



Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador

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May 15, 2019

Ms. Jennifer Collingwood
Executive Director
Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL)
Email: jcollingwood@panl.net

Dear Ms. Collingwood:

Thank you for your email regarding our Party's policies on a number of issues of concern to the members of the Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and of importance to the effective delivery of healthcare services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I want to address each of your questions in turn.

But first, let me state for the record that our overarching approach to the unsurpassed priority of healthcare delivery in our province is collaborative, patient-centered and outcome-focused. We will not cut healthcare investments. We will increase them. We will not govern in a top-down manner, but our decisions will be guided by those at the front lines of healthcare delivery – including the Pharmacists of Newfoundland and Labrador, individually and through your Association – who know the circumstances best.
We want to work with you and be guided by you.

The following are the opening words of our Healthcare Policy, as stated in our Blue Book:

Affordable health care

"I will put patients first and identify the waste in the system. They deserve better. I do not intend to cut health care expenditures. But what I do intend to do is ensure every dollar we spend improves patients' access to quality health services for better results." – Ches Crosbie, April 18, 2019

"We spend almost \$3 billion on health care – almost 40 percent of our total expenditures – but we continue to have some of the highest rates of chronic disease and poorest health outcomes in the country. We have the lowest life expectancy in Canada, the highest rate of heart disease, the highest rate of lifestyle associated cancers, the highest rate of

diabetes. We're spending more per person than any other province – yet patients have the worst outcomes. For patients in this province, that's not good enough. It's got to change." – Ches Crosbie, April 18, 2019

"I will not cut health care spending. What I will do is identify the waste so the money can be spent better – so patients get care sooner and get healthier instead of sicker. I will value the input of patients and those involved in the delivery of health care services. Our approach is all about improving care for the people of our province." – Ches Crosbie, April 18, 2019

Here is our plan for timely access to quality health services for better results for patients.

Premier's Task Force on Health Care

There is no greater priority in our province than health care. The province spends just over \$3 billion on health care, which is 38 percent of the total provincial budget. Health care costs are escalating across the country, but Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest per-capita spending of any province. While health care costs are increasing, unfortunately, the province continues to have some of the highest rates of chronic disease and poorest health outcomes. Newfoundland and Labrador spends more on intervention than on prevention. This is not good practice.

This province deserves a health care system whose focus is a healthy population; a health care system that is centered on quality, accessibility, sustainability and reliability. A Crosbie government will focus on a health care system that is designed to keep people healthy, not simply react when they become sick. A Crosbie government will not cut health care expenditures. That means we must promote and invest in healthy living initiatives that will ultimately achieve better outcomes. We must ensure that we are using the \$3 billion of resources assigned to health care in the most efficient and results-oriented manner possible. To those ends, we must engage in productive, meaningful conversations with care providers as well as health care consumers to learn from the experience of those front-line health workers and those who depend on the care provided.

The Ball Liberals have not attempted to improve the health care system in any way. We know that, because our health outcomes have not improved.

A Crosbie government will establish the Premier's Task Force on Health Care to work with all health care stakeholders including residents, frontline workers, health care providers and health care administrators, with a mandate to improve the way health care is delivered in this province. The Task Force will be, not top-down, but consultative. It will bring a level of independence and a broad perspective on the best practices in the country.

Let me turn next to your specific questions.

INFLUENZA VACCINATION PROGRAM — UNIVERSAL FUNDING

Seasonal influenza is the leading cause of death from infectious disease in Canada. As of mid-March 2019, there were over 500 lab-confirmed cases and 11 flu-related deaths reported in Newfoundland and Labrador. In most other provinces, eight of ten now, pharmacists have the ability to vaccinate for flu as part of the universal program. However, in Newfoundland and Labrador people pay \$20 to \$25 to get a flu shot from a pharmacist, unless they are covered by the province's public drug program or have private insurance coverage for flu shots. This severely limits access to this important vaccination and as a result, NL's vaccination rates are among the lowest in the country. *Question: In order to increase immunization rates, improve access for all patients, ease demand on physician offices and decrease hospitalizations resulting from influenza, will your party commit to a universal seasonal flu vaccine program so that residents of Newfoundland and Labrador can access the flu vaccine free of charge through physician offices, public health clinics and pharmacies?*

We are ready to innovate in healthcare service delivery if it will improve patients' access to services and improve patient outcomes. To determine how best to deliver services to patients, we need to come together around a common table and look at all the opportunities for improving the way our healthcare system serves Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. There is no greater priority in our province than health care. The province spends just over \$3 billion on health care, which is 38 percent of the total provincial budget. Health care costs are escalating across the country, but Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest per-capita spending of any province. While health care costs are increasing, unfortunately, the province continues to have some of the highest rates of chronic disease and poorest health outcomes. Newfoundland and Labrador spends more on intervention than on prevention. This is not good practice. This province deserves a health care system whose focus is a healthy population; a health care system that is centered on quality, accessibility, sustainability and reliability. We will focus on a health care system that is designed to keep people healthy, not simply react when they become sick.

A government I lead will not cut health care expenditures. We will promote and invest in healthy living initiatives that will ultimately achieve better outcomes. We must ensure that we are using the \$3 billion of resources assigned to health care in the most efficient and results-oriented manner possible. To those ends, we must engage in productive, meaningful conversations with care providers as well as health care consumers to learn from the experience of those front-line health workers and those who depend on the care provided.

A Crosbie government will establish the Premier's Task Force on Health Care to work with "all" health care stakeholders including pharmacists, residents, frontline workers, health care providers and health care administrators, with a mandate to improve the way health care is delivered in this province. The Task Force will be, not top-down, but consultative. It will bring a level of independence and a broad perspective on the best practices in the country.

In this light, we will introduce an "accountable care model" to give people better access to physicians and other care providers. This delivery model will see the development of primary healthcare teams of physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and dieticians, etc. An accountable care model will encourage care providers to be innovative in the way they deliver care as a team.

We will also establish a NL Quality Health Council. When decisions about treatment are made on a foundation of solid evidence, patients benefit and health care funding is used more effectively. This Council will be responsible for interpreting evidence and proposing follow-up actions to ensure the province's health care investment decisions are made in the best interests of patients. The Council will be an independent body that consistently reports on outcomes, similar to the financial Auditor General but focused on clinical outcomes. Patients are better served when we minimize waste and harm in the health care system. Supporting the objectives of the collaborative effort between Quality of Care NL and Choosing Wisely NL, the Council will focus on ensuring the right treatments get to the right patients at the right time.

PRESCRIBING FOR MINOR AILMENTS — UNIVERSAL FUNDING

Pharmacists are able to assess and prescribe for minor ailments – such as cold sores and yeast infections which benefits patients through increased access to timely care. This also allows other health care professionals to focus on more complex conditions, thereby easing the demand on emergency rooms and physician offices. Currently, if a patient is assessed in a physician office or emergency room for a minor ailment, the service is covered under MCP. Yet, a patient assessed by a pharmacist for a minor ailment, including smoking cessation, must pay a fee as there is no government funding in place for the service. The correction of this inequity will help ensure the full intended benefit of pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments — increased access for patients and less demand on emergency rooms and physician offices, meaning resources can focus on patients with more serious conditions. *Question: Will your party commit to funding these services universally for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, regardless of whether the assessment occurs in a pharmacy, doctor's office or emergency room?*

You raise important suggestions that must be given full consideration within the framework of better serving patients and improving patient outcomes. All of these

matters will be considered by the Premier's Task Force on Health Care. You will be at this table. The Premier's Task Force will work with "all" health care stakeholders including pharmacists, residents, frontline workers, health care providers and health care administrators, with a mandate to improve the way health care is delivered in this province. The Task Force will be, not top-down, but consultative. It will bring a level of independence and a broad perspective on the best practices in the country.

REIMBURSEMENT FOR PHARMACIST-PHYSICIAN CONSULTATIONS

Statements made by the Honourable John Haggie, Minister of Health and Community Services, such as, "Pharmacists are highly trained, capable professionals who provide frontline services every day to the general public," (March 12 2018) and, "Pharmacists are valued professionals who not only play an integral role in our healthcare system, but also serve as an important source of knowledge when it comes to healing and education," (January 8, 2019), demonstrate that the current Provincial Government values the role of pharmacists in delivering front-line services and their importance to sustainable and effective health care for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. However, pharmacists continue to provide services for which other providers are reimbursed. For example, the Family Practice Renewal Program compensates physicians for the time they spend consulting with pharmacists and other health care providers. There is a serious inequity here as pharmacists spend a significant amount of their time on a daily basis consulting with physicians on patients' prescribed medications — there is no compensation to pharmacists, and it takes valuable time out of their work day. *Question: Does your party support equity among healthcare providers? Will your party recognize the importance of pharmacists to the health care system by adequately compensating them for health care services similar to other providers, such as compensation for consultation with physicians?*

We support equity among healthcare providers. It takes a team to deliver quality healthcare to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and every member of that team has a vital purpose.

Issues of compensation will be resolved through consultation and negotiation.

Everything we do in health care will flow from the new approaches we take to better serve patients and improve outcomes. A Crosbie government will establish the Premier's Task Force on Health Care to work with "all" health care stakeholders including residents, frontline workers, health care providers and health care administrators, with a mandate to improve the way health care is delivered in this province. The Task Force will be, not top-down, but consultative. It will bring a level of independence and a broad perspective on the best practices in the country.

To promote innovative ways of delivering healthcare to better serve people, we will introduce an “accountable care model” to give people better access to physicians and other care providers. This delivery model will see the development of primary healthcare teams of physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and dieticians, etc. An accountable care model will encourage care providers to be innovative in the way they deliver care as a team.

We will maximize the use of e-technology to better integrate and modernize the health care system. We will advance the use of the Electronic Medical Record to improve the flow of information among health care providers. We will improve communication among “all” health care providers so that allied health care providers are efficiently using Electronic Medical Records to track patient care. This will minimize errors and avoid needless duplication.

The specific issues you raise should be addressed around the table of healthcare providers so we can review the best practices of others, examine the evidence, listen to one another and make the best choices for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

All decisions about such matters will flow from the Premier’s Task Force on Health Care as it works with “all” health care stakeholders including residents, frontline workers, health care providers and health care administrators, with a mandate to improve the way health care is delivered in this province. The Task Force will be, not top-down, but consultative. PANL will have the opportunity to make a strong case for innovative ways to deliver care that promise better access to services for patients and better outcomes.

PHARMACISTS IN PRIMARY CARE TEAMS

As noted in the Provincial Government’s 2017–18 Chronic Disease Action Plan, Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the highest rates of chronic disease in Canada and as the population continues to age, the prevalence of chronic disease is expected to grow. Further, 63% of residents have at least one chronic disease and NL has the highest rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity across the country. The management of chronic disease is increasingly creating pressure within our healthcare system. Managing chronic disease and mitigating its impact on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians requires collaboration and commitment. Pharmacists have direct, front-line interactions with patients managing chronic disease. This has many benefits including decreased hospitalization, medication adherence and cost reductions within the system. *Question: Will your party commit to provide funding to support the placement of pharmacists in primary healthcare teams in order to enhance accessible care for the patients of our province?*

Again, you raise an important suggestion that must be considered within the framework of the consultative Premier’s Task Force on Health Care. Bring your suggestions and

evidence to the table, and make a strong case that reforming the way certain services are delivered will improve access to services for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and improve patient outcomes.

You refer to the example of cardiac illness and related conditions and causes. Newfoundland and Labrador has the country's highest rate of heart disease, the number one killer in Newfoundland and Labrador. Physicians have described cardiac illness as an epidemic in our province. In 2009, cardiovascular disease was reported as the underlying cause of death for 32% of residents of the province. We will develop a Cardiac Centre of Excellence to make our province a leader in cardiac care. Through the Premier's Task Force, PANL can bring forward suggestions that will complement our approach to improving cardiac care and patient outcomes.

PUBLIC SERVICE PHARMACISTS

Currently, salaries for pharmacists in the provincial public service in this province are not on par with the other Atlantic provinces. Government compensates for this by providing these pharmacists with additional remuneration through a market adjustment. However, these additional monies are not a permanent addition to their salaries, are not subject to general economic increases following contract negotiations and do not figure into pension calculations, thereby penalizing pharmacists within the public service. *Questions: Will your party support a compensation structure for public service pharmacists that is on par with the other three Atlantic provinces, as opposed to the measure of market adjustment? Will your party work with public service pharmacists and their representatives to address this issue?*

We will work closely with pharmacists and PANL when compensation and related issues are discussed.

EVALUATION OF PHARMACIST-DELIVERED SERVICES

Sustainability of the healthcare system is a huge concern across the country and particularly in our province with high rates of chronic disease, high per capita expenditures on healthcare and decreased revenues. Evidence-based decision making is always part of good governance and good management of provincial fiscal resources to determine if the delivery of these new services provide value for money in terms of improved health outcomes at a reasonable and sustainable cost. With pharmacists now providing more services to patients, PANL recommends government funding specifically dedicated to the research into and evaluation of pharmacist-delivered services. *Question: Will your party fund research and evaluation activities that will determine whether pharmacist delivered services improve health outcomes at a reasonable cost?*

Evidence-based decision making will be a hallmark of our renewed approach to improving patient outcomes. The Premier's Task Force will deal with such issues, and PANL will be at that table to make the case for this and other advances.

Emphasizing our evidence-based approach, we will educate health care providers and patients about the appropriateness of various tests, procedures and treatments to minimize waste and harm in the health care system. Our efforts will complement the work of Choosing Wisely Newfoundland and Labrador, which is working to reduce unnecessary testing across the province. We will support the efforts of CWNL to reduce waste and improve our health care system.

We will establish a NL Quality Health Council. When decisions about treatment are made on a foundation of solid evidence, patients benefit and health care funding is used more effectively. This Council will be responsible for interpreting evidence and proposing follow-up actions to ensure the province's health care investment decisions are made in the best interests of patients. The Council will be an independent body that consistently reports on outcomes, similar to the financial Auditor General but focused on clinical outcomes.

Patients are better served when we minimize waste and harm in the health care system. Supporting the objectives of the collaborative effort between Quality of Care NL and Choosing Wisely NL, the Council will focus on ensuring the right treatments get to the right patients at the right time.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Services and supports for those impacted by mental health and addictions issues are critical and must involve the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. The impacts of lack of access to timely programs are many and can be felt throughout our communities. Even a passing glance at local news coverage of break-ins and court proceedings reveal an increased prevalence of violent crime often linked to addictions issues. The security of pharmacies and their staff is a growing concern, especially given the attraction of pharmacies to thieves and those challenged with addictions. *Question: Will your party ensure involvement of PANL in discussions and approaches to address any mental health and addictions services and programming gaps? With the introduction of hub and spoke models throughout the province, will your party commit to ensuring that clinical services in these sites are delivered by on-site pharmacists?*

Yes, our Party will involve pharmacists and the Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador in discussions and approaches to address any mental health and addictions services and programming gaps. Our approach to health care in general, including mental

health and addictions treatment, will be consultative, collaborative and evidence-based. The following are some of the relevant commitments defined in our Blue Book:

A Crosbie government will be fully supportive of a new mental health hospital and will consult with appropriate health providers and mental health advocates to ensure the design and location will meet both current and future needs. These buildings are expensive, so we must get it right. A Crosbie government will not cut health funding. Mental health and addictions will be given equal status to other areas of health care.

We will ensure the challenges of mental health and addictions treatment are subject to intense critical review and evolve in line with best practices. We will improve access to mental health care and addictions treatment as per the recommendations of the report of the all-party committee on mental health and addictions. We will consult on the most effective measures we can take to improve access to mental health and addictions services, including Suboxone treatment, and specialty appointments dealing with issues of mental health and addictions.

We will open up a broader public discussion about community drug issues, and work collaboratively with policing agencies, the health care sector, community groups, frontline professionals and others to find solutions that will protect our people and make our communities safer.

Violence and other crime in the community is a significant concern for us, as it is for PANL's members. We will bring forward a renewed Violence Prevention Strategy to build on the advances of the most recent Violence Prevention Strategy. Initiatives will relate to child protection, victim safety, shelters and support networks, transition houses, cyber-violence, workplace harassment, gang violence, human trafficking, protective police presence, restorative justice, victim impact, legal aid and support, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, elder abuse, persons with disabilities, racism and hate crime, gender-based violence, bullying, safe and caring schools, violence in care facilities, and other matters.

NATIONAL POLICY IMPACTS

With the Pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance imposing drastic changes across the country, coupled with potential significant impacts of national pharmacare, the NL pharmacy industry will continue to feel the effects of federal decision making. *Question: Will your party commit to consult with PANL in advance of and throughout discussions with the Federal Government and other jurisdictions on national pharmacy-related issues that will have an impact provincially?*

I believe it is reasonable and responsible that pharmacists and their Association be consulted when pharmacare and related issues are being discussed so we take positions and make decisions that are in the province's long-term best interest.

RECOGNITION OF FINANCIAL PRESSURES FACING COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

Over the past few years, pharmacy owners have been dealt a number of significant financial blows. In addition to increased regulation and operating costs, the April 2018 generic price reduction meant as much as a 20 percent decrease in revenue for many pharmacy owners, resulting in layoffs and reduction in pharmacy hours, thereby significantly impacting optimal patient access and care. Further, with insurers implementing pay for performance programs and the introduction of e-prescribing, a service for which pharmacies will solely bear the cost, the financial pressures are only mounting. These industry specific challenges are also compounded by the many inflationary pressures facing all other provincial businesses such as increase in minimum wage, rising power costs and adherence to Occupational Health and Safety standards. Pharmacies, especially independent ones in rural communities, can be integral to the improved health and safety of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Yet, the province is at risk of losing these vital partners without substantial change. *Question: Will your party work with PANL and other stakeholders to ensure the compensation provided to pharmacies adequately reflects the true costs of delivering pharmacy services to patients?*

We will work closely with pharmacists and PANL when compensation and related issues are discussed.

PRIORITIZATION

How does your party prioritize the issues outlined above with '1' being least-important to '10' being most important?

Respectfully, I have not filled out the prioritization table because I believe it is for you to tell me what the priorities are. We will prioritize to reflect the issues that are priorities to you. Every issue of concern to you will be a priority for us. When we meet, we look forward to hearing from PANL the order in which you wish us to address these priorities. In everything we do, I am sure all of us will put patients first, let evidence dictate our choices and commit to work with one another to make all elements of our healthcare system work more effectively for patients and improved outcomes. We share these goals; we share the responsibility for delivering; and we will share the fulfilment of knowing our approach has made people's lives better.

I look forward to sitting around the table with you on my Premier's Task Force on Health Care.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ches Crosbie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ches Crosbie
Leader of the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador