

## ACE Survey for Newfoundland and Labrador Political Parties

### *Share your plan for arthritis prevention, treatment, and care in Newfoundland and Labrador*

Arthritis is the most common chronic disease in Canada and affects one in five Newfoundland and Labrador voters. There are over 100 types of arthritis, and despite the misconception that it is only a disease of older adults, two-thirds of Newfoundland and Labrador residents living with arthritis are younger than 65.

It is the leading cause of disability in Newfoundland and Labrador. Residents of working age with arthritis are twice as likely to be out of the workforce as their peers without the disease, representing a significant economic burden related to direct health care costs and indirect costs to the economy related to lost employment, sick leave, and absenteeism.

Rural residents, Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, women and racialized communities, can face the highest burden but the least access to care.

Health care is consistently ranked as a leading issue for Newfoundland and Labrador voters leading up to the October 14, 2025, provincial election. Arthritis affects more than 135,000 Newfoundland and Labrador residents<sup>1</sup>, yet no comprehensive model of arthritis care is available across the province. The way people with arthritis access and receive health care varies significantly across Newfoundland and Labrador. This particularly affects residents living with inflammatory arthritis – like rheumatoid arthritis, axial spondyloarthritis, psoriatic arthritis or lupus – who depend on getting a timely and accurate diagnosis, fast access to rheumatologists, and appropriate public reimbursement for needed disease-modifying medications.

The political parties running in the upcoming provincial election have diverse policies on health care. This survey asks what your party, if elected to form the next government, will do to improve the level of arthritis prevention, treatment and care in Newfoundland and Labrador?

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<sup>1</sup> The State of Arthritis in Canada Report Card (2023) <https://arthritis.ca/about-us/what-we-do/advocacy/report-card>

### Question 1

**If elected, will your government ensure that hip and knee joint replacement patients in Newfoundland and Labrador are treated within the CIHI guideline of 26 weeks?**

#### **Surgery wait times: Meeting national standards**

Over 99 per cent of knee replacements and more than 70 per cent of hip replacements are caused by arthritis. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the guideline for knee and hip replacement is to receive surgery within 26 weeks.<sup>2</sup> In Newfoundland and Labrador in 2024, only 33% of knee replacement patients and 41% of hip replacement patients were treated within that guideline, well below the Canadian average. This deeply impacts the lives of Newfoundland and Labrador residents with osteoarthritis who require these surgeries.

### Question 2

**If elected, will your party remove outdated barriers that delay patient access to biologic and tsDMARD therapies, and modernize the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program?**

#### **Medication access: Modernizing NLPDP reimbursement criteria**

Biologic and targeted synthetic disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (tsDMARDs) are highly effective in slowing or halting the damage caused by inflammatory arthritis, including rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, and lupus. When older, conventional small-molecule treatments fail, residents living with inflammatory arthritis require timely reimbursement access to biologic or tsDMARDs medicines to prevent irreversible damage to joints, tendons, tissues, and even internal organs. Currently, Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP) reimbursement criteria require patients to first fail on older, less effective treatments, causing unnecessary delays in accessing the most appropriate, therapies for the right patient at the right time.

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. Wait times for priority procedures across Canada. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/wait-times-for-priority-procedures-in-canada-2024>

### Question 3

**If elected, will your government ensure Indigenous Peoples with arthritis have access to culturally safe, community-based care models to close existing gaps and improve outcomes?**

#### **Indigenous Health: Culturally safe arthritis care**

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. Significant gaps in Indigenous arthritis care currently exist in Newfoundland and Labrador. 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.<sup>3</sup>

### Question 4

**If elected, 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?**

#### **Drug Plan sustainability: Reinvesting biosimilars savings**

The next Newfoundland and Labrador government must take steps to ensure the sustainability of prescription drug plans and the continued affordability of prescription medicines for Newfoundland and Labrador patients. In March 2023, the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program launched the [Biosimilars Initiative](#). Under this initiative, NLPDP beneficiaries using certain originator biologics are transitioned to a safe and effective biosimilar version, in order to maintain drug plan coverage. The NLPDP Biosimilars Initiative provides an evidence-based opportunity to get the best value from medications funded under the program, without negatively affecting patient health outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> Umaefulam et al. (2021). Arthritis liaison: a First Nations community-based patient care facilitator. *Health promotion and chronic disease prevention in Canada: research, policy and practice*. <https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.41.6.04>



### Question 5

**If elected, will your government ensure the continuation, improvement, and expansion of virtual care for Newfoundland and Labrador residents – both patients and health care professionals – and ensure access is equitable to all?**

#### **Virtual care: Equitable access for all**

Many Canadians are positively adapting to virtual care. A majority of respondents in a 2021 Arthritis Consumer Experts 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 who identified as Black, Indigenous and People of Colour were over 3 times more likely to report difficulties using virtual care services.