

## Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) Survey - Liberal Responses

1. The time to address models of care in arthritis is now after years of being at the back of the line of health care planning and delivery in Nova Scotia. A major barrier is access to care, including the wait times for people with inflammatory arthritis for a first rheumatologist visit. There is a pressing need to explore, invest in, and develop different care models, such as team-based care, that allow people with arthritis to receive timely access to suitable care and support for managing their disease.

**What will your government do to provide high quality, evidence-based models of care to ensure more timely access to arthritis care and enable Nova Scotians to get the right treatment at the right time?**

A Nova Scotia Liberal government will build and expand 40 collaborative care clinics across the province to ensure timely access to primary care for Nova Scotians. This model will give people health care close to home, and improve referral processes among allied health professionals, allowing for a more proactive approach to treatment of diseases like arthritis. We need to make sure that we're helping Nova Scotians stay on top of issues like arthritis, and we're being proactive with our healthcare system. This model is currently working well in places like Clare, where it has significantly increased attachment to primary care.

2. Indigenous Peoples in Canada 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 or developing co-morbidities. Significant gaps in Indigenous arthritis care currently exist in Nova Scotia. Care models, such as having an Indigenous community based patient care facilitator, that address health care in a culturally relevant manner and the many barriers to care, have been proven to resolve care gaps more effectively and optimize health outcomes of Indigenous Peoples with arthritis and comorbidities.

**Will your government introduce culturally appropriate, patient-centered policies to help Indigenous Peoples navigate the healthcare system and receive coordinated care within their community to manage their arthritis?**

Indigenous communities have faced generations of trauma and barriers to accessing culturally appropriate healthcare, and the Nova Scotia Liberal Party is committed to working with these communities to determine how to best meet their needs. We respect the lived experience of Indigenous folks in our province and will ensure that their voices are heard when implementing our collaborative care model.

3. The next Nova Scotia government must take steps to ensure the sustainability of prescription drug plans and the continued affordability of prescription medicines for Nova Scotia patients. The Department of Health and Wellness stated at the launch of the Nova Scotia Biosimilars Initiative that it expected to save over \$13 million annually once it was fully implemented, thanks to people transitioning from originator biologics to their

cost-effective biosimilars, which are highly similar versions of high-cost biologic drugs used to treat chronic diseases, such as inflammatory arthritis.

**Will your government commit to reinvesting biosimilars savings to increase accessibility to new medicines and expand coverage for existing medicines for people living with inflammatory arthritis?**

We support increasing accessibility to new medicines for folks living with conditions like inflammatory arthritis, and ensuring that there is adequate research in place to continue to improve this access. Our health system must invest in increasing access to care. If elected, we will work with arthritis advocacy groups to ensure that the programs in place are supporting their medication needs in an effective and barrier-free manner.

4. Some individuals with severe osteoarthritis require joint replacement surgery to achieve better quality of life, less pain and more joint function. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the guideline for knee and hip replacement is to receive surgery within 26 weeks.<sup>4</sup> In Nova Scotia in 2023, only 47% of knee replacement patients and 53% of hip replacement patients were treated within that guideline and fell below the Canadian average. This deeply impacts the lives of Nova Scotia residents with osteoarthritis who require these surgeries.

**Will your government take steps to ensure timely, specialized care for Nova Scotia residents struggling with osteoarthritis, including joint replacement surgery wait times that are within medically recommended guidelines?**

A Nova Scotia Liberal government will take action to shorten the surgical wait times in the province, by investing in our healthcare system and doctor/surgeon retention. We recognize the importance of folks accessing joint replacement surgeries within the recommended timelines in order to improve their quality of life in the short- and long-term. We also need to work more to prepare patients for surgery while they are waiting to meet the surgeon, so they can get surgery as quickly as possible.

5. Many Canadians are positively adapting to virtual care. A majority of respondents in an Arthritis Consumer Experts National Survey reported they believe virtual care could save costs in the healthcare system and improve access to specialists and timeliness of test results. However, respondents from underserved communities – rural and remote and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour - were over 3 times more likely to report difficulties using virtual care services.

**What will your government do to ensure the continuation, improvement, and expansion of virtual care for all Nova Scotia residents – both patients and health care professionals – and ensure access is equitable to all?**

We will work with marginalized communities to ensure that they have equitable access to all aspects of healthcare in the province. We will expand the various models of care to take the specific and diverse needs of these communities into consideration, easing access and improving the care they receive in Nova Scotia.