



Nova Scotia Election Information

Dear NSGEU Member,

Every election, we draw on issues identified by you, the membership, to develop questions for the registered political parties. This year, we asked the leaders of the four registered political parties the following questions on your behalf and have received the following unedited responses.

We hope you find the answers helpful to you. Most importantly, make sure to Vote on Election Day, June 9 – it is your right.

The *Elections Act* specifies your rights with regard to voting:

TIME TO EMPLOYEES FOR VOTING

Time to employee to vote

133 (1) An employee, who is an elector, shall, while the poll is open on ordinary polling day, have three consecutive hours for the purpose of casting his vote.

(2) If the employment of an employee does not permit the use of three consecutive hours of his own time for voting, the employer shall allow the employee such additional time with pay from the hours of his employment as may be necessary to provide the three consecutive hours, but the additional times for voting shall be granted to the employee at the time of day that best suits the convenience of the employer.

(3) This Section does not apply to an employee who is engaged in the operation and dispatch of scheduled railway trains, buses, motor transports, ships, and aircraft, and to whom the three consecutive hours mentioned in subsection (1) cannot be allowed without interfering with the scheduled operation or dispatch of the trains, buses, motor transports, ships or aircraft.

(4) An employer who refuses, or by intimidation, undue influence, or in any other way, interferes with the use by an employee of the three consecutive hours for voting, or fails to pay the employee, as provided in this Section, is guilty of an offence. R.S., c. 140, s. 133 .

If you do not know where or how to vote, please visit Elections Nova Scotia at: (www.electionsnovascotia.ns.ca).

Have a great election day!

Sincerely,

Joan Jessome

President, NSGEU

Political Parties Response to Questions from the NSGEU Election 2009

Topics:

Pensions

OH & S

Recruitment & Retention in the Public Services

Filling of Vacancies in the Public Sector

Mental Health

Topic: Pensions

Background

On January 27, 2009, the Nova Scotia Pension Review Panel released its final report entitled: "Promises to Keep". As you may know, this Report contains thirty (30) recommendations that cover a number of important issues and concerns to NSGEU members. They include proper funding of pension plans, protection of pension benefits, increasing employee involvement and participation, and expanding access of information.

We have been generally supportive of the Report but we have also been quite concerned about the extent to which its recommendations might open the door to the possible conversion of existing Defined Benefit Plans to Defined Contribution Plans. This would mean the loss of more secure pension benefits for Plan members as has happened with the recent economic downturn.

Pension Question

Will your Party introduce amendments to the Pensions Benefits Act and its regulations that will protect existing pension benefits and expand plan coverage?

Will your Party detail what specific amendments you might be prepared to introduce and identify with whom you are willing to consult about these amendments?

Political Parties Response

Green Party

The Green Party would consult with the NSGEU prior to amending the Pension Benefits Act for a comprehensive examination including proper funding of pension plans, protection of pension benefits, meaningful employee participation, and improved access of information.

We take the government's commitment to pension plan members very seriously. Yet if this economic crisis continues to generate massive losses on investments, private sector unemployment, reduced government revenues, and financial hardship for Nova Scotians, it will be a tremendous challenge to meet the commitments of a continued Defined Benefits program, along with commitments to health care, education, social programs, etc. The Green Party will not sugarcoat our situation or promise what may be impossible to deliver. More than ever we need honesty from our politicians.

We would do everything we can to ensure that Defined Benefits are maintained, and in the case of continued losses on investments we would have to look at other options going forward.

Liberal Party

The most recent economic downturn has brought pension reform issues to the forefront and has highlighted weaknesses within the existing legislative and regulatory framework.

The Liberal Party has been supportive of the work being done to find common sense solutions to these complex pension issues. There is always a balance that must be struck between appropriate contribution levels and the appropriate level of benefits received for retirement savings.

The government intended on introducing amendments to the Pension Benefits Act that would implement some of the recommendations from the final report of the review panel. While pension reform requires immediate attention, we do believe it is important to ensure that the changes are amenable to all parties and are based on sound policy to ensure benefits are protected.

Our party has long been committed to meaningful and substantive consultations regarding any issue that will affect interested stakeholders. We can assure the members of the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union (NSGEU) that before reforms to pension benefits are introduced a proper consultative process will take place.

New Democratic Party (NDP)

Pension plans have suffered serious setbacks in the last two years due to market volatility. This has eroded confidence in pension plan benefits and coverage.

The stability of pension plans is of paramount importance. People need to know they can rely on receiving income when they retire. In the recent Pension Review Panel report, it was of particular concern that not only is pension plan participation dropping but that employees' understanding of their benefits is low, especially among younger workers.

Those concerns suggest that any changes to the Pension Benefits Act need to be considered in a context of expanded coverage and broader public education about pension benefits. Business, labour and others must be involved to ensure these key challenges are addressed. The recommendations of the Pension Review Panel should be implemented with full public and stakeholder involvement to ensure the consequences are well understood before new rules are adopted.

Progressive Conservative Party (PC)

As you know, last February our government appointed a panel appointed to seek public input about registered pension plans.

The panel, through its discussion paper, sought comments from employees, employers and pension professionals about ways to improve the regulation of pensions under the Pension Benefits Act.

The goal was to find ways, legislatively, to make pension plans work better for both employers and employees.

Forty-one per cent of employed, paid workers in the province contribute to registered pension plans. Plans under this act include private employers' plans, universities, municipalities, multiemployer pension plans, hospitals and nursing homes, and non-teaching school board staff.

The board was made up of experts: Bill Black, former president and CEO, Maritime Life; Ronald Pink, founding partner of Halifax law firm Pink Breen Larkin; and Dick Crawford, also a former president of Maritime Life as well as past-president of the Canadian Institute of Actuaries.

When the members reported their findings and recommendations, we committed to have Labour and Workforce Development Department staff review and evaluate the report's recommendations with a view to what is underway in other jurisdictions and what is in the best interests of the people of Nova Scotia. Of course, the review panel did do a tremendous job with consultation, however, as is our party's procedure, we would ensure that before major changes are made legislatively, there is further consultation with stakeholders.

It is disturbing to now realize, as Mr. Black said when releasing panel recommendations, "The available data show that pension plan participation is

dropping and employee understanding of its importance is low, especially among younger workers." A PC Government would follow through on the report's recommendations based on further work from within the LWD Department.

Topic: Occupational Health & Safety

Background:

We are very concerned that two long-standing draft regulations have never been approved even though they have been finalized for over 12 years. One of these regulations deals with Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees which are the cornerstone of the internal responsibility system. The other deals with indoor air quality about which there continue to be complaints at an alarming rate in many Nova Scotia workplaces.

Occupational Health & Safety Question

Does your Party agree with adopting and enforcing the long-developed regulations about Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees and indoor air quality? If so, by when and if not, please explain.

Political Parties Response

Green Party

The Green Party agrees with adopting and enforcing the both the regulation the affects the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committees and the regulation that deals with indoor air quality. The adoption of these regulations should proceed directly at the earliest convenience of the new provincial government. Timely enforcement of the indoor air quality regulation may require additional trained technicians to deal with the large number of workplace concerns that have been reported.

Liberal Party

Given that we have not seen these regulations, it is difficult for us agree to adoption until we are assured they will be beneficial to workers. A Liberal government will, upon election, commit to ensuring these regulations are immediately reviewed with all stakeholders and are then adopted and enforced through appropriate government channels.

New Democratic Party (NDP)

The NDP understands that these regulations have gone through the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council process. As such, the NDP believes they should be enacted and enforced, as should all health and safety regulations. The NDP will make it a priority to establish a date for promulgation.

Progressive Conservative Party (PC)

Each year, at the outset of May, we celebrate North American Occupational Safety and Health Week - focusing on the importance of preventing injury and illness in the workplace, at home and in the community. The health and safety of the public service is of importance to our party and government.

In terms of the Indoor Air Quality Regulation, work on this project was put on hold when resources were targeted to support work on other, critical areas in 2005. The drafting instructions for an Indoor Air Quality Regulation that were developed may be a starting point to determine if employers and employees believe a regulation is still required. Such a decision would be made after consultation on the need and content.

Where immediate issues exist, our government has acted to ensure employees have a safe work environment.

That said, a PC Government has done more in the last decade to turn around the focus from treating illness to promoting healthy living than ever before. We created the first government department dedicated to leading the collaborative effort to promote and protect health, prevent illness and injury, and reduce disparities in health status.

We recently found clear results through a four-year project - Healthy LifeWorks - in partnership with Creative Wellness Solutions. It was the first Canadian study to address the business case for workplace and was implemented to improve the health of Nova Scotians and reduce the risk of chronic disease and involved more than 400 employees from the Department of Justice. It measured individual health, musculoskeletal health and organizational health. The project showed significant improvements to employee health including:

- a 19 per cent improvement in nutrition scores, determined by combining low saturated fat meals, high-fiber foods, fast food and snacks, daily breakfast, and fruit and vegetable intake scores
- a seven per cent improvement in fitness scores, which included scores based on the frequency of weekly aerobics, and strength and stretching activity
- a nine per cent reduction in the average number of lifestyle risk factors such as smoking and cholesterol level

The overall wellness score of department staff increased by 12 per cent over the course of the study - demonstrating the significant benefits of a comprehensive approach to

workplace health. The project also showed an improvement in staff morale with more employees reporting that they felt good about the opportunities to learn and grow within their work environments.

A PC government will continue to work with our public service, stakeholders and all communities in Nova Scotia to ensure all our citizens have the chance to grow up healthier and happier, live better and longer lives. This is not only good socially, but, economically it will help reduce the strain on our healthcare system and the cost burden that this places on all Nova Scotians.

Topic: Recruitment & Retention in Public Services

Background

Nearly half of our nurses and health care workers and many of our community care workers, are eligible to retire in the next seven years. More than 95 percent of Nova Scotians who participated in a 2008 poll conducted by a Coalition of Health Care Unions agreed that focusing on recruiting and retaining nurses and health care workers was the best way to fix problems with the healthcare system including long wait times.

Recruitment & Retention in Public Services Question

What is your Party's position on the importance of recruitment and retention for fixing problems with our public health care system? What specific steps are you prepared to take to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses and health care workers?

Political Parties Response

Green Party

The Green Party agrees that recruitment and retention are important parts of a strategy to improve our public health care system. In the Green Party platform, some of the steps we have noted that can improve the recruitment and retention of nurses and health care workers include:

Increased financial support and incentives for multidisciplinary clinics and practices that team doctors with nurses, nurse practitioners, dietitians, psychologists, counsellors, physiotherapists and other allied health care providers for a more stimulating and supportive work environment and improved service to patients

Increased funding to Primary Health Care and Emergency Health Services in the province and steps to ensure implementation of over capacity protocols for Emergency Rooms, which will reduce the stress level for workers and improve access to timely care

Initiating stakeholder consultations on the best practices for the implementation of preventive and primary health care by family doctors, and other primary health providers with an emphasis on resolving risk factors to optimize chronic disease management removing the burden from the acute care system, thereby reducing recruitment needs and contributing to a less stressful work environment favouring retention of nurses and health care workers

Reducing the need for hospital beds to be used by patients who did not have access to long-term care beds would free nurses and health care workers to attend to acute care, fully utilizing their training, adding to their diversity of experience, and increasing job satisfaction for greater retention (the Green Party platform addresses strategies for long-term care)

An evaluation of the wage standards for those workers delivering essential services within our health system.

Liberal Party

The Liberal Party believes that training, recruitment and retention all need to be addressed in order to ensure we have sufficient numbers of health care workers in our public health care system.

The Nova Scotia Nursing Strategy is now in its second phase. Developed by nurses, the new phase focuses on recruitment and retention as well as ensuring nurses are used to their full scope of practice. As a result of nurses' efforts on the strategy, an additional 46 nursing and 180 practical nursing seats were added to the 2008 budget. The training of these nurses started last fall. Unlike the NDP, The Liberal Caucus supported the budget which added nursing and practical nursing school seats.

A Liberal government will also work with the Provincial Nursing Network as well as other stakeholder organizations to develop a team-based collaborative approach to the delivery of health care, provide more supportive work environments for nurses and implement a plan which will enable us to retain our late-career nurses. The Liberal plan speaks to a commitment to work with nurses (and others) to ensure we are creating positive working environments for all of our dedicated healthcare professionals. These commitments will strategically position our public health care system as one where nurses would not only like to come and work from other jurisdictions, but one where we are able to retain new graduates and experienced health care staff.

New Democratic Party (NDP)

Darrell Dexter and the NDP understand that it is vitally important to increase the number of nursing school seats for RNs and LPNs in order for the province to deal with the recruitment and retention problems that plague the healthcare system. The NDP sought and supports the recent increase of 71 registered nurse training seats and 180 licensed practical nurse training seats which was outlined by the Department of Health.

The NDP will be open to considering any other means of ensuring that Nova Scotia trains enough nurses.

The NDP recognizes the importance of improving the quality of life for our nurses. LPN and RN shortages already lead to mandatory overtime, working short staffed and difficulty accessing vacation and holiday time. Nurses are also on the front lines and see everyday the impact of closed emergency rooms and long wait lists. These situations and others like them negatively affect nurses' work-life balance, making it more and more likely that people will leave the profession for other work, or retire at the first opportunity.

Information released by the Department of Health in 2007 shows that 18 per cent of LPNs and 20 per cent of RNs in Nova Scotia are eligible to retire by 2010. Given the number of pending retirements and the fact that many nurses educated in Nova Scotia choose to leave the province, Nova Scotia must do more to attract new graduates and retain our existing nurses. The NDP will do this in partnership with the NSGEU and other nurses' organizations.

The NDP plan, Better Deal 2009, commits to providing new graduates who stay in Nova Scotia with a tax credit totalling \$15,000 over six years. This will help keep and attract recently graduated licensed practical nurses and registered nurses by allowing them to claim the tax credit against their income provided they stay and work in this province. It will be available to LPNs and RNs trained in Nova Scotia, across Canada and abroad.

Better Deal 2009 also details initiatives to help keep emergency rooms open and reduce health care waits.

Progressive Conservative Party (PC)

The PC Party Government has been actively recruiting and retaining more health professionals in competition with a global market. We are blessed in Nova Scotia to be home to first-class tertiary care facilities and the tremendous professionals who care for our citizens. A few examples of our work on recruitment and retention of our health professionals are as follows:

Over 200 more nurses will be trained in Nova Scotia this year with the approval of \$3.4 million for university and community college nursing seats.

Provided bursaries to medical lab technician students.

Funded the Rural Nursing Program to provide nurses with the skills they need to practice nursing in rural communities.

Offering french-speaking nursing students bursaries to entice them to begin their careers in Nova Scotia.

Piloting a two-year, tuition-free, Link Continuing Care Assistant program to train Nova Scotians for careers in health care while they complete their high school diplomas.

A PC Government has also committed in Budget 2009-10 to invest \$700,000 annually over the next 20 years to create a new Integrated Learning Centre for health professionals in partnership with Dalhousie University. This centre will allow team-based learning for doctors and nurses - in keeping with the health transformation agenda.

We expanded the assessment and integration of internationally-educated health professionals.

In 2008, we were pleased to work with Doctors Nova Scotia on the new Master Agreement

- providing more than \$108 million in new funding over five years to help ensure that Nova Scotia becomes an even more attractive place to practice medicine. As Dr. Don Pugsley said at the time, "This agreement is different. Rather than simply offering an across-the board fee increase, this agreement supports system change." Highlights include:

- a focus on encouraging doctors to provide a broad spectrum of care to their patients;
- new funding to help retain rural specialists;
- funding to support collaborative care with other health-care providers; and
- more funding to support general practitioners who provide comprehensive care, chronic disease management and in-hospital care.

Our government initiated the PHSOR review in an effort to find ways to sustain our evergrowing health system. We have committed to put into action all 103 recommendations of the health transformation report. These recommendations have been clustered into 25 initiatives. Work is already underway on six, and another six will begin next year. A new health transformation office will provide support, and evaluate and report on all aspects of health transformation. As noted at the outset, a PC government is phasing in these significant recommendations over a three year period which offers time to work with important front-line workers like our nurses to ensure the changes are effective and make a real difference in the delivery of health care in this province. It is important to note that the report was developed with input from thousands of health-care providers and interested groups, from every hospital across the province.

Topic: Filling of Vacancies in the Public Sector

Background

On vacancies, our members are telling us that the filling of vacant positions in the public sector is becoming an increasingly serious problem that appears likely to become worse in the future. For example, approximately two thousand members of the Public Service Superannuation Plan (or PSSP) are currently eligible to retire with their full pension benefits with another 600 to 700 additional members eligible to retire for each of the next ten years.

Filling of Vacancies in the Public Sector Question

How important is the filling of vacant positions in the public sector for your Party?
What specific measures are you prepared to take to do so address this problem?

Political Parties Response

Green Party

Your membership includes many different working groups within the Public Service. The Green Party would require an evaluation of the impact of those retiring in various sectors and the development of a strategy, in consultation with those most directly affected, to determine the best response to vacant positions in specific sectors.

Liberal Party

The Liberal Party values the hard work and dedication of our public servants. However, acknowledging value and dedication when statistics are clearly indicating action is required is not enough. The demographics of our public service is showing a need for government to attract and retain talent in order to achieve its goals and continue to deliver high quality services to Nova Scotians. Consequently, in 2006, the Public Service Commission developed a framework which included new approaches for recruitment and retention.

A Liberal government will continue to focus on the implementation of this framework while recognizing that in order to effectively address both attraction and retention requires long term planning as well as collaboration among many stakeholders.

A Liberal government will commit to working with the many stakeholders to ensure we continue to deliver high quality services to our residents.

It is important to take a moment and reflect on the NDP plan in light of its potentially significant impact to the public service. A 1% across the board reduction represents \$34 million in the health budget; the equivalent of over 400 nurses. Should the NDP decide that the health budget will somehow be spared, a reduction in government expenditures of \$73 million represents the combined budgets of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture and Seniors. The closures of these departments represent loss of jobs for well over 500 staff. Without question, a 1% across the board cut will have very damaging effects to government programs and services.

New Democratic Party (NDP)

The NDP is committed to the best possible delivery of public services that Nova Scotians need and deserve. The NDP will work with unions and administrators within the public service to review the issue of vacancies, setting specific staffing targets and timelines.

Progressive Conservative Party (PC)

Shortages are just as much a concern in our public sector. With the changing demographics here and across the country, this is, of course, an important issue to address to ensure a seamless continuation of the professional delivery of the programs and services of government to the citizens of Nova Scotia.

Our Government through the professionals of the Public Service Commission has been actively addressing this issue. As noted on its website: "Our HR Community, like our overall civil service, is experiencing the impact of demographics on its workforce. As our workforce ages and the competition for skilled employees becomes even tighter, we need to be proactive in HR (workforce) planning and talent management if we want to make a difference through a skilled, committed, and accountable public service.

Our Philosophy

Modern day talent management has evolved from succession planning of "putting names in boxes" to developing many people with the capacity to be effective leaders in any number of positions, in any area of HR. Talent Management is a deliberate and systematic effort to encourage individual advancement and ensure continuity in key positions, including management, technical and professional specialist roles, across professional groups such as HR. It is a key strategy that addresses many of the issues the government is currently facing, such as an aging workforce, increasing retirement rates, tight labour market, limited competitiveness, and fast-paced changes in work.

Our Approach

We strive to extend beyond the focus on management and leadership roles so that we can build high performance and high involvement work environments for all employees, across our community.

Our corporate Talent Management model includes identifying critical positions, utilizing skill and competency information, conducting talent review meetings (also known as gap analysis between business needs and internal talent for key positions), and implementing strategies (such as secondments, job rotation, formal training) to address the gaps.

One component of our approach is career development workshops for the entire HR Community.

These workshops focus on the new HR competencies and career development planning. Career development planning is foundational to successful talent management as it encourages employees to talk about career aspirations, strengths and areas for development, and in turn, makes managers aware of employee needs and the Community's overall bench strength.

By implementing a talent management program that is transparent and equitable we are creating an environment for people to develop their skills in preparation for a range of future possibilities. This results in a workplace that will be well positioned to face whatever lies ahead."

Topic: Mental Health

Background

Less than 4% of Nova Scotia's health spending is devoted to mental health services even though mental illness will affect one in five Nova Scotians at some point in their lives. In addition, the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia reports that mental illness is the leading cause of employee disability in the workplace and 80 percent of mental illness has its onset before age 18 although the resources are limited and waiting lists are long.

Mental Health Question

What is your Party prepared to do to raise the priority of mental health issues? What will you do to address the chronic underfunding of mental health services?

Political Parties Response

Green Party

The Green Party will take steps to ensure that citizens requiring mental health support can access the care they need by:

Decentralizing mental health services;

Increasing the ease of access to psychological and psychiatric services by installing mental health care professionals in community clinics across the province;

Reducing the need for GP referrals to access mental health care; and

Increasing funding and resource allocation to mental health services, and advocacy groups working directly with people with mental health issues.

Liberal Party

The Liberal Party's vision for strengthening mental health services in our province falls directly in line with that of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. We 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.

There are a couple of specific initiatives contained within the Liberal plan that will assist in the delivery of mental health services. 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.

Our Liberal plan also makes a significant investment of \$10 million over four years 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.

New Democratic Party (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 presenting 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 expand 24/7 mental health crisis teams and establish 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.

Progressive Conservative Party (PC)

As noted to you through the Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia, our government is concerned with the health and well-being of all Nova Scotians and, therefore, has invested heavily in the treatment of illness in this province as well as placing a greater priority on making sure we prevent illness and keep our citizens healthier and happier.

As research shows that at some point in their lives, mental health problems affect one in three Canadians, chances are that each of us knows someone with a mental health problem such as a substance-related disorder, depression, anxiety, or a psychotic disorder.

In terms of dealing with mental health, we have made advances through the following:

Set in motion the province's first mental health court - to open Fall 2009.

In response to the Nunn Commission recommendations, we invested \$3 million at the outset to start responding. The funds go to several initiatives including hiring more mental health professionals.

Expanded mental health and addictions services by \$2.8 million in 2008-09. This will increase access, decrease wait times and place mental health services in the community for the Capital District Health Authority and the IWK Health Centre. It will also enhance services to youth in the Cape Breton District Health Authority with addiction issues.

Created the Seniors Mental Health Network, bringing together a group of experts in the field to focus on enhancing and expanding mental health services to seniors at the community level.

Since 2000, increased spending on mental health services by 54 percent.

Committed \$6.7 million to construct more appropriate facilities for mental health patients requiring long-term treatment.

As a part of the depression strategy launched in 2005, developed and made available new resources such as fact sheets, calendars and posters focusing on raising awareness of depression in the workplace and the need for early identification and intervention. In 2008, launched the booklet Women and Mood Disorders: Stories of Recovery to

raise awareness about women's experience of mood disorders and encouraging those effected to seek professional help.

Proclaimed new mental health legislation - The Involuntary Psychiatric Treatment Act - July 2007.

Invested \$4 million in an Autism Treatment Program for young children with autism. An independent evaluation of the first group of children was received in April 2008 and indicates the treatment outcomes for these children were very positive.

In September 2006, we announced \$400,000 over four years to the Canadian Mental Health Association - Nova Scotia Division to invest in the **Communities Addressing Suicide Together** initiative.

The new \$20.4 million emergency and trauma centre at the QEII Health Sciences Centre just opened includes a mental health suite.

From March 2009 to December 2009, our health department is hosting sessions on a new mental health first aid training program for the general public, being offered coast-to-coast by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Canada.

We will continue to work through our health department in partnership with communities and stakeholders to support appropriate access, education and services for those Nova Scotians dealing with mental illness.

I was pleased that in our Budget 2009-10 that we tabled on May 4, 2009 we noted that Nova Scotia is one of the only provinces to provide increases to the health system while balancing its provincial budget. District health authorities and the IWK Health Centre received \$1.398 billion in 2008-09 for health-care budgets, including wages and benefits. This was not easy to find the funds, but we continue to invest in all aspects of our health system as we are able.

Please Note:

In addition to our question, the **Mental Health Coalition** (which we are a part of) has sent a letter to all four registered political parties. Their letter and responses can be found here: www.mentalhealthcoalitionns.info