAN received from each party and to summarise how each party addresses the other areas of focus by letter, in their federal platform, or by public announcement.

The need for autism support is a non-partisan issue. Likewise, Autism Nova Scotia is a non-partisan organization, and we are ready and willing to work with all parties to make Nova Scotia a better place for our community. We hope this toolkit will help our community make an informed decision on election day.

Let's take a look!

At a Glance:

| | Liberal Party of Canada | Conservative Party of Canada | New Democratic Party | Green Party of Canada |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| National Autism Strategy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X |
| Employment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Housing | X | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| Disability Tax Credit | ✓ | ✓ | X | ✓ |

Focus Area 1: National Autism Strategy

Current Situation: In December 2019, the federal government announced its endorsement for the development of Canada's first ever National Autism Strategy. However, the greater autism community is now concerned with the lack of movement for the development of this strategy and needs concrete action to improve their quality of life.

Constituent Question: *Will your government invest in the development of a National Autism Strategy and provide a concrete timeline to have this strategy implemented by 2023?*

Liberal Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes

According to letter response: "We recognize the complex and diverse needs of people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and are committed to improving the health and overall well-being of children and adults with autism spectrum disorder."

That's why in April 2021, we announced an investment of \$15.4 million over two years in the federal Budget to support the development of a National Autism Strategy by enhancing engagement efforts, supporting additional Strategic Fund projects to address emerging priority needs and improving data collection. Work on the strategy has progressed during COVID-19, and the public engagement process by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences has ended with the final report to be released in early 2022.

We understand the importance of inclusive consultation and have invested \$1.46 million to make sure that Canada's autism strategy is developed in collaboration with the people most impacted by it. We remain committed to continue our work with provinces, territories, families, individuals with ASD, and stakeholders to achieve this objective."

See full response [here](#).

Conservative Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes

According to letter response: "Canada's Conservatives stands with Autistic Canadians and their families. We support the development of a National Autism Strategy to help Autistic Canadians live full lives."

"This is an important initiative and will provide crucial benefits to Canadians on the autism spectrum, as well as to their families. Conservatives first endorsed the idea of a National Autism Strategy in 2019."

"A Conservative government would prioritize this important initiative and ensure that Autistic Canadians receive the support they need and deserve in a reasonable timeframe. We believe that concrete action is necessary, and the rapid development of this strategy by 2023 is one thing we will do to provide relief to Autistic Canadians and their families."

"This will be accomplished while also prioritizing meaningful, indepth consultation with the autism community. A National Autism Strategy should reflect the real, lived experience of Autistic Canadians and address the diverse set of needs seen in the autism community."

See full response [here](#).

New Democratic Party

Party Commitment: Yes

According to NDP Platform: "We will work with Autistic Canadians to develop and implement a national Autism strategy that will coordinate support for research, ensure access to needs-based services, promote employment, and help expand housing options."

See page 62 of [NDP platform](#)

Green Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Unclear

According to the Green Party platform: "A Green government will work to create a Canada Disabilities Act (CDA) to express Canadians' vision of a more equitable society rather than the current confusion resulting from the multiplicity of acts, standards, policies, and programs that prevail."

See page 75-76 of [Green Party platform](#).

Focus Area 2: Employment

Current Situation: In Canada, there are approximately 500,000 working age adults with autism or an intellectual disability, but only 25% are employed. Canada cannot afford the costs of exclusion and employers cannot afford to overlook this talented yet untapped workforce.

Constituent Question: Will your government invest in robust funding to support employment opportunities for Autistic adults and persons with disabilities, including re-funding successful national employment initiatives such as the Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) program?

Liberal Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes
Commitment to RWA? Yes

According to Liberal Party platform: "A re-elected Liberal government will develop and implement an employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities. This strategy will be focused on supports for workers and employers and creating inclusive and welcoming workplaces. It will also include an investment in the Ready, Willing & Able inclusive hiring program to support individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (ASD)."

According to letter response & mentioned during Disability Debate from Minister Carla Qualtrough: "investing \$12 million in the Ready, Willing and Able initiative, a partnership between Employment and Social Development Canada, the Canadian Association for Community Living and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance."

See Page 39 of [Liberal Party Platform](#)

Conservative Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes
Commitment to RWA? Yes

According to Conservatives Party Platform: "Canada's Conservatives will ensure that going to work never costs a disabled person money."

"We will overhaul the complex array of disability supports and benefits to ensure that working always leaves someone further ahead. And we will work with the provinces to ensure that federal programs are designed to work with provincial programs to achieve this result. This will augment the effect of our increase to the Canada Workers Benefit, which will help make work pay for disabled Canadians by boosting the benefits of work."

"We will provide an additional \$80 million per year through the Enabling Accessibility Fund to provide:

- Additional incentives for small business and community projects to improve accessibility.
- Grants and support for all types of accessibility equipment that disabled Canadians need to work.
- Enhancements to existing programs (such as RWA, mentioned in Disability Debate by CPC MP Mike Lake) that will get more disabled Canadians into the workforce."

See Page 136 of [CPC Platform](#).

New Democratic Party

Party Commitment: Yes
Commitment to RWA? Unclear

According to NDP Platform: "To help tackle the unacceptable rate of poverty among Canadians living with a disability and ensure that everyone has the chance to thrive and live in dignity, we will expand income security programs to ensure Canadians living with a disability have a guaranteed livable income. While the Liberal government spends years talking about a new federal disability benefit, New Democrats will get to work immediately to deliver it."

When it comes to employment, everyone deserves a fair shot at a good job that fits their unique abilities. A New Democrat government will continue and expand employment programs to make sure that quality employment opportunities are available to all.

See Page 62 of [NDP platform](#)

Green Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes
Commitment to RWA? Unclear

According to the Green Party platform: "A Green government will enforce the Employment Equity Act to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal opportunity to long-term employment and advancement. People with disabilities are generally the last to find employment and the first to be laid off."

"A Green government will also institute a Guaranteed Liveable Income for people living with disabilities so that none live in poverty."

See Page 76 of [Green Party platform](#).

Focus Area 3: Housing

Current Situation: Canada is in a major housing crisis. The situation is even more dire for persons with disabilities. As a country, we must enact plans to evaluate disability housing and create concrete action that addresses home ownership, supported community living arrangements, & community-based small option homes to improve the quality of life for the disability community.

Constituent Question: *Will your government invest in diverse housing options and necessary support structures to support the growing needs of Autistic Canadians?*

Liberal Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Unclear*

*No mention of disability housing, supported community living arrangements, community-based small home options, and/or community support structures for persons with disabilities

According to Liberal Platform:

"A re-elected government will:

- Double the Home Accessibility Tax Credit, to \$20,000, putting up to \$1,500 back in the pockets of Canadians who need it.
- Establish an expert panel to provide recommendations for establishing an Aging at Home Benefit."

See Page 17-18 of [Liberal Party Platform](#)

Conservative Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Unclear*

*No mention of disability housing, supported community living arrangements, community-based small home options, and/or community support structures for persons with disabilities

New Democratic Party

Party Commitment: Yes

According to NDP Platform: "A NDP government will create at least 500,000 units of quality, affordable housing in the next ten years, with half of that done within five years. This will be achieved with the right mix of effective measures that work in partnership with provinces and municipalities, build capacity for social, community, and affordable housing providers, to provide rental support for co-ops, and meet environmental energy efficiency goals.

In order to kick-start the construction of co-ops, social and non-profit housing and break the logjam that has prevented these groups from accessing housing funding, we will set up dedicated fast-start funds to streamline the application process and help communities get the expertise and assistance they need to get projects off the ground now, not years from now. We'll mobilize federal resources and lands for these projects, turning unused and under-used properties into vibrant new communities."

See NDP Platform on Website:

["Making sure everyone can afford a place to call home"](#)

Green Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes

According to the Green Party platform: "A Green government will invest in social housing adapted as necessary to meet particular needs, with both rental and purchase options.

See Page 76 of [Green Party platform](#).

Focus Area 4: Disability Tax Credit

Current Situation: The disability tax credit (DTC) is a non-refundable tax credit intended to recognize the effect of disability-related costs on a person's ability to pay tax. A valid DTC certificate also allows access to more than a dozen tax-related programs and benefits. The current DTC assessment process is cumbersome and creates undue barriers for the autism community. There is also a prevalent misconception that people with autism/Autistic individuals "grow out of their autism diagnosis". This misconception needs to be addressed in the DTC reassessment process.

Constituent Question: *How will your government improve the support offered by the DTC and alleviate the application burden on Autistic Canadians?*

Liberal Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes

According to the Liberal Party platform: "A re-elected Liberal government will:

- Undertake a comprehensive review of access to the Disability Tax Credit, CPP-Disability and other federal benefits and programs to ensure they are available to people experiencing mental health challenges.

See Page 5 of [Liberal Party Platform](#)

- Re-introduce a Disability Benefit Act which will create a direct monthly payment, the Canada Disability Benefit, for low-income Canadians with disabilities ages 18-64. Once implemented this new benefit will reduce poverty among persons with disabilities in the same manner as the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Canada Child Benefit."

See Page 38-39 of [Liberal Party Platform](#)

Conservative Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes

According to party's letter response:

"Canada's Recovery Plan will double the Disability Supplement in the Canada Workers Benefit from \$744 to \$1,500, providing a major boost to lower-income Canadians with disabilities, on top of our increase in the Canada Workers Benefit.

To give more Canadians with disabilities access to financial support, we will reduce the number of hours required to qualify for the Disability Tax Credit and the Registered Disability Savings Plan from 14 to 10 hours per week.

Our changes will save a person with a disability made eligible for the tax credit or their family an average of \$2,100 per year. Making it easier to qualify for the tax credit will also make it easier to qualify for the Registered Disability Savings Plan, which provides up to \$3,500 per year in matching grants for Canadians with disabilities."

See full letter response [here](#).

New Democratic Party

Party Commitment: Unclear

According to NDP Platform: "New Democrats will uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and strengthen the Accessibility Act to cover all federal agencies equally, with the power to make and enforce accessibility standards in a timely manner.

To help tackle the unacceptable rate of poverty among Canadians living with a disability and ensure that everyone has the chance to thrive and live in dignity, we will expand income security programs to ensure Canadians living with a disability have a guaranteed livable income."

See Page 62 of [NDP platform](#)

Green Party of Canada

Party Commitment: Yes

According to the Green Party platform: "A Green government will convert the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) to a refundable credit and redesign the Canada Pension Plan/Disability Benefit (CPP/D) test to incorporate the DTC definition of disability and permit employment."

See Page 76 of [Green Party platform](#).

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CONCLUSION

As Canadians, we all have a role to play in helping create a more inclusive country for everyone.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the areas of focus for the autism community.

We hope this toolkit will help you make an informed decision on election day.

Happy voting!