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By email: koehn@jointhealth.org

Dear Ms. Koehn,

Thank you for the opportunity to address issues important to your organization during the 2017 provincial election. On behalf of all BC Liberal Party candidates, please accept the responses to your questions, below. For more information about Today's BC Liberal platform, please go to: <https://www.bcliberals.com/platform/>

Sincerely,

Today's BC Liberals

Arthritis affects approximately 600,000 BC residents, yet no model of arthritis care is available. This is particularly pronounced outside of the Lower Mainland. Where you live can be more important in determining treatment than how sick or disabled you are.

What will your government do to bring a high quality, evidence-based model of arthritis care for all BC residents?

The face of health care – and how it's delivered – is changing. For too long, health care has been disease-centred and provider-focused instead of centred on the patient. Today's BC Liberal goal is to have health care focused on the patient from the beginning – on prevention, health management and primary care in a patient's community, supported by a strong acute and emergency care system. We have committed \$90 million in new funding to bring integrated team-based primary care services to more communities throughout British Columbia.

In working towards a health care system that's centered on the patient, more emphasis is being placed on care in the community rather than just in a hospital. This new funding will help create new teams of primary care providers in communities throughout BC, starting in those with the greatest need for enhanced primary care services.

This model was first piloted in Kamloops, which brought together team members, including physicians, nurse practitioners, mental health clinicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, pharmacists, and others, to meet the full spectrum of patient needs.

Today's BC Liberals believe that a good primary and community care system allows people to remain at home rather than ending up with hospital stays that could be avoided or having to enter residential care sooner than required. Our goal is for patients to be supported to proactively maintain their health throughout their lives regardless of where they live – in particular those with greater needs who use the health system more frequently, such as people with complex medical conditions like arthritis.

Today's BC Liberals are able to make this investment due to British Columbia's strong economy, and because we have a solid plan that invests in the services people count on.

A 2016 study by researchers from the University of Calgary and Statistics Canada predicts that by 2031, OA will cost the Canadian economy an estimated \$17.5 billion a year in lost productivity. Osteoarthritis forces people to stop working or work less due to pain, fatigue, and the demands of prescribed treatment therapies. The work time loss is significant because of the reducing number of workers available to replace retiring baby boomers after decades of low birth rates.

What will your government do to introduce patient education and exercise programs, such as GLA:D, that have been proven to significantly reduce hip or knee osteoarthritis symptoms?

British Columbia is recognized as a Canadian leader in health and wellness, but we can and must do more. It's critically important that all of us make healthier choices – to live tobacco free, to eat well, to enjoy regular physical activities, and to do what we can to prevent chronic disease.

In order to support implementation of the physical activity strategy and build on existing investments, our BC Liberal government has invested \$8.5 million to help increase physical activity levels in targeted populations including children and youth, First Nations and Aboriginal peoples, and older adults as well as enhance opportunities for physical activity within communities across the province.

Additionally, we have developed a provincial physical activity strategy designed to guide and stimulate co-ordinated policies, practices and programs in physical activity that will improve the health and well-being of British Columbians, and the communities in which we live, learn, work and play.

We have also partnered with the Centre for Hip Health and Mobility (CHHM) through the government-funded Active Aging BC (ABC) grant to create and provide evidence-based community-level fall prevention programs throughout B.C.

As part of the 3 year Active Aging BC (ABC) grant to CHHM capacity has been created to provide mobile fall prevention clinics (*Mobile in the Community*), a culturally safe elder safety and fall prevention program for First Nations communities (*Strategies and Actions for Independent Living – SAIL FN*) and a program to train home care workers to enable clients to identify fall risks, increase mobility and prevent falls in their own homes (*Mobile at Home*)

We will build on these initiatives by:

- Investing \$1 million in grants to communities across British Columbia to build activity areas that are appropriate for seniors suffering from dementia.
- Providing an additional \$2 million to the Union of BC Municipalities to fund our age-friendly communities program and expand access for seniors across our province.
- Introducing an Active Seniors Credit to support and promote seniors leading active healthy lifestyles.

Aboriginal Canadians have some of the highest rates of serious or life threatening arthritis in the world, and are at greater risk for becoming disabled by arthritis. Significant gaps in Aboriginal arthritis care currently exist in BC.

What will your government do to improve the healthcare and lives of Aboriginals living with arthritis in BC?

Our government is working to improve health outcomes by ensuring accessible and culturally appropriate health care is available to all Aboriginal people. B.C.'s First Nations Health Authority is the first province-wide health authority of its kind in Canada. It works with First Nations, Health Canada, our government and the provincial health system to improve health programs and services, and foster a health and wellness approach that reflects First Nations culture.

To foster a health-care system where patients feel safe when receiving care in an environment free from discrimination, in 2015, the provincial government, regional health authorities, the Provincial Health Services Authority and the First Nations Health Authority signed the Declaration of Commitment to Cultural Safety and Humility in Health Services for First Nations and Aboriginal People in British Columbia.

Arthritis Consumer Experts annually ranks publicly funded drug formularies based on the number of medically necessary arthritis medications (e.g. biologics, biosimilars and targeted small molecule). B.C. currently sits in fourth place in Canada.

What will your government do to improve the province's ranking and ensure that BC residents living with arthritis, with the help of the doctors who treat them, are able to choose the medication most appropriate for their specific disease and risk factors?

Today's BC Liberals agree access to new therapies is important - that's why we have a pharmacare program that is the most comprehensive in Canada. We will continue to work to ensure new medications and treatment regimes are examined through our drug review process.

We are also pleased to have provided \$3 million to the Arthritis Research Centre of Canada to further develop prevention strategies, diagnosis and treatment.

Arthritis is the leading cause of disability and work disability in BC. About a quarter of the population with arthritis between 20 and 54 years of age in BC were not in the labour force because of their arthritis.

How will your government establish better prevention programs and facilitate flexible work arrangements to help reduce the direct and indirect costs of arthritis to BC employers and the BC economy?

With close to one million job openings expected in B.C. over the next decade, people with disabilities – 334,000 British Columbians, aged 15 to 64 – represent an important employee talent pool.

The Presidents Group, a change-driven network of business leaders, was appointed in 2013 to help increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities and create a more accessible consumer marketplace.

Members work with the business community to encourage employers in a number of different sectors to hire more people with disabilities and commit to sharing their collective learnings on the recruitment, hiring and retention of employees with disabilities with other employers.

Additionally, we have also Created the WorkAble internship program for new graduates with disabilities to enter the BC Public Service. 75% of first year interns still work for the Public Service

Today's BC Liberals understand the challenges that accompany a growing and aging society and we want to help. To assist those caring for a family member with a disability, if re-elected, we will introduce a respite tax credit of up \$2,500.

The economic burden of arthritis is expected to double within a generation and strain the BC health system's ability to provide quality care to BC patients with arthritis.

Will your government take steps to increase the number of rheumatologists and arthritis trained allied health professionals to ensure timely, specialized care for BC patients with arthritis?

BC has the best health outcomes in Canada. Since forming government, Today's BC Liberals have made record investments to ensure British Columbians live long, healthy lives. We know that having access to a primary health care professional, such as a family doctor, is a vital part of people achieving and maintaining good health. That's why Today's BC Liberals are working to increase access to primary health care for all British Columbians.

Everyone involved in the health system is working to improve the quality of health care for the benefit patients across the province. We will continue to work our partners to improve access to health care professionals by:

- Growing the number of graduating doctors from B.C.'s medical programs to 400 by 2025— ensuring that the majority of these new students are placed in the distributed medical programs at the University of Victoria, University of Northern British Columbia and UBC Okanagan.

- Identifying retention programs to ensure these health care providers remain in rural and northern communities.
- Expanding our Practice-Ready Assessment-BC program that fast-tracks international physicians into clinical practice in rural communities.
- Provide funding to train an additional 500 nurses per year across the province.
- Train and place an additional 100 nurse practitioners across British Columbia.