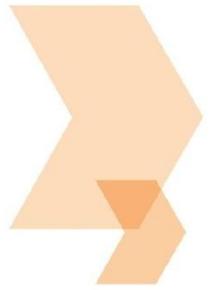




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August 9, 2021

Cynthia Carroll, CFRE
Executive Director, Autism Nova Scotia
director@autismns.ca

Dear Ms. Carroll,

As requested, please find below our responses to your questions. For further details on many of these commitments as well as other areas of our plan, we invite you to read our Vision Document, *Something Better for Nova Scotia*, available at <https://www.nsndp.ca/something-better-nova-scotia>.

- 1. Nova Scotia is in a housing crisis. Investments and strategies in diverse housing solutions must include persons with disabilities, including autism. Nova Scotia needs to expand beyond traditional conversations of small option homes to enhance community living options including: co-operative models, affordable housing opportunities, portable rent subsidies, increased public and private partnerships, support structures, and funding that go beyond bricks and mortar.**

Will your government commit to greater investment in diverse housing options and necessary support structures in partnership with the disability and autism community?

The NDP is fully committed to ending the housing crisis that is currently affecting Nova Scotia. Housing options must be truly accessible, beyond conventional definitions of physical accessibility, and investment in supportive options is badly needed. The harms are felt by people of all backgrounds across the province, but especially acutely by people with



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disabilities or autism. Solving this problem will require a coordinated effort with multiple strategies across all levels of government, not merely creating new tax breaks and handouts for developers and hoping for the best.

Firstly, the NDP is the only party committing to implement permanent rent control in Nova Scotia. This will ensure that everyone who currently has a home where they want to stay may do so without the fear of sudden, unaffordable rent increases. Tenants' rights would also be strengthened through policies like allowing tenants to file group complaints and creating a registry of health and safety violations in rental properties.

Next, the NDP is committed to building 1,000 new units of housing in the next four years by reinvesting in publicly-owned, cooperative, and non-profit housing. We would also support the creation of a permanent Housing Trust where provincial, municipal, and private resources could be pooled to allow non-profit housing providers to quickly acquire and provide affordable housing. Whenever existing affordable housing comes on the market, an NDP government would exercise a right of first refusal to acquire it. We would also enable municipalities to require affordable housing through inclusionary zoning.

We also support the expansion of supportive housing. We have specifically committed in our vision document to integrating mental health services with housing and other related services, including education and family supports.

Lastly, while you rightly identified that small options homes are not a complete solution, we still recognize them as an important part of it. As such, the NDP is committed to accelerating the building of small options homes in conjunction with our other investments in housing.

- 2. Delayed autism preschool diagnostic and intervention services are critically impacting child development and access to services for families. There is an immediate investment required in preschool diagnostic and intervention services to eliminate waitlists and give children and families**



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access to critical early intervention that meets their needs.

Will your government make the necessary investment to ensure preschool children have access to timely and integrated intervention services to meet their needs and future goals?

When we were in government, the NDP invested \$8 million to ensure that every preschool aged child with autism gets the help they need – help that was previously only available to half of them. We still have this same commitment to making sure that early diagnostic and intervention services are available to all children and would make this a distinct priority.

Intervention and support services for families with preschool children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder were also a key focus area for the provincial Autism Spectrum Disorder Action Plan released by the NDP government in 2013. An NDP government would use the recommendations in that action plan as a starting point and is committed to updating and implementing them accordingly.

- 3. The implementation timelines outlined in the Blueprint for Change in the Students First Report are behind schedule. Prioritization of the Provincial Autism Strategy outlined in the Commissioner's report on inclusive education, which includes enhance support for autistic students and aligns with the federal work on the National Autism Strategy, is essential.**

Will your government prioritize the development and implementation of the Provincial Autism Strategy acknowledged in the Students First report (2018)?

In government, the NDP developed the first provincial Autism Spectrum Disorder Action Plan. Like several other action plans developed by the NDP government, this plan was largely ignored by the Liberals in favour of doing more consultations and kicking the can further down the road. People with autism deserve action.



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An NDP government will publicly release a plan for implementing the recommendations from the Students First report and report annually on progress. We are also committed to updating the provincial Autism Spectrum Disorder Action Plan and conducting an audit of services across all departments through an autism and neurodiversity lens.

- 4. In Nova Scotia, Autistic adults struggle to access public diagnostic and mental health services with professionals who understand mental health and autism. Currently, Autistic adults are turned away from the public mental health services when they disclose they have autism. In addition, there are no public mental health providers providing adult diagnostics in our province, leaving expensive private service as the only option.**

Will your government commit to investing in appropriate mental health supports and diagnostic services for Autistic adults?

The provincial Autism Spectrum Disorder Action Plan released by the NDP government in 2013 focused on five key focus areas that contemplated the full, complex lifespan needs of people with autism spectrum disorders:

- *Intervention and Support Services for Families with Preschool Children Diagnosed with ASD*
- *Supports for School-Aged Children with a Diagnosis of ASD*
- *Supports for Adults with ASD and Their Families*
- *Skills Training and Awareness*
- *Partnerships to Support Programming and Services*

Particularly within the final three of the five focus areas listed above, the action plan laid out a number of actions the provincial government needed to take in order to fully support adults with ASD. An NDP government would use these recommendations as a starting point on the path to updating and implementing necessary changes to government services. We would also conduct an audit of services across all departments through an autism and neurodiversity lens.



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- 5. Autism Nova Scotia has worked hard in partnership with all parties to ensure the needs of Autistic individuals and their families are better understood and have actively worked to enhance needed service delivery.**

Will your government commit to current investments in autism service delivery and ongoing collaboration with Autism Nova Scotia and the autism community to ensure equitable access to support and services across the province?

Autism Nova Scotia is a critical voice in advancing this work. The NDP recognizes the need to maintain constructive, collaborative partnerships with all service providers and stakeholders to make sure that people with autism get the support that they need.

We look forward to continuing to work with Autism Nova Scotia as one of these crucial partnerships.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to share our vision for a healthier, more prosperous, and stronger Nova Scotia for everyone.

Sincerely,

The Nova Scotia New Democratic Party