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Thank you for your email and the opportunity to provide answers to your questions. Please read below.

Strengthening child and youth mental health and mental health care.

- 1. If elected, what will your party do to meet the mental health needs of children and youth resulting from the global pandemic and ensure timely access to publicly funded mental health treatment and resources?**

Throughout the pandemic, many Nova Scotians have found creative and innovative ways to secure comfort and support from family and friends. Neighbourhoods and communities have pulled together to maintain their wellness. At work, colleagues and teams have overcome differences and worked in their collective interest during the most challenging times. However, we also know that the impact of COVID-19 has, and will continue to, extend far beyond the immediate risk of COVID infection itself, presenting even greater concerns for the mental health of Nova Scotian's children and youth as they adapt to rapidly evolving changes to their daily lives. When it comes to mental health, no one is immune.

The Nova Scotia 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. We 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. In 2021, the overall expenditure on mental health and addictions programming was increased by \$12.3 million, establishing vital new services such as, single brief intervention sessions, withdrawal management hubs to address substance-related harm and addictions issues, e-mental health options to increase access to supports.

The Nova Scotia Liberal government will continue to build upon these investments, leveraging expertise in the psychiatric community to deliver new services designed to respond to the unique mental health needs of Nova Scotians. Mental health professionals have observed and reported rising levels of patients presenting with mental health challenges and addictions related illness throughout the pandemic. These circumstances have created the need for additional services to fill gaps between inpatient and community supports to prevent hospitalizations.

The Nova Scotia 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 new walk-in clinics will simplify the process of connecting to mental wellness supports by providing Nova Scotians with compassionate, reliable, and stigma-free care closer to where they live.

Each clinic will be located close to a regional hospital to ease pressure on emergency rooms and create opportunities for referrals. 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.

Doctor recruitment and retention is a top priority for the Rankin government. In 2021, our government committed \$12.2 million for physician training at Dalhousie Medical School, including an additional \$1.2 million to continue funding 16 new seats for a total of \$2.7 million this year. This investment expands access to medical training and increases the diversity of our physician workforce by providing spaces for rural Nova Scotians, Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian students.

We are committed to a broad strategy that trains, recruits, and retains, physicians and will lead to increased patient attachment. Investing doesn't just involve money and infrastructure; we must invest in our people. That's why the Rankin government will modernize our public health care system to create a welcoming, compassionate, competitive, and innovative environment to practice medicine. We will do so through increased collaboration and engagement, and by investing in healthy and vibrant communities of practice throughout the province.

A Rankin government will continue to support Nova Scotia's Family Resource Centres with an additional \$2 million annual investment to help communities provide more services, deliver new programs and help more Nova Scotian families access community-based activities and services that support their well-being.

Creating safe and healthy environments

If elected, what will your party do to reduce rates of childhood poverty and food insecurity and ensure safer and healthier homes, schools and communities for children and youth?

The global pandemic highlighted food insecurities that too many families face every day. Children should not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. Food insecurity is known to impact academic performance, while poor nutrition impacts long-term physical, social, and emotional well-being. The government launched a school breakfast program that has been widely successful and is now available across the province. There has also been interest expressed by the Federal Government in a national school food program. That's why a Liberal Government will allocate \$3 million a year to pilot a P-6 school lunch program. The Healthy Lunches for Healthy Kids program will provide healthy, locally sourced, low-cost

lunches, ensuring children in elementary schools are well nourished and prepared to succeed in the classroom. The average cost per lunch will be \$5 a day.

The program will use a pay-what-you-can model and will be first launched in communities' demonstrating the highest need. The pay-what-you can model provides families with flexibility within their household budgets while adaptable, convenient payment options promote inclusive participation. A buy local component will promote and emphasize locally sourced foods and vendors, highlight healthy local food options, as well as provide additional markets for farmers and producers. The Nova Scotia Liberal Party is committed to the health and wellbeing of our children. Providing affordable, healthy lunches will lead to greater health and academic outcomes for our kids, while making life more affordable for Nova Scotian families.

Child Care-The Liberal government has signed the new Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement, an historic \$645 million commitment. This agreement will make childcare much more affordable for families, while expanding access to quality care across Nova Scotia. Currently, in parts of the province, the average cost of childcare is \$44 per day. By next year, families in Nova Scotia will pay 50% less for regulated child care, and by 2026, child care will cost an average of \$10 a day. The Liberal Party's commitment to providing affordable, high-quality, inclusive child care and early learning will support parents, especially women, to enter or re-enter the labour force.

The Nova Scotia Liberal Party has committed to a \$20 million over five-year investment in Poverty Reduction. The goal is to support innovative projects that are designed to improve the lives of low-income Nova Scotians, by building vibrant communities by investing in community expertise, preventing poverty by breaking the cycle, alleviating the hardship of poverty through improved services, and enabling Nova Scotians to exit poverty by building capacity. We have also expanded the Nova Scotia Child Benefit to include more families, while also raising the amount eligible families receive. The \$18 million investment, (2020-21 budget), was the largest single increase to the benefit since it was created in 1998. The benefit is a tax-free, monthly payment to families with children under 18. Families that are newly eligible will also now qualify for the Low-Income Pharmacare for Children Program for children under the age of 18. For each additional child, families will receive between \$412 and \$900 annually depending on income level. The expanded child benefit will support an additional 6,100 families including 10,000 more children - a total of 28,000 families and 49,000 children across Nova Scotia. Low Income Pharmacare (drug coverage) for children is a program that provides prescription drug coverage for children of low-income families. Families pay \$5 per prescription no matter how much the medication costs.

The Nova Scotia Liberal Party is committed to making life more affordable and equitable for Nova Scotians families. We are improving mental health services, investing in healthcare infrastructure, recruiting more doctors, and training more skilled workers in the health profession fields. We are working to alleviate child poverty and increase food security. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to answer these important questions.