



Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia
Attn.: Carol Tooton and Joan Jessome
c/o 63 King Street
Dartmouth, NS
B2Y 2R7

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Via email: mhcns@ns.aliantzinc.ca; cmhans@eastlink.ca

Dear Ms Tooton and Ms Jessome:

On behalf of Darrell Dexter, Leader of the New Democratic Party, I write to enclose the response of the NDP to the request from the Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia. The 2009 NDP issue backgrounder on mental health is also attached.

I trust that your members will have the opportunity to review these answers in informing their voting intentions in this election. More details on our platform, *Better Deal 2009*, are available on our website at <http://www.ns.ndp.ca/>.

We thank you for the opportunity to outline our positions on these important issues.

Best regards,

Dan O'Connor

Dan O'Connor
Chief of Staff to Darrell Dexter
Leader, Nova Scotia New Democratic Party

Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia – Election 2009

Nova Scotia NDP

The Conservatives, like the Liberals before them, have failed to provide adequate mental health services that are accessible to all Nova Scotians. Services are not always available when and where they are needed, and Nova Scotian families are suffering as a result.

Suicide attempts among adolescents presented at the IWK emergency room have doubled in the last three years and wait times have lengthened for many adolescent mental health services.

The situation has become so desperate that the Chief Executive Officer of the IWK has expressed concern about the surge in mental health cases. Even Nova Scotia's Deputy Health Minister has admitted that the province is failing to provide "absolutely essential help" to children and others.

Despite a call for action from the Nunn Commission, wait times for youth mental health assessment and treatment through the justice system remain unacceptably long.

Nova Scotians contact the NDP regularly because they are waiting too long to access mental health services. We have advocated on their behalf in the House of Assembly, through press releases, and by writing letters to the Minister of Health calling on the government to make both preventive services and treatment accessible to all Nova Scotians.

The Conservative government has had almost 10 years to fix the problems in mental health, for children, teens and adults, and they have failed.

One in five people will be affected by a mental illness in their lifetime. But for the past 15 years the Liberal and Tory response to the mental health issue has been to commission studies and then ignore their findings.

Our plan, *Better Deal 2009*, includes the *Every Kid Counts* Program, which will establish 24/7 mental health crisis teams and Mental Health Teams in the school system. The NDP will ensure emergency rooms stay open, with additional beds in the system. The NDP will improve patients' access to care by adding more nurse practitioners. Additionally the NDP will set targets for acute and chronic disease reduction, including mental health. This includes the development of a nine-member Council with a rotating membership of representatives from health advocacy groups in Nova Scotia and representatives from the Department of Health Promotion and Protection. The Council will accept applications for healthy living grants and prioritize them for the reduction of serious, acute, and chronic illness in addition to wellness projects.

These are steps towards ensuring that the prevention and treatment of mental illness becomes an integral part of the health care system in Nova Scotia.



Mental Health:

Issues: Campaign 2009

The NDP will improve mental health services and wait times for today's families.

The Issue

The Conservatives, like the Liberals before them, have failed to provide adequate mental health services. Services are not available when and where they are needed, and Nova Scotian families are suffering as a result.

Young people are the worst off. Suicide attempts among adolescents presented at the IWK emergency room have doubled in the last three years and wait times have lengthened for many adolescent mental health services.

The situation has become so desperate that the Chief Executive Officer of the IWK has expressed concern about the surge in mental health cases. Even Nova Scotia's Deputy Health Minister has admitted that the province is failing to provide "absolutely essential help" to children and others.

The Conservative government has had almost 10 years to fix the problems in mental health and they have failed.

No early intervention

School board officials say that Nova Scotia needs mental health resources in the schools. Children who do not get the help they need often end up in trouble with the law. Despite a call for action from the Nunn Commission, wait times for mental health assessment and treatment through the justice system remain unacceptably long.

When asked in the House of Assembly what his department was doing about adolescent mental health wait times, the Minister of Health responded: "Unfortunately, of course, they have competing priorities within the Department of Health."

No community supports

Because Liberal and Conservative governments have continually underfunded mental health services, many patients in mental health beds have actually been discharged before their condition is under control.

Letting families down

The Conservatives decided if you can't fix a problem then you can pretend it doesn't exist. In 2005, Capital Health ordered a change in how wait times would be measured: they scheduled appointments far in advance and removed people from the wait list while they were still waiting. The number of people waiting appeared to go down when it was actually rising.

One in five people will be affected by a mental illness in their lifetime. But for the past 15 years the Liberal and Tory response to the mental health issue has been to commission studies and then ignore their findings.

Time to Act

Government must follow existing recommendations and work with groups and individuals to design and implement a mental health action plan. The plan should include improved school-based services, mobile crisis team across the province, expanded services for adolescents and a secure treatment facility for youth.

Liberals

Forced small options homes into crisis through years of under-staffing and under-funding

Placed a moratorium on hospital inpatient beds while choosing not to fund community-based treatment programs and support services

Supported the Involuntary Treatment Act even though no resources or programs to help people in the community came with it

Conservatives

Were publicly criticized by their own Deputy Minister of Health who said that the province is failing to provide “absolutely essential help” to those who need it

Ignored the desperate need for mental health services, and refused to address wait lists around the province

Blocked mental health beds by cutting community resources and housing options for people struggling with mental health issues

Funded mental health significantly below the national average

Cut mental health services in 2006, despite the long history of under-funding

Stood by while the number of adolescents who presented at the IWK due to suicide attempts more than doubled

The specific, costed commitments that Darrell Dexter and the NDP are making in this campaign can be found in *Better Deal 2009* - the NDP plan to make life better for today's families. It is available to read or download at ns.ndp.ca

The NDP will further work to:

Use existing recommendations and work with groups and individuals to implement a mental health strategy for Nova Scotia;

Establish 24/7 mental health mobile crisis teams all across the province;

Build a long term secure treatment facility for youth;

Expand both day treatment and inpatient services for adolescents;

Ensure implementation of all Nunn Commission recommendations on services to youth.