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Whitehorse, Yukon*

To: Cheryl Koehn and Arthritis Consumer Experts

Thank you for reaching out to the Yukon NDP during the election. We completely agree that health care is the most important issue for this election. That is why our platform prioritizes access to primary care providers for all Yukoners. When we listen to frontline healthcare workers, we hear over and over again about the importance of access to primary care and especially access to preventive care in the communities.

Surgery Wait Times: Right now in the Yukon, wait times for joint replacements range from 16 to 21 months. That is months of painful waiting. The Yukon NDP has a plan to reduce surgical wait times, and to support arthritis care in communities. We will be expanding surgical services to add four new operating rooms at the Whitehorse General Hospital to address the backlogs and delays, and to provide the infrastructure that the territory needs. We will also be expanding access to primary care with several initiatives to recruit and retain more family doctors and primary care providers, including public team-based primary care clinics, relocation programs, more beds at Whitehorse General Hospital, and expanding the scope of practice for nurse practitioners and pharmacists. Each of these measures increases access to primary care while Yukoners are waiting for their surgeries.

Medication Access: The Yukon NDP recognizes that the Chronic Disease Program and other public drug plans in the Yukon are tremendously outdated. Under an NDP government, these lists will be reviewed and modernized, in consultation with medical professionals and individuals with lived experience, to reflect needs-based assessments to provide more equitable public drug coverage. We will also reinstate the Chronic Disease and Disability Benefits Advisory Committee to regularly review and update medication access.



Indigenous Health: A Yukon NDP government will work with each community and First Nation to ensure that there are culturally safe supports. The *Putting People First* report has multiple recommendations about reconciliation and integrating cultural safety and humility into the health and social services system, and we fully support these recommendations. Working to develop a position for an Indigenous community-based patient care facilitator to address health care issues in a culturally relevant manner is something that we would work on in conjunction with all Yukon First Nations.

Drug Plan Sustainability: We will continue to support the *Putting People First* report recommendation for the Yukon Biosimilar Initiative. This initiative saves costs on healthcare and protects health outcomes. It has been adopted across Canada, including the Yukon, because of these successes.

Virtual Care: We will work with patients and healthcare professionals to ensure that equitable access to virtual care is part of the Yukon health care system. Part of our work to update and modernize the digital health systems in the territory will be consultation on virtual care and how it can best work for Yukoners. The Yukon NDP is also committing to expanding the cell phone tower network that would better support projects like virtual care and access from remote communities.

Reducing Avoidable Emergency Department Use: The Yukon NDP will work with the arthritis community to reduce avoidable emergency department use by people living with arthritis, by launching a Community Nurse Support program to keep health centres open and fully staffed. The program will offer relocation costs and provide housing, social, and cultural support for nurses in the communities. We will also be hiring ten more nurse practitioners for the communities, while expanding their scope of practice and offering pay in line with the rest of Canada. These initiatives will mean better access to primary care in communities, and better preventive care for those with arthritis in their home communities. We will engage with



specialists and those with arthritis to follow the recommendations for procedures to reduce emergency department use.

Sincerely,

Kate White

Leader of Yukon NDP