

Cynthia Carroll
CFRE Executive Director
Autism Nova Scotia

Dear Cynthia,

On behalf of Nova Scotia Liberal Party Leader Iain Rankin, thank you for your questions regard support for people with Autism in Nova Scotia. Please see responses to your questions below.

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?

Partnering with the Federal Government, our Government committed to the National Housing Strategy that will invest \$105 million over the next three years to increase access to affordable housing and preserve and maintain existing housing stock. This commitment also includes \$70 million over that same three-year period for renewal of existing housing and supports for low-income homeowners. We have also funded \$12 million in initiatives to support those experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness and \$6.4 million for social housing needs in communities across Nova Scotia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Liberal Party of Nova Scotia understands how necessary it is to protect renters against rising prices and address affordable housing in Nova Scotia.

In the last year, we've committed \$25 million to address immediate investments recommended by the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission. This money will directly support new affordable housing units, repairs to public housing and building upgrades that will reduce emissions. It will create an independent housing entity and look at modernizing laws and regulations around housing. An additional \$2.5 million will support a fund, to be co-created with community housing organizations, to help grow the community housing sector and to add more affordable units.

The other parties are running on platforms that address only pieces of the problem we face as a province. We are striving for a balanced approach that lessens the impact on those looking for a place to call home now while expediting the creation of new housing

stock for the future to help bring down rising housing costs. We're providing more than 2,500 rent supplements and repairing and adapting almost 1,000 homes for low-income Nova Scotians.

A re-elected Rankin government is committed to expanding the housing options available to include secondary suites and garage lofts, tiny homes and other non-traditional forms of housing. We will explore innovative forms of funding, like forgivable and repayable loans for homeowners that want to add affordable, non-traditional rental and housing options to their existing properties. We will also provide support for single-room occupancies such as boarding houses in areas of need.

The Affordable Housing Commission also said we should look at ways to minimize the impact of renovations and evictions, that is why we have committed to requiring landlords to compensate tenants that are involuntarily displaced from their units for renovations. We will amend the *Residential Tenancies Act* to require one month of compensation for the tenant for each year they lived in the unit up to a maximum of 6 months rent.

A Liberal Government will immediately begin a comprehensive review of provincial legislation and regulations. We will direct the Department of Municipal Affairs to support municipal governments to complete a targeted assessment of the municipal development process to identify ways we can support local governments in their efforts to combat their affordable housing challenges.

Access to affordable housing is essential to quality of life. Creating affordable housing is a group effort and we remain committed to finding innovative solutions with our partners that help Nova Scotians find an affordable place to call home.

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 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?

In August 2019 the provincial government approved the Inclusive Education Policy as a commitment to ensuring a high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable education to support the well-being and achievement of every student. The guiding principles of Inclusive Education in Nova Scotia include the knowledge that every student can learn with enough time, practice and equitable and responsive teaching, and every student deserves to be affirmed, validated, and nurtured in all aspects of their daily experience.

Regional centres for education (RCEs) and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) support staff, such as, but not limited to, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw support staff, culturally responsive and SchoolsPlus teams, consultants, coordinators, and directors provide additional supports to Teaching Support Teams, teachers, students, and families. These professionals work with Teaching Support Teams to support teachers in improving their teaching practices and to provide individual supports to the students that need them.

We will continue to increase support for students. For our younger Nova Scotians, this year government will invest \$1 billion in public education for P-12 and pre-primary to provide students and educators with the support they need for success. Since coming to government in 2013, the education budget has been increased from \$1.1 billion to \$1.6 billion, 44 per cent in eight years. We are investing in our youth, an investment that will provide a return for decades.

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 Student's First report (2018)?

Our government is committed to working with our partners and Autism Nova to ensure that there are appropriate supports in place for children and their families. We will continue to support Nova Scotia's Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (NS EIBI) and believe that giving parents appropriate tools and coaching through our partners at the IWK will lead to even better outcomes for families.

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 Liberal Government made significant investments to expand and enhance mental health service delivery throughout the pandemic, including the recent establishment of the Office of Mental Health & Addictions. Budget 2021/22 contributed \$1.5 million to support the new office and hired Nova Scotia's first Chief Officer of Mental Health & Addictions to oversee the deployment of \$336.5 million to sustain our mental health services and supports.

A re-elected Liberal government will invest \$4 million annually to launch 8 new mental health walk-in clinics to ensure that Nova Scotians struggling with mental health issues can receive timely, appropriate, and dedicated treatment from a team of specialized professionals.

The clinics will be staffed by interdisciplinary teams of mental health practitioners and clinicians trained to provide culturally competent, trauma-informed, age-appropriate, and 2SLGBTQIA+-aware care so that individuals who experience systemic oppression feel safe when seeking care.

Our government is open to dialogue on how to further improve diagnostic supports for adults and children to improve outcomes for all people with autism and their families.

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?

Yes. We are committed to working with our partners and Autism Nova to ensure that there are appropriate supports and that we are best meeting the needs of children with autism and their families.