



August 9, 2021

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

Dear Cynthia,

I am pleased to respond to our questionnaire as follows:

- 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 PC Party acknowledges the difficulties the disability and autism communities experience that compound with the challenges of our housing crisis. A PC government is committed to meeting with all stakeholders in this sector to prioritize funding to make housing more accessible.

- 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?

The PC Party knows how important these services are. We were extremely disappointed to see the Liberals make cuts to the Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention program last year for children as young as two. We wrote to the Premier and called for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to convene a panel of parents with diverse needs children to determine what can be done to provide them with the most effective education. A PC Government will work with stakeholders to leave no child behind.

- 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)?

When the Student’s First Report got to the government, the ball was dropped. At that stage, an arms-length “implementation” panel could have been established to map the way forward. It wasn’t and as a result, the government did not implement things like the intensive treatment programs recommended in Sydney and Halifax and a critical recommendation for more psychologists in schools went unfilled. A PC government will recommit to the Report – with proper input from the disability and autism community – and implement the recommendations with an eye on the “wholeness” of the document. Our government will not cherry-pick from these recommendations and falsely claim action.

A PC government will commit to following through on the recommendations outlined in the Report and, just as importantly, to provide a public accounting of our progress by the eight-month mark of forming the government. The implementation of this Report will mean greater accountability within the inclusion model to ensure students have the appropriate supports and Programming.

- 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?

Healthcare, including mental health, is without a doubt the most pressing issue facing Nova Scotians right now. After 8 years of neglect, our wait times and lack of accessibility for almost all health services have risen to levels that are having deadly consequences. Wait times for mental health care were unacceptable before the pandemic, and due to the massive increases in need for services over the course of the pandemic, access to mental health services has only gotten further out of reach for Nova Scotians.

A PC government will not ignore the mental health needs of Nova Scotians any longer.

The PC Party is the only party to put forward a universal, publicly funded solution for our mental health crisis. If elected, a PC government will immediately introduce **Universal Mental Healthcare**. This will allow every Nova Scotian to access the mental health services they need when, where, and how they need them. This will allow anyone, including adults with autism, to receive the services they need at any psychologist's office without having to worry about how they will pay for it.

By removing the financial barrier and months-long wait times that discourage many Nova Scotians from receiving the care they need, every Nova Scotian, regardless of status or income, will have equal access to these essential services.

- 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.**

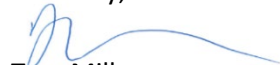
Will your government commit to current investments in autism service delivery and ongoing collaboration with Autism Nova Scotia and the autism community to ensure equitable access to support and services across the province?

Similar to the answer to the previous questions, the PC Party is the only party to have put forward a thoughtful, compassionate, universal solution to the mental health challenges facing Nova Scotians.

Equitable access is a core objective of our healthcare solutions as we emerge from the pandemic while ensuring that nobody gets left behind.

As shown through our investments into healthcare, and in taking the lead on becoming the only province in Canada to have universal access to mental health services, we hope you can see how committed a PC government will be to continuing a productive collaboration with Autism Nova Scotia and the autism community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tara Miller', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Tara Miller

Campaign Co-Chair

PC Party of Nova Scotia