



Hon. Stephen McNeil
Liberal Caucus Office
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May 25, 2009

Ms. Carol Tooton
Executive Director
Canadian Mental Health Association
Nova Scotia Division

Ms. Joan Jessome
President
Nova Scotia Government and General
Employees Union

Dear Ms. Tooton and Ms. Jessome:

Thank you for the opportunity to outline the Liberal Party's views and platform as it relates to mental health.

My party's vision for strengthening mental health services in our province falls directly in line with that of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. I believe all stakeholders must work together if we are to help stimulate change and innovation in the organization and delivery of mental health services in our province. There is no one government department, group of health care professionals or stakeholder organization that can do it alone.

As a result, the Liberal plan calls for the creation of a provincial Mental Health Commission. Membership will include mental health professionals, academics, mental health consumers and family members and will report directly to the minister of health. This commission will be publicly accountable and provide valuable direction when it comes to the flow of information and collaboration among government departments and stakeholders.

The Liberal Party feels strongly about the need to promote good mental health and prevent mental illness. To do so will strengthen the resilience of individuals and families, create stronger and healthier communities and address the social and structural determinants of mental health - poverty, education and adequate housing. These determinants lie beyond the reach of the health department and very much depend on collaboration with other sectors, such as employment, education, housing, community services and others. The provincial Mental Health Commission will assist in collaboration but there is more we can do.

There are a few initiatives contained within the Liberal plan that will assist in addressing the social and structural determinants of mental health. We have committed to investing in early wellness screening programs for toddlers and pre-schoolers. Earlier identification and support for developmental issues such as autism ensures greater success in that child reaching his or her potential. The Liberal plan to provide a student support grant will allow individual schools to target priority needs of their students. The grant can be used by schools to access social supports such as psychologists should this be determined a priority of the school. This is especially important at the elementary school level as it will enable schools to provide support earlier resulting in better outcomes. We have also committed to the expansion of the Options and Opportunities program so that it is available in all high schools and grade levels. This program has been extremely successful in providing students a head start with future employment opportunities.

As Leader, I have consistently spoken to the need to honour agreements signed between the province and others levels of government prior to the start of this election. The Canada Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Agreement signed just a few short days before the start of the election will be honoured should we be elected to form government.

Our Liberal plan also makes an investment in a province-wide school-based mental health program. Based on the pilot program, PATHS (Promoting Alternate Thinking Strategies) currently in place between South Shore Mental Health Services and the local school board, this program employs a whole-school approach to develop a supportive environment. This program teaches children to discuss and understand emotions which in turn decrease internalization responses such as depression and anxiety.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to outline our support and vision for mental health as well as mental health promotion and prevention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen McNeil". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen McNeil

Leader, Nova Scotia Liberal Party