



Cheryl Koehn
President
Arthritis Consumer Experts
Via Email: koehn@jointhehealth.org

Dear Ms. Koehn,

Thank you for inviting me to respond to your survey asking how the Progressive Conservative Party, if elected to form the next government, will improve the level of arthritis prevention, treatment and care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As you noted, arthritis is the leading cause of disability in Newfoundland and Labrador, affecting 135,000 residents – one in five – and diagnosis and care vary by region. I believe that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should have access to healthcare when they need it, regardless of where they live.

Far too many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are waiting too long for critical procedures and care, including hip and knee replacements, arthritis treatment, and access to essential medications. The status quo is not acceptable. I believe we can and must do better by listening to frontline professionals, planning more effectively, and making smarter choices that put patients first.

I am committed to ensuring patients receive the right care at the right time. That means reducing surgical wait times to meet national standards, improving access to arthritis treatment and biologic therapies, and modernizing our drug coverage programs so patients are not forced to divide medications or go without. A government I lead will negotiate with the federal government to secure a pharmacare program that lowers the cost of prescription drugs and diabetic supplies. Savings from smarter delivery, including the use of biosimilars, will be reinvested into expanding access to new medicines and improving coverage.

Equity of care is also essential. Indigenous people in our province continue to face unacceptable barriers in accessing healthcare. I am committed to working in genuine partnership with Indigenous communities to close gaps, support culturally safe care, and deliver true equity in access and outcomes.

On the issue of virtual care, I must be clear: while it may have a role to play, it is not the only solution to the access crisis. People want to sit beside a healthcare professional, not rely on a screen. My priority will be to ensure everyone has a family doctor or nurse practitioner, while expanding training, recruiting more providers, and investing in diagnostic equipment and services throughout the province. These steps will reduce wait times, support rural care, and end the costly reliance on out-of-province travel nurses.



Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve a healthcare system that delivers better outcomes, not excuses. By making smarter investments, improving access to medications, supporting healthcare professionals, and strengthening equity, we can ensure patients get the care they need when they need it, without having to pay extra. That is the standard we will set and the commitment I make to you.

Thank you for your advocacy and for pressing for better healthcare for all of us. I look forward to working together to make these improvements a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Wakeham".

Tony Wakeham
Leader
Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador