

Dr. Jeff Critch  
Canadian Pediatric Society  
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Dear Dr. Critch,

Thank you for your correspondence of January 27<sup>th</sup> 2021 and for giving me an opportunity to express my commitment to strengthening child and youth mental health and mental healthcare, and creating safe and healthy environments. The PC Party agrees with the Canadian Pediatric Society that these are two key priorities for improved child and youth health and well-being in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Let me address your two questions.

***Strengthening child and youth mental health and mental healthcare: If elected, what will your party do to improve access to publicly funded mental health treatment and resources for children and youth?***

As CPS members know all too well, children and youth and young adults are not immune to mental health and addictions challenges. A PC Government will improve access to publicly funded mental health treatment and resources for children and youth. Here is how.

A PC Government will work with all stakeholders to implement a youth mental health and addictions strategy. As a part of this strategy, we will focus particular attention on the issue of youth suicide. I believe in working together and in collaboration with subject matter experts. If I am elected Premier on February 13<sup>th</sup>, I would extend an invitation to the Canadian Pediatric Society to be one of the subject matter experts engaged in the creation and implementation of our youth mental health and addictions strategy.

We will lose no time in advancing improvements. Even as we develop this strategy, a PC Government will also take action to improve mental health supports for children and youth. As students spend a large part of their day in schools, we will promote mental wellness in the school curriculum and ensure the appropriate supports are in place to help children and youth develop strategies that improve mental wellness and empathy for peers and others who are struggling. We will improve students' access to assistance and support from school counsellors, mental health professionals, and related personnel. We will ensure the health care and education systems do not operate in silos, but rather work together to support our students.

We are keenly aware that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant public health restrictions have negatively impacted the mental health of many in our province. We will work with mental health professionals to address the mental health needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, including children and youth, who have been severely impacted by the pandemic and the measures to combat it.

Additionally, a PC Government will improve access to mental health care and addictions treatment as per the recommendations of the report of the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly all-party committee on mental health and addictions. "Towards Recovery" was released in March of 2017 and contained 54 recommendations. We will work diligently to ensure all are implemented. We will review the implementation to ensure that positive progress is being made.

***Creating safe and healthy environments: If elected, what will your party do to ensure safer and healthier homes, schools and communities for children and youth in NL, including reducing rates of childhood poverty and food insecurity?***

With respect to creating safe and healthy environments, the CPS specifically mentioned reducing the rates of child poverty and food insecurity – two issues we are addressing in our policies.

To improve the health of people, we will focus on the Social Determinants of Health, recognizing that one of the reasons for the poor outcomes of so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is the impoverished conditions in which they live. Poverty reduction is a wellness strategy. It was a PC government a decade and a half ago that instituted the province's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, which invested enormous sums to help people escape the grip of poverty. National anti-poverty leaders started taking notice of the PC plan a decade ago and called it the model for the rest of the country. Within a decade, it had transformed Newfoundland and Labrador from the province with the highest rate of child poverty in the country to the province with the lowest, as borne out by objective indicators. It worked. Our party is committed to developing a brand new Poverty Reduction Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador, to continue the important work we started. Poverty is intolerable. The best solution is good jobs for the family's caregivers. Poverty reduction mechanisms can increase the power of the money people earn when they are at the lowest end of the income scale.

A PC Government will work with organizations whose mandate focuses on the issue of housing and homelessness to implement and support their plans. A PC Government will strive to ensure all organizations and individuals have the supports they require.

Newfoundland and Labrador has a high rate of food insecurity, both at the provincial aggregate level and within many households. In other words, the province is not producing enough of the food we eat, and many households are not able to access enough of the healthy food they need. Reducing food insecurity in our communities can be achieved by working together. We believe that community organizations, governments, local food distributors and retailers, and local food producers can work together to reduce food insecurity and the rate of dependence on food banks. We are also looking at producing more of the food we eat. That should put fresher, more affordable food within reach of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We can work with retail outlets and community organizations in the district to strengthen food security for residents. Food donations really do meet the needs of so many people who are especially vulnerable and in need of immediate assistance. Lower-cost meal programs help students, seniors and many others access healthy food on a daily basis. Non-profits and local businesses can explore innovative solutions to help residents available of low-cost but nutritious food options. For example, the goal of the Kids Eat Smart Foundation is to "provide children with the nutrition they need to learn, to grow, and to be their very best." This is a goal we support. I am especially proud of the work Kids Eat Smart did to innovate in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which left even more kids vulnerable, but made the delivery of meals challenging. There is even more we can do to address food insecurity in families. We ought to explore affordable food delivery services, farm to table services, lower cost meal programs, community kitchens, community gardens and a host of other innovative solutions that have been tested in jurisdictions near and far. It is incumbent on us to ensure people have access to healthy food, regardless of their financial means, because that keeps people healthier and benefits all of us in the long run. It is a wellness strategy that not only alleviates needless suffering, but also reduces health care costs.

There are other policies I could highlight. Some children live with violence. A PC Government will develop a new, long-term violence prevention strategy based on evidence and best practices to help prevent violence from occurring. A PC Government will increase support for community-based organizations that assist survivors of violence. A PC Government will collaborate with Indigenous organizations and governments to support the development and implementation of long-term, culturally appropriate solutions to violence against Indigenous women and children. A PC Government will collaborate with the Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women, Indigenous women's organizations, survivors of violence and other partners to establish a task force to examine the issues of intimate partner and family violence and develop an action plan. The task force will have representation from all parties in the House of Assembly and various community stakeholders. We will advance Family Violence Intervention Courts based on the recommendations of the task force.

A PC Government will create a new strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in collaboration with non-profit and community organizations to remove systemic barriers and help achieve the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador society, including education and employment.

In health care, prevention is paramount. Instead of a 'sick' care system, we need a 'health' care system. A PC Government will appoint a Chief Wellness Officer (CWO) to find ways to make Newfoundlanders and Labradorians healthier so they need less care, have healthier lives and incur less cost. The CWO will provide strategic vision, planning and direction to the development, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to improve health and well-being outcomes for people; regularly monitor and report outcomes; raise awareness and provide education; and create a culture of wellness. We will promote healthy living starting in school, with curriculum focusing on smoking and drug use, healthy eating, exercise and mental wellness. In consultation with stakeholders, a PC Government will explore utilizing our schools, where possible, as year-round community centres, making them available for early childhood education, non-profits, and other social supportive programming.

A PC Government will also improve the delivery of safe, potable drinking water. We will conduct a systemic review of water boil-order advisories across the province, with a goal of developing workable small-town solutions and a timeline to address them.

Find more details of our plan as we roll out our policy platform online: [pcnl.ca](http://pcnl.ca)

Thank you once again for your correspondence, and that you for the important work all CPS members do.

Ches Crosbie  
Leader  
Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador