

November 12, 2024

ELECTION 2024: Mental Health Access for Nova Scotians

Dear Political Party,

The Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia (APNS) is the professional association representing psychologists across the province. Our diverse membership spans every health zone in Nova Scotia, and they actively engage with and support mental health in their communities. APNS promotes psychological well-being by advocating for the needs and issues of people and society.

Psychologists are leaders within the mental health field and provide crucial mental health services that include psychological assessments, diagnosis, treatment and research. Psychology is a regulated profession under the Nova Scotia Psychologists Act. To be a psychologist one must meet rigorous professional requirements and adhere to prescribed standards, guidelines and ethical principles. Given their training and expertise, psychologists are in a unique position to: (1) advise on the clinical implications of the roll out of programs to support the goals above, (2) support evaluation of those programs, and (3) oversee the implementation of evidence-based practice among a wider range of disciplines or health professions.

We invite you to respond to the following questions, which focus on issues vital to psychologists and the communities they serve. Your responses will be shared electronically with our members, provided we receive them by November 18, 2024.

Improving public access to mental health services through timely access to services, high quality of care, innovative implementation, collaborative care teams, educating the public on mental health and addictions care services and supporting organizations that provide mental health care.

1. How will your party prioritize mental health funding within the health care budget?
2. The Canada-Nova Scotia Agreement to Work Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians has \$19 million for *Improving access to quality mental health and substance use services*. Does your party commit to spending the full amount on improved access to mental health and addictions support for all Nova Scotians?

Public System Recruitment and Retention. Public health system and school psychologists are leaving public institutions to work in the private sector. This is mostly due to workplace culture, shortage of resources that affect the standard of care, lack of professional autonomy and wages.

3. How will your party support the recruitment and retention of public health and school psychologists?
4. What is your plan for ensuring that the province has enough psychologists in the workforce to ensure that all Nova Scotians' mental health needs are met throughout the province?

Increased Education and Training. There is a shortage of psychologists across Nova Scotia. Students who leave the province for training often do not return, whereas students who train here often stay. Additionally, the mental health needs of Nova Scotians are increasingly complex, requiring newly trained psychologists to possess very specialized skills. To meet the complex health needs of Nova Scotians, university graduate programs and residency training sites across the province need to be expanded. Funding is necessary to support increased opportunities for high quality, graduate-level training in psychology within Nova Scotia, which will enable graduates to better support diverse and underserved clients in high needs regions.

5. What is your fiscal plan for supporting increased, high quality university training of psychologists at the graduate level across the province? This is needed to address the complex mental health needs of Nova Scotians.

APNS looks forward to engaging with your party on these issues and others, to improve the mental health of Nova Scotians.

Sincerely,

APNS President