

October 22nd, 2020

Thank you for your inquiry into how the B.C. Greens will support those with arthritis in our province. We hope that our response details our commitment to bettering the healthcare system for all British Columbians.

Sincerely,
Sonia Furstenau
Leader, B.C. Greens
B.C. Green Candidate for Cowichan Valley

Question 1

Arthritis affects approximately 700,000 B.C. 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. Approximately six million adults – one in five – have doctor-diagnosed arthritis. Two thirds are under the age of 65. In fact, arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions are the leading cause of work disability in Canada.

What will your government do to bring a high quality, accessible, standardized evidence-based model of arthritis care for all B.C. residents?

The B.C. Greens are committed to ensuring that all British Columbians have access to quality, timely medical care. One important priority we must tackle is the family doctor shortage in BC. The BC Greens will continue to work with physicians and other stakeholders to improve the incentives for doctors to set up family practices in BC and further the opportunities for qualified foreign-trained physicians to play in providing services in our province. In the last government, the BC Greens helped champion the creation of primary care networks. These interprofessional and integrated teams are providing more access to physiotherapists, nurse practitioners, midwives, dieticians and other health professionals, helping alleviate the burden on doctors, increasing their ability to take on new patients.

As laid out in our platform on expanding primary care, we commit to working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia to create a pathway for qualified foreign-trained physicians to practice in BC. We further commit to continuing the roll-out of primary care networks in BC to expand accessibility of healthcare services, while increasing the number of British Columbians with a family doctor. We will consult with physicians and other stakeholders to improve efficiency, reduce administration, and incentivize becoming a General Practitioner. These interprofessional and integrated teams are providing more access to physiotherapists, nurse practitioners, midwives, dieticians and other health professionals, helping alleviate the burden on doctors, increasing their ability to take on new patients, and take stress off of our acute care network. It is belief that through ending this family doctor shortage, those with arthritis will receive an increased quality of care that is accessible, consistent and personalized.

Question 2

The Canadian Medical Association released independent survey results this summer, showing that Canadians are embracing virtual care options and would like to see a continuation, improvement and expansion of virtual care after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. A majority of respondents in the survey believe virtual care could save costs in the healthcare system and improve access to specialists and timeliness of test results. This is important because many people with inflammatory arthritis live in locations where specialists are scarce and/or have difficulty traveling (due to symptoms like decreased mobility, imbalance or walking issues). Virtual care can address some of these challenges by bringing doctors into patients' homes or nearby clinics.

What will your government do to ensure the continuation, improvement, and expansion of virtual care for all B.C. residents – both patients and health care professionals?

Expanding virtual care for mental health supports and family practitioners is an important element of providing quality care throughout this pandemic and into the future. The B.C. Greens would work with medical professionals and service providers to enhance the availability and accessibility of virtual care for all British Columbians. We would also invest in greater availability of personal protective equipment for medical professionals and other high-risk frontline workers, spurred through innovation in sectors of our economy for a made-in-BC approach to PPE.

Question 3

ACE's Arthritis Medications Report Card is designed to help Canadians evaluate where their province ranks in terms of providing reimbursement for medications approved for inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis, axial spondyloarthritis, psoriatic arthritis and juvenile idiopathic arthritis. B.C. ranks third on the Report Card where 11 medications are currently "under review," including four medications for the treatment of types of inflammatory arthritis.

What will your government do to improve the Province's ranking on the ACE Report Card?

The B.C. Greens would work with industry, healthcare professionals, and community organizations to improve patient access to reimbursable medications. We would need to assess the status of the medications under review before committing to specific coverage. We have also committed to developing a proposal to implement an essential drugs program beginning in 2022, designed to reduce the costs of prescription drugs and ensure the cost of drugs is not a barrier to health management.

Question 4

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 B.C.

What will your government do to improve the healthcare and lives of Indigenous peoples living with arthritis in B.C.?

The BC Greens are committed to working every day to ensure that the provincial government delivers on its commitment to create an action plan, as required by the legislation, to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA). The B.C. Greens will work in partnership under DRIPA to support rebuilding and self-determination in health and wellness for Indigenous communities, and work with those communities to develop a targeted approach on treatment and providing sufficient support to ensuring quality of life for those with arthritis. Improving the health and wellbeing of all British Columbians is our overarching priority and we see this as a fundamental part of reconciliation.

Question 5

Some individuals with severe arthritis require joint replacement surgery in order to achieve better quality of life, less pain and more joint function. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), the guideline for knee and hip replacement is to receive surgery within 182 days. In B.C. in 2019, only 66% of knee replacements and 76% of hip replacements meet the guideline. This deeply impacts the lives of B.C. residents with arthritis who require these surgeries. The COVID-19 pandemic may have also caused delays in surgery wait times.

Will your government take steps to ensure timely, specialized care for B.C. patients with arthritis, including joint surgery wait times that are within medically recommended guidelines? How will your government manage the backlog of surgical appointments that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes, we will continue to work to improve our patient care timelines, including surgery wait times. We know that having to wait for much needed treatment, including surgery, can have an extremely detrimental effect on a person's quality of life. Addressing the backlog of surgical appointments due to COVID-19 is a priority for us and will require a dedicated effort. We would work with Dr. Bonnie Henry and health professionals to work through the backlog, and we are open to allocating additional resources as needed to create more spaces and reduce wait times.

Our priority is to ensure that hospitals are fully staffed and operating as efficiently as possible by providing avenues for better recruitment of healthcare workers, supporting retention through reducing the burden on our hospital staff, and optimizing the ways our hospitals operate in collaboration with healthcare professionals to ensure effective use of hospital rooms and operating space.

More broadly, the B.C. Greens believe that we must take the burden off of our acute care system in order to improve the efficiency of the system for all and immediately begin the process of addressing the backlog of surgeries. This will be accomplished through our pathways to address the family doctor shortage as outlined above, including consulting with physicians and other stakeholders to improve efficiency, reduce administration, and incentivize becoming a General Practitioner and working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia to create a pathway for qualified foreign-trained physicians to practice in BC.