

Election Questionnaire

2021 NSGEU Provincial Election Questionnaire

On behalf of Premier Rankin and the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, thank you for the opportunity to provide responses to the questions asked. Please read answers below.

1. Following seven years of almost constant labour strife, will a government led by you respect the collective bargaining process? Would your government use legislation to interfere at the bargaining table?

We respect the collective bargaining process. We are committed to strong relationships and open dialogue with our unions that balance both the interests of union members and taxpayers.

2. Bill 148, the “Public Services Sustainability (2015) Act” Imposed a non negotiated wage settlement and used legislation to unilaterally remove longstanding articles from collective agreements. The history of Bill 148 will cast a long shadow over public sector bargaining for years to come. If elected Premier, will you repeal Bill 148? Will you accept the findings of the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal?

The Supreme Court of Canada is the final court of appeal and has the ultimate authority. Bill 148 was upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada.

3. Nova Scotia’s Long Term Care and Home Care sector is currently privatized, run either as not for-profit or for-profit enterprises. This has led to a fragmented system of operations with varying degrees of capability. The NSGEU believes that home care is health care, and should be managed and delivered as such with Nova Scotia Health. What is your stance on long-term care reform?

The Liberal Government has made historic investments to rejuvenate Nova Scotia’s long term care sector. This year’s cumulative commitment of \$152.6 million will create new capacity across Nova Scotia, the largest single long-term care investment in our history. 500 new beds will be added to our system. Increasing capacity in the communities with the greatest demand and reducing the average wait time for placement in long term care to 60 days.

Facilities will be built, repaired, or renovated according to space and design standards that put the needs of residents first, with private bedrooms and washrooms, and more focus on infection prevention and control. They will also include workplace safety elements like ceiling lifts to ensure staff are supported to safely provide the best quality care.

Just recently, a new collective agreement for health-care workers was ratified which, provides economic increases of 1.5 per cent per year with an additional one per cent in the final year for all health-care workers. The agreement also includes other investments, such as a five per cent classification adjustment for care team assistants, who support the team in providing care to patients or long-term care residents.

Nova Scotians living in long-term care deserve to have safe, comfortable facilities in their communities. These are more than bricks and mortar facilities – they are people’s homes, and we respect that. This support will help rejuvenate the sector, ensuring our loved ones are well cared for today and into the future.

4. Chronic health care understaffing has been affecting our health services long before COVID-19: Emergency Departments are regularly over-capacity; ambulances and paramedics wait with patients for treatment; and Emergency Departments throughout Nova Scotia are forced to close regularly. Many of these issues can be traced back directly to chronic understaffing. What is your plan to fill longstanding full-time vacancies?

From our rural emergency departments, specialty units, operating rooms and major centres of excellence, the Liberal Government has made once-in-a generation, multi-year and multi-billion-dollar investments to ensure that our hospitals can provide high-quality care in communities across the province. We are investing more than \$4 billion in spending for new hospitals, emergency care centres, and community health centres that will completely transform the way healthcare is delivered in Nova Scotia.

These historic builds represent state-of-the-art operating rooms, modern IT to support virtual care, endoscopy suites, outpatient clinics and day surgery units, inpatient beds, dialysis units, X-ray and ultrasound services and laboratory and diagnostic imaging, and much more. We believe that these brand-new facilities will also help to attract more doctors and other healthcare professionals to the province. They will provide care closer to home for many Nova Scotians and there will be better patient safety by improving infection protection and control.

The NSCC is key to filling our labour needs in critical sectors, such as healthcare, childcare, and construction, fostering an innovative, entrepreneurial, and technologically advanced workforce. Since 2013, the Liberal government has been making strategic investments in the NSCC to grow Nova Scotia, launch careers, and drive business innovation. NSCC programs for skilled trades, health professions, early learning, information technology, and alternative energy have long waitlists. Reducing the waitlists for these programs will put more Nova Scotians to work in the sector in highest demand.

A \$12 million investment over three years will add 800 additional students each year — 400 of which will be dedicated to high demand disciplines in the health sector, including 270 new seats for Licensed Practical Nurses.

We must ensure that our post-secondary institutions have the capacity to produce the skilled workers we need to meet the growing demands of our healthcare system.

That's why, a re-elected Liberal government will commit \$1.5 million to double the funding available for the Nurse Practitioner Education Incentive while adding an additional \$500,000 to expand seats in the Nurse Practitioner Program at Dalhousie University. These programs will be made available for RNs who are committed to working in rural communities with the highest rates of unattached patients for five years, providing better access to primary care for Nova Scotians. More Licensed Practical Nurses Students willing to embark upon a career in nursing should have timely access to training at NSCC.

A Rankin government will invest \$4.05 million over three years to create 270 new LPN seats at the Nova Scotia Community College. The additional workforce is critically important to support the expansion of healthcare infrastructure, both in our hospitals as well as our continuing care sector.

Permanently increasing the number of BScN seats at Cape Breton University and Dalhousie (Yarmouth campus) will address the forecasted demand for RNs required to support government investments in new and expanded provincial health care facilities.

The Rankin Government's investment of \$6 million to permanently add 70 new nursing seats, 62 at CBU and 8 at Dalhousie Yarmouth, brings the total investment in new nursing seats to \$18.2 million by 2026-27, with \$3.2 million in annual ongoing funding.

We are focused on investing in a healthcare system in Nova Scotia that focuses on a holistic approach to health and wellness. We are also making significant investments in mental health and addictions services including plans to launch 8 new mental health walk-in clinics to ensure that Nova Scotians struggling with mental health issues can receive timely, appropriate, and dedicated treatment from a team of specialized professionals.

The Liberal Government recently announced \$3 million to pilot a dedicated emergency department transition team at the QEII. A new pilot program will be launched at the QEII Health Sciences Centre Halifax Infirmary site to improve patient flow and reduce the amount of time ambulances are waiting at the hospital's emergency department.

An emergency department transition team will help get patients into the care of hospital staff quicker and assist with the flow of patients who no longer require emergency care out of the department and into hospital. This will help reduce overcrowding within the emergency department, decrease patient wait times and allow paramedics to get back on the road sooner.

We are invested in major infrastructure improves, developing a larger skilled workforce to meet the growing labour demands in our healthcare systems. We are recruiting more doctors and we are providing education opportunities for training and skill development. We have a plan that is targeted and well thought out, to realistically meet the needs of our healthcare system.

5. Have you ever had to worry about not having a place to live? Many Nova Scotians were experiencing the threat of evictions and uncontrolled rent increases of 20%, 40% and 90%. This meant vulnerable people faced the choice of going without food or medications and potential homelessness. Government recently capped increases at two per cent per year, retroactive to September, 2020. The cap will remain in place until February 1, 2022, or whenever the COVID-19 State of Emergency is lifted. The issue of affordable housing existed before COVID-19 and will last well after.

As Premier, what would your government do to address this issue on a permanent Basis?

Partnering with the Federal government, our government committed to the National Housing Strategy that will invest \$105 million over the next three years to increase access to affordable housing and preserve and maintain existing housing stock. This commitment also includes \$70 million over that same three-year period for renewal of existing housing and supports for low-income homeowners. We have also funded \$12 million in initiatives to support those experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness and \$6.4 million for social housing needs in communities across Nova Scotia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Affordable Housing Commission tabled its report on May 31st, 2021, and the Rankin government accepted its recommendation to allocate \$25 million on quick start initiatives to immediately increase supply and access to affordable housing.

This investment included:

- \$20 million New Affordable Housing Supply Fund
- \$2.5 million Community Housing Growth Fund
- \$2 million for the renewal and repair of existing public housing
- \$500,000 to assist municipalities with housing needs assessments.

A Liberal government will:

- develop a long-term provincial housing strategy that will map out a 10-year plan, including milestones and review periods, to ensure accountability and that we are meeting our goals and housing targets every step of the way over the life of this plan.
- immediately begin a comprehensive review of provincial legislation and regulations, including the Municipal Government Act and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, to create an appropriate legislative environment to reduce housing costs, including a thorough analysis of inclusionary zoning and its role in increasing the supply of affordable housing units. We will direct the Department of Municipal Affairs to support municipal governments to complete a targeted assessment of the municipal development process to identify ways we can support local governments in their efforts to combat their affordable housing challenges.

- rebate the provincial portion of the HST on construction costs for new affordable housing units, committing up to \$25 million to a pilot program in each of two years that will incentivize construction of new affordable housing units. We will also work towards creating a provincial loan fund for non-profit housing organizations. This will facilitate the acquisition of rental properties that are being sold or risk being converted to market rate housing. This will allow our non-profit housing sector to maintain these units as affordable or to convert them into social housing.
- commit to expanding the housing options available to include secondary suites and garage lofts, tiny homes and other non-traditional forms of housing. We will explore innovative forms of funding, like forgivable and repayable loans for homeowners that want to add affordable, non-traditional rental and housing options to their existing properties and provide support for single-room occupancies such as boarding houses in areas of need.
- require compensation for renters who are displaced from their homes due to “renoviction”. Tenants will be eligible for compensation from the landlord equal to one month’s rent for each year they have lived in their current dwelling place, up to 6 months, when a landlord gives notice to quit to allow for renovations.

6. If elected, will you commit to implementing a living wage? For reference: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/living-wages-nova-scotia-and-newbrunswick-2020>. Why or why not?

The current model of determining annual minimum wage adjustments is mandated, under the Nova Scotia Labour Standards Code, and overseen by the Nova Scotia Minimum Wage Review Committee based on the formula set out in the minimum wage regulations.

On January 4, 2021, the Minimum Wage Review Committee submitted its annual report to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. The report recommendations were to increase the minimum wage rate to \$12.95 an hour and to conduct a review of the current approach to setting the minimum wage rate. The new rate increase came into effect on April 1st. The Committee will provide recommendations to the government. The Committee has representatives from both employees and employers. The recommendations are expected by the end of the year.

We listen to representative groups of employers and employees and strive for a balanced approach to decision-making while adapting to economic realities.

7. NSGEU has over 1,100 members working in Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation facilities throughout Nova Scotia. NSGEU members pride themselves on practicing the highest standards of customer service and social responsibility. These jobs are very important to many communities, especially in more rural areas. What is your plan for the NSLC and alcohol/cannabis sales in our province? As Premier, where would you stand on privatizing the NSLC?

Nova Scotia has seen great success in the current model for the sale of beer, wine, cider and ready to drink beverage products through the NSLC Locations, Various Agency Store, Private Wine Specialty Stores, directly from Manufacturer Onsite Retail Stores and Manufacturer Offsite Retail Stores.

Nova Scotia has recently loosened regulations regarding sale and delivery of “cocktails-to-go” to support bars and cocktail focused restaurants. These changes were made as a direct result of consultations with small business owners. The Nova Scotia Liberal party will continue to support Nova Scotia producers of beer, wine, cider and spirits and promote local products at home and abroad.

8. Poverty is a major issue throughout Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia’s levels of child poverty has been trending in the wrong direction. What is your plan to reverse this trend and ensure that no Nova Scotian children go hungry?

The global pandemic highlighted food insecurities that too many families face every day. Children should not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. Food insecurity is known to impact academic performance, while poor nutrition impacts long-term physical, social, and emotional well-being. The government launched a school breakfast program that has been widely successful and is now available across the province. There has also been interest expressed by the Federal government in a national school food program. That’s why a Liberal government will allocate \$3 million a year to pilot a P-6 school lunch program. The Healthy Lunches for Healthy Kids program will provide healthy, locally sourced, low-cost lunches, ensuring children in elementary schools are well nourished and prepared to succeed in the classroom. The average cost per lunch will be \$5 a day.

The program will use a pay-what-you-can model and will be first launched in communities’ demonstrating the highest need. The pay-what-you can model provides families with flexibility within their household budgets while adaptable, convenient payment options promote inclusive participation. A buy local component will promote and emphasize locally sourced foods and vendors, highlight healthy local food options, as well as provide additional markets for farmers and producers. The Liberal Party is committed to the health and wellbeing of our children. Providing affordable, healthy lunches will lead to greater health and academic outcomes for our kids, while making life more affordable for Nova Scotian families.

The Liberal Party has committed to a \$20 million over five-year investment in Poverty Reduction. The goal is to support innovative projects that are designed to improve the lives of low-income Nova Scotians, by building vibrant communities by investing in community expertise, preventing poverty by breaking the cycle, alleviating the hardship of poverty through improved services and enabling Nova Scotians to exit poverty by building capacity. Expanded the Nova Scotia Child Benefit to include more families, while also raising the amount eligible families receive.

In the most recent budget, government announced the biggest investment in our province's history toward supporting vulnerable Nova Scotians. Specifically, government provided \$100 more per month to every adult receiving income assistance. Seventy-five per cent of the caseload will see an increase between 12% and 20%, which represents the people with the deepest need for Employment Support and Income Assistance.

9. Prior to the election the Nova Scotia Government signed an initial agreement to eventually provide \$10 a day childcare in Nova Scotia. This is going to require a significant infusion of resources. If elected Premier will your government honour this Agreement? This agreement will also require a commitment to ensuring enough people are available to staff the new childcare spaces and facilities. We have seen how low pay has driven people from sectors like early childhood education. If elected Premier, what is your commitment to ensure training and proper salaries will be accessible to attract and keep people in the sector?

The Liberal government has signed the new Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement, an historic \$645 million commitment. This agreement will make childcare much more affordable for families, while expanding access to quality care across Nova Scotia.

We understand that this will require a commitment to ensuring a huge demand for ECE as our government embarks upon this transformational expansion of our childcare system. We recognize that investments in childcare spaces must be matched with investment in the individuals providing quality care to our children. As such, we will ensure that childcare services continue to be provided by qualified early childhood educators, who are intrinsically valued professionals supported with opportunities for further training and enhancement of their skills.

Our early childhood workforce strategy is grounded in the belief that successful early childhood learning requires a workforce that is diverse and inclusive, supported by access to lifelong learning and is professionally recognized.

We are investing \$10.9 million in our early childhood workforce, training hundreds more Early Childhood Educators while covering the cost of tuition and books for over 300 current childcare and pre-primary staff to upgrade their credentials.

The workforce strategy includes opportunities for underrepresented groups to access designated seats for ECE certification, ensuring Mi'kmaq and Indigenous people, African Nova Scotians, Acadian and francophone Nova Scotians and newcomers can pursue careers in early childhood education. We will further enhance the workforce by taking a systematic approach to professional certification, developing a compensation framework that will reflect education, speciality training, and years of work experience.

The Liberal Government is prioritizing Nova Scotian families. Implementing the Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement will deliver affordable, inclusive and high quality child care that is universally accessible, while investing in and supporting the workforce that provides valuable services to our children.

Oversight and management of all child care operations, including fees, wages and policies will be provided by a newly established provincial entity. All currently funded operators and agencies, both commercial and not-for-profit will have access to funding under this agreement, including a workforce development fund and wage package for Early Childhood Educators.

10. In what ways does your party platform ensure that decolonization is incorporated into its proposals? How will your party commit to addressing the legacy of colonialism? In what ways is your party prioritizing the social policy solutions found in the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including Jordan's Principle, and in the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls?

Since 2015, the Nova Scotia government, through appropriate departments, offices, and agencies, has worked in partnership with the Mi'kmaq and Canada towards addressing the TRC Calls to Action. This work continues in areas related to justice, socio-economic opportunities, social issues, education and training, culture and heritage, language, and health and wellness. The work has been done collaboratively with the Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous organizations to ensure meaningful participation in programs, services, and policies and to ensure that these will have positive outcomes for communities, families, and individuals. This work is complex and requires a long-term commitment from the government, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Notable work and projects include:

- Major revisions to the *Child and Family Services Act* was undertaken, and continues, with direct engagement with Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs.
- Opening of the Wagmatcook Court representing a historic step forward in supporting Indigenous justice in Nova Scotia.
- Waiving of all administrative fees for Residential School survivors and their families to reclaim their Indigenous names.
- Ongoing collaborative work and support with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to support their over 90 programs and services that address urban issues relating to housing and homelessness, mental health and addictions, education and training support, childcare, and economic development.
- Planning and participation in the development of a new Mi'kmaw Health and Wellness Authority.
- Supporting the establishment of a new long-term care facility in Eskasoni, a first in Nova Scotia.
- Collaborative development of appropriate Shubenacadie Residential School commemoration.
- Supporting the development of a Mi'kmaw Language Strategy
- Inclusion and focus on Mi'kmaq culture in the Nova Scotia Culture Action Plan.
- Continued support for various sport and recreation activities including the Mi'kmaw Summer Games, North American Indigenous Games, Mi'kmaw Hall of Fame, and sport programming for Mi'kmaw youth.

- Dedicated cultural training across government departments, educational institutions and partners, and other business organizations.
- Treaty Education Nova Scotia, a partnership between the Province and Mi'kmaq, is developing programs and services for the education system, provincial civil service, and all Nova Scotians to highlight the contributions of the Mi'kmaq. These resources will help explain the importance of Treaties and how they are significant building blocks for Nova Scotia and Canada and how we have all benefited from them.
- Collaborative partnership with the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association to shape the approach and focus for addressing the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice in Nova Scotia.

We will continue to work to raise awareness about the TRC Calls to Action and implement and coordinate provincial initiatives that respond to these Calls. Reconciliation is a long-term journey that will take generations to complete.

The Mi'kmaq language is the language of Mi'kma'ki and the first language spoken in what we now call Nova Scotia. Sharing and protecting wisdom for centuries, the language is resilient and has survived efforts to erase its use, including residential schools. As of the 2016 census, there are 8,870 Mi'kmaq speakers, with approximately 5,500 residing in present day Nova Scotia.

Interest in learning the Mi'kmaq language has never been higher, and the Liberal Party will do its part to support Mi'kmaq to stabilize and sustain language learning in Nova Scotia as a necessary step along the path of truth and reconciliation.

A Liberal Government will introduce Mi'kmaw language legislation, in consultation with Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaw organizations and provide funding to enable participation in the process.

The new legislation will acknowledge Mi'kmaq as Nova Scotia's original language and commit to specific actions that contribute to the language's preservation, including a funded action plan with an accountability structure consistent with Mi'kmaq values.

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The workforce strategy includes opportunities for underrepresented groups to access designated seats for ECE certification, ensuring Mi'kmaq and Indigenous people, African Nova Scotians, Acadian and francophone Nova Scotians and newcomers can pursue careers in early childhood education.

We will further enhance the workforce by taking a systematic approach to professional certification, developing a compensation framework that will reflect education, speciality training, and years of work experience.

11. Please briefly describe your plans as Premier to help all Nova Scotians through your Covid-19 recovery plan.

As we emerge from the pandemic, our energy and efforts can turn towards our collective recovery. The positivity and optimism that our province is known for gives us great confidence that we can seize this opportunity to move forward on a path to a fair, healthy and more prosperous future.

Our vision for Nova Scotia requires a strong economic recovery. An equitable, sustainable and prosperous recovery will support business growth, make life more affordable, create jobs and provide high quality health care services across our province.

The Liberal Party has the vision, values and the leadership required to write our next chapter. A Plan for Jobs and Growth is a progressive, evidence-based and clearly costed plan that makes sensible investments that chart our course to recovery.

Our plan presents smart proposals that respond to the immediate priorities of Nova Scotians. We can foster economic growth that allows businesses to grow, while transitioning to a lower carbon future. We can pursue economic growth while providing the opportunity for all Nova Scotians to share in that prosperity. We can deliver high-quality health care in all communities, while protecting our most vulnerable and investing in our workforce.

12. The civil service has undergone a sizeable reduction since 2010. During that same time frame there has also been reductions in departmental spending.

This reduction in workforce and spending has happened at the same time Nova Scotians are experiencing fewer services offered in our provincial parks, trying to manage less supervision in our correctional facilities and reeling from not having nearly enough employees to look after children in provincial care.

Given the growing problems resulting from understaffing in our provincial civil service, how would your Party ensure our civil service is expanded to a level such that our provincial employees feel their work is valued by their elected government?

We value our extremely talented provincial civil service, and we are open to discussions on how best to ensure that our workforce feels appreciated and valued. Central to a healthy workforce is an efficient labour market, where employers can hire talented workers with the skills needed to quickly add value to the team and organization. One key way to address this need is to

ensure students and recent graduates have work integrated learning placements where their education is blended into the workplace.

Work placements are essential to support employment pathways for members of equity-seeking communities. NSCC will provide paid work placements of approximately 4 months for students and recent graduates of these communities to gain direct experience and support the creation of an inclusive and efficient pool of talent for Nova Scotian businesses.

A Rankin Government will help students and graduates access the labour market by investing \$3.75 million over 3 years to fund 150 co-op placements connected to NSCC programs.

The jobs created by constructing more housing, expanding childcare, delivering quality healthcare, and building our clean energy future will require a major boost to our skilled workforce. NSCC programs for skilled trades, health professions, early learning, information technology, and alternative energy have long waitlists. Reducing the waitlists for these programs will put more Nova Scotians to work in these growing sectors.

There are also new programming options for artificial intelligence, automation, immersive technology, and green technology will open new pathways, labour pools, and additional opportunities for Nova Scotian workers.

The Nova Scotia Liberal Party is committed to providing important services to Nova Scotians and to support the employees who deliver those services.