

Nova Scotia Liberal Party 2021 Policy Platform Evaluation

NSCSW Policy Note



Who We Are

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW) exists to serve and protect Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work. We work in solidarity with Nova Scotians to advocate for policies that improve social conditions, challenge injustice and value diversity.

Learn more about the College at nscsw.org/about.

Introduction

As a summer election is now on, we will soon be faced with big decisions as several parties try to convince Nova Scotians to vote for them.

As social workers, we labour in solidarity with our clients, organizations and communities, and with Nova Scotians who are vulnerable, oppressed and dealing with the hurtful outcomes of society. Our profession is committed to social justice and is mandated by our Code of Ethics to work for a society that promotes social, economic, political, and cultural equality for all people. A critical analysis of the party platforms, to understand how their positions will affect the clients that we serve, is a helpful process.

As part of our mandate to serve the public interest, the NSCSW will provide an analysis on each party's positions, to evaluate whether their policies will lead to greater equity and equality, through the lens of the [social policy framework](#) that we developed with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS): [Creating the future we all deserve: A Social Policy Framework for Nova Scotia](#). This evidence-based report lays out what is required for a transformative social policy agenda in our province, and we encourage our members to utilize it in order to ensure that they better understand how their votes will address or remedy the injustices and harms we see daily.

During the election period, we have evaluated how each party's platform advances our vision and values using this intersectional and evidence-based framework and these ten guiding principles. This policy note evaluates the Liberal platform on core social justice and advocacy issues of concern to social workers.

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We invite you to join us in exploring each of these principles, and examining the proposals made for our province's future. By working together, we can make decisions that align with our professional values, and that advance the well-being of our clients and all Nova Scotians.

Summary of Findings

The Liberal platform misses an opportunity to create greater equality and equity by not fully utilizing the 10 policy principles laid out in the CCPA-NS and NSCSW social policy framework to create its platform.

The Liberal platform does have some clear strengths, particularly a commitment to the new Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement. This historic \$645 million commitment to ensure affordable, high-quality, inclusive childcare and early learning will support parents, especially women, to enter or re-enter the labour force. The Liberal Party is to be commended for this transformational proposal. The Liberal Party platform does make a

significant commitment to the principle of universality through the childcare platform. The platform also takes some important steps to address the systemic racism in our province through the justice institute. There are also important policy positions regarding climate justice.

However, there are substantial opportunities missed by not addressing the social determinants of health or working to redefine primary care through a collaborative model. The platform's primary investment in decent work and well-being is its commitment to invest in affordable childcare. However, without a commitment to update labour laws including minimum wage, the platform lacks a full commitment to decent work and well-being. Many of the proposals in this platform perpetuate the status quo, and the emphasis on deregulation runs the risk of harming the safety and rights of the citizens it seeks to serve. Most troubling of course is the Liberal Party's fiscal framework which will bring about more austerity, managerialism and under-investments in social and health services

The NSCSW awards the Liberal Platform a C. This is mostly because of the commitment to universal \$10 a day childcare, which is a game changer.

Intersectional and Evidence-Based Policy Principles

The Social Policy Framework indicates that policy that works for everyone must be designed to account for the multiple ways that power and privilege are unevenly shared; it captures the interaction and interconnection between social locations, policies, and institutions and offers a path toward systemic change (Findlay *et al.*, 2020). Evidence-based policy-making rests on the foundational premise that government decisions that are influenced by research and data are more likely to solve problems effectively, and that we should learn from best practices (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

Evidence that must not be overlooked is the impact that poverty has on many on the issues facing Nova Scotians such as quality of life, health care, mental health, child and youth well-being and the economy. Evidence demonstrates that Nova Scotia has the highest poverty rate in Canada based on the Market Basket Measure (Findlay *et al.*, 2020), and the highest rate of child poverty in Canada, with one in four children living in poverty (based on the Market Basket Measure) (Frank *et al.*, 2020). These interactions between poverty and other contributory factors are complex and frequently circular. For example, poverty increases the risk of mental illness, and mental illness increases the likelihood of poverty. Parental substance use accompanied by poverty is more likely to lead to contact with child protection services than substance use in a position of affluence (Bywaters *et al.*, 2016). Poverty is also directly related to adverse childhood experiences which produce many negative educational, health and mental health outcomes with substantial public costs (Bellis *et al.*, 2019; Kagi & Regala, 2012). A study conducted in rural Nova Scotia found 73% of survey respondents reported one adverse childhood experience and 31% reported four or more (Ross, *et al.*, 2020).

Evidence also demonstrates that Nova Scotia there has seen a steady trend of widening income inequality. In 1988, the income shares of the wealthiest ten per cent in Nova Scotia were 11.1 times the income share of the bottom ten percent. Three decades later, top incomes in Nova Scotia grew to 16.3 times the income share of the bottom (Findlay, *et al.*, 2020). This should be of great concern to any political leader, particularly during a global pandemic, as rising inequality and the continued class divide between the rich and the poor has allowed the voices of the most vulnerable, particularly those of our racialized communities and children and youth, to go unnoticed, eroded trust, and increased anxiety and illness for all (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

This lack of trust appears to be growing; recently produced data shows that only 27.1% of Nova Scotians trust the provincial government (Engage Nova Scotia, 2020).

Economic inequality impacts equity: we have consistently seen various governments enact austerity policies (expanding corporate influence in the process) to cut the cost of care, institutionalize new management systems, and centralize government services, leading to highly top-down bureaucratic systems (Findlay *et al.*, 2020). This has led to increasing managerialism which devalues and deskills professional competence and creates a management framework that is focused on liability and that is constantly searching for efficiencies rather than promoting human connection (Brown *et al.*, 2020; Findlay *et al.*, 2020). These trends have had a profound impact on the ability of Nova Scotians to receive the services and care that they rely on, to make our economy one that works for all of us.

In the current provision of public services in Nova Scotia, individuals, rather than the state, are responsible for social risks such as illness, (dis)Ability, unemployment, and poverty (Brown, *et al.*, 2020). Intersectional policy must be designed with intent of public services taking on more of this risk in order to establish greater equity and justice (Barkley and Wright, 2019). Family violence, trauma and poverty are connected to broader structural issues that have allowed poverty to fester in Nova Scotia particularly for women, Black Nova Scotians, Indigenous people and people of colour, LGTBQ2SIA people and people with disabilities (Frank *et al.*, 2020). Poverty is felt deeply; it is a social condition manifested in struggles to afford the cost of housing, food, childcare, clothing and transportation in the face of low wages, precarious work, racial and gender discrimination, a weak social safety net, inadequate public services and lack of affordable and available child and family services (Frank and Saulnier, 2017).

The current social environment in all sectors (health, justice, social services, etc.) minimizes our collective responsibility for the safety and well-being of all Nova Scotians, and places that responsibility onto individuals. Evidence of this is reflected in Canadian public social spending which peaked in 1990 at just under 18% of gross domestic product (GDP). The most recent data shows that Canada spent 17.3% of GDP in 2017, which is about same as 1990. Canada spent less than 23 other countries including the United States. It is striking that only 1.6% of GDP in Canada is spent on social expenditures for families, and even less on the unemployed at 0.6% (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

The consequence of this have led to dire outcomes for Nova Scotians.

- A over representation of Black and Indigenous children in the care of the province.
- Amendments to the Children and Family Services Act lowered the threshold for intervention based on vague definitions of a child in need to care, created less oversight and provided no new funding or resources to manage the changes. This combined with the absence of bigger-picture social supports to create pathways to safety and well-being have created a child protection system that is more intrusive and focused more on investigations and court process than being able to create support and well-being for families (NSCSW, 2021)
- Data from Engage Nova Scotia demonstrates that for single parent families, who generally make up over 50% bulk of child welfare clients (Tromce *et al.*, 2004), quality of life is less than that of the rest of the Nova Scotia population (Engage Nova Scotia, 2020). More than 1 in 2 children living in lone parent families live in poverty (53.1%) compared to 11.7% of children living in couple families (Frank *et al.*, 2020).

- Data collected in Nova Scotia schools between 2015 and 2018 shows a meaningful increase in the rates of vulnerability from 25.5% to 28.8% (Findlay *et al.*, 2020). Vulnerability means that without additional support in areas like social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communications skills, and general knowledge, these children will face future health, educational, and social challenges (Frank and Saulnier 2017). Researchers in Nova Scotia have long pointed to the weak social safety net and the lack of public programming as being at the root of these vulnerabilities (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).
- Labour standards are out of date and not aligned with other Canadian jurisdictions. Nova Scotia has the longest work week (48 hours), the lowest vacation time, little legislation regarding pay equity and an unacceptably low minimum wage (Casey, 2019). Minimum wage falls short of the income needed to live a quality life, as the living wage for Halifax is now at \$21.80 (Saulnier and Driscoll, 2020).
- Pre-COVID, people were already struggling to pay their rent. Overall, 28% of renters are in core housing need in Nova Scotia and of that percentage 42% are lone-parent renters (Housing for All, 2021). Rents for a 2-bedroom apartment in Halifax increased by 15.8% in 2019 and the vacancy rate is about 1.2% (NSACCW, 2020). Little wonder there are more homeless people, including families. It is estimated that 33,500 Nova Scotians are housing insecure and there is list of over 5500 folks waiting for social housing (Housing for All, 2021). According to Adsum for Women and Children, out of the nearly 500 homeless currently in Halifax Regional Municipality, 62 are families, most of them female-led lone parent families (Frank *et al.*, 2020).
- Statistics Canada's report on food insecurity, released in February of 2020 defined food insecurity as hunger and/or the fear of hunger because there's not enough money to buy food. In 2017-18, across Canada, 12.7 per cent of households suffered some level of food insecurity. In Nova Scotia, the number is 15.4 per cent — almost one in six households — the highest rate recorded in any province (Vibert, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, the annual Hunger Count in Canada showed an increase of 5% of new clients to foodbanks in Nova Scotia in March 2019 alone. Children made up 30% of those accessing foodbanks in Nova Scotia. Since the pandemic began, Feed Nova Scotia has seen a 15% increase in demand for food in Nova Scotia. (Frank, *et al.*, 2020).
- Data collected by the Disability Rights Coalition of Nova Scotia shows the disturbing trend backward of the province since it first committed to the Coalition's Road to Inclusion by 2023. The Nova Scotia government, through its Disability Supports Program, is assisting fewer people with disabilities with residential supports right now than in 2013/14 when it committed to the roadmap, dropping from 5,184 to 5,033 people. Since the Roadmap's release in 2013, there has been a sharp increase in numbers on the Disability Supports Program waitlists, going from 1099 in 2014 to 1,915 in 2021, an increase of more than 74%. The official Disability Supports Program Policy Manual, which restricted all admissions to institutions to 'temporary admissions' in preparation for their closure has been recently (May 2021) been removed from official government policy. Nova Scotia continues to send people with disabilities indefinitely to institutions as their only available option for accessing social assistance. The lack of options for people with disabilities to even be able to vote confidentially is yet another glaring example of how much work needs to happen in this area.

- [A paper produced by the NSCSW](#) shows the current strategy in mental health and substance abuse care utilizes “evidence-based” jargon to legitimize choices that focus mental health care through bio-medical and neo-liberal lenses. This approach attempts to keep the cost of care low, creating systems that focus on mental health disorders that are reduced to their simplest forms in order to provide standardized treatments, leading to a system that focuses on treating those who are most symptomatic. This is a political choice that negates the overwhelming evidence that mental health is more often shaped by our social, economic, and physical environments, and require approaches to care rooted in the context of a person’s life, not standardized treatments. By ignoring this evidence services reduce the need for a bio-psycho-social approach to mental health, which would require creating a strong, connected, and supportive society and government policy that is focused on the social determinants of mental health (Brown, *et al.*, 2021)

Social Policy Framework Analysis of the Liberal Platform

When evaluating the Liberal platform from the perspective of the Social Policy Framework, some of the above issues are addressed, and it is evident the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia is exploring some core challenges that Nova Scotians face. However, the solutions presented draw heavily from neo-liberal ideology which leans towards holding individuals, rather than the state, responsible for social risks such as illness, disability, unemployment, and poverty (Brown, *et al.*, 2020). This approach is not intersectional as it negates the ongoing struggles of marginalized Nova Scotians. Policy presented in the Liberal platform significantly focuses on individual self-management, self-discipline, and regulation through “rational choices.” This trend is reflected in the Liberals’ fiscal framework of moving to a balance budget quickly, prudent investments in areas of high need, and the continuation of austerity, leading to the inadequate or reduced provision of social and health services (Saulnier, 2021). The problem with this fiscal approach is that it leads to social policy that is individualized, decontextualized, and pathologizing, which fails to address the social and political contexts in which families exist and the state passes this responsibility on to vulnerable and marginalized individuals and families to solve their own problems (Brown, *et al.*, 2020).

The core of the Liberals’ economic strategy is constraining public spending and reducing regulation. This runs the risk of weakening the protections for the public at a time when vulnerabilities are already intensified. It is worth noting that “cutting red-tape” does not apply to everyone; while steps are reduced and streamlined for businesses, the proposal of the Liberal party to help the growing number of Nova Scotians facing “renovictions” is to provide a small compensation for which they would have to apply. Such measures do not take into account the complex issues that lead to homelessness and are not likely to help those facing housing crises (Housing for All, 2021). The platform makes mention of the housing crisis, however its proposal to address the current situation is less than adequate. A small funding commitment over the next several years will not suffice to stem the tide of the rising numbers of Nova Scotians who are housing and homelessness (Housing for all, 2021). Many of the deeper systemic issues are not addressed, particular the roadmap to inclusion, while too many Nova Scotians with disabilities continue to live in institutions rather than community.

While the Liberals throughout their platform address issues of equity by stating commitments to create a more diverse workforce (which is commendable). Their approach involves shoring up seats in post-secondary education programs but negates, the huge impact that poverty has had

on increasing vulnerabilities which impact health, educational, and social outcomes. Poverty is felt deeply, it is a social condition manifested in families' struggles to afford the cost of housing, food, childcare, clothing and transportation in the face of low wages, precarious work, racial and gender discrimination, a weak social safety net, inadequate public services and lack of affordable and available child and family services (Frank and Saulnier, 2017). Without substantially addressing poverty and costs of post-secondary the Liberals' goals for greater diversity and inclusion in the workforce will be challenged.

The Liberal platform however does draw from evidence based and intersectional thinking which has led to their strongest policy: a commitment to the new Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement. The Liberal Party is to be commended for this transformational proposal.



Interconnectedness

The principle of interconnectedness draws from the idea that policies and social and health issues are interrelated, and that people experience policy differently depending on their location in intersecting systems. Improving social well-being relies on working across silos and developing policies that address multiple challenges at once (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

There is the potential for several intersectional policies with the Liberal platform. These include:

- Early Learning & Child Care Agreement, an historic \$645 million commitment to ensure affordable, high-quality, inclusive childcare and early learning that will support parents, especially women, to enter or re-enter the labour force.
- Investing in services for older adults to remain in their homes for longer and expanding the options for their care can affect not only these individuals, but their families and communities.
- Maintaining their current commitment to public health during the pandemic, which is a strategy that has protected Nova Scotians from many of the hardships that individuals, families, communities and businesses in other provinces have had to endure.
- Liberal policies to address climate change show intersectional focus, by seeking to invest in job development, such as their plan to develop 350 megawatts of renewable energy projects such as wind and solar, stating that this investment will stimulate over \$550 million in construction activity while creating over 4000 new jobs.
- Liberal policies to ensure healthy lunches for school children show intersectional focus, addressing disparities of income and providing funding for local farmers, such as with its \$3 million a year pilot P-6 school lunch program.

The promise of \$10/day childcare is the strongest interconnected portion of the Liberal platform. Childcare is a social determinant of health. It also has the ability to catching vulnerabilities before children enter school avoids high social and financial costs later on. Investing in the early years also has many future benefits including healthier, better educated, and more prosperous adults. Childcare can address multiple social challenges at once: child development; demographic decline; rural revitalization; immigrant retention; gender equality; work/family

balance, social inclusion; and precarity for early childhood educators. Childcare is a proven economic development strategy; for every dollar spent, two are returned to the economy. Comprehensive childcare gives options to parents, such as flexible scheduling and a variety of locations. It includes wrap around care that covers the full working day in a seamless system. Childcare is one component of a broader package of necessary family policies that include improved income supports, maternity and parental leave (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

However, the Liberal party platform misses opportunities for greater interconnectedness, particularly in the creation of the Primary Care Council. It has been noted that doctor recruitment and retention is a national challenge (Grant, 2021) and that models for primary care are changing. The days of a doctor for everyone are gone, and primary care is shifting toward collaborative care models (Rousseau *et al.*, 2017). While the Liberal party intends to create a Primary Care Council led by doctors, they have missed the opportunity to expand and increase the quality of collaborative care as the model for primary care. Their proposed council does not include subject matter experts in the psychosocial determinants of health, aside from the Office of Immigration & Population Growth. Absent from this council are obviously social workers, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists; as well as client-led or first-voice groups, or other groups reflecting traditionally marginalized stakeholders. Social workers in Nova Scotia particularly have been leading models of collaborative care with the creation of the Dalhousie School of Social Work Clinic (Karabanow *et al.*, 2018).

Overall, the social determinants of health greatly impact our overall well-being and quality of life, and these are inadequately addressed by the Liberal Party platform. Health outcomes are shaped by the social, economic and political experiences of each person's life and experiences (WHO, 2014). Lacking in the plan is the connection between health, mental health and the social determinants of health. The World Health Organization maintains that improvement is needed in direct mental health services alongside the broader social environment. For instance, we know that if a child experiences several adverse childhood experiences that they are highly likely to experience mental health issues as adult (Bentall, 2016). In fact, adverse childhood experiences are as statistically relevant to mental health as smoking is to cancer. A truly interconnected mental health and health plan must recognize the impact of poverty, housing, and racism on our overall mental health and create investments and strategy to politically strengthen the social determinants of health (Bentall, 2016).

The Liberal platform mentions increases to the province's income assistance program that were approved in the 2021-2022 budget. However, even with these changes a single employable adult faces a \$15,494 per year gap and a couple with two children face a gap of \$17,898 per year just to reach the poverty line (Market Basket Measure) (Saulnier, 2021).

The Liberal Party's plan for mental health does little to change the status quo, focusing on adding a few walk-in clinics to address what they called the increased mental health needs that have emerged since the pandemic. Such suggestions do not recognize the profound gaps in the current system. The party touts as successes that they wish to build on, some of the recent developments such as "single brief intervention sessions", despite the fact that these steps are not based upon evidence-based principles. The lack of integration and interconnectedness between the health care delivery systems regarding mental and physical well-being are a lost opportunity (Brown *et al.*, 2021).

The Liberal Party platform does not provide a comprehensive overhaul. Rather it reinforces the status quo, frequently defending it with apologetics, such as the statement that "Nova Scotia is fortunate to have the highest number of doctors per capita in Canada. However, we know that

there are challenges with respect to patient attachment, specifically in rural areas” and proposing to work to create “a new payment model to create better conditions for full-time family doctors to increase their patient panels, improving access to primary care.” Such statements do not meaningfully address the underlying systemic issues impacting Nova Scotians’ inability to access primary care in a timely way. Furthermore, the Liberal Party’s failure to meaningfully expand options for older adults needing long-term care is concerning. Adding 500 beds will not solve some of the underlying crowding conditions that led to the pandemic’s deaths last year, due to the lack of private rooms and the risk of infection (Health Coalition, 2021).

In brief, the Liberal Party hits the mark with interconnected policy with the creation of \$10/day universal childcare. However, there are substantial opportunities missed by not addressing the social determinants of health or working to redefine primary care through a collaborative model.

Universality



Universality is a core principle in the Social Policy Framework. Programs and services must be accessible to all, regardless of income and paid for through general revenue from income taxes, rather than through user fees or payroll taxes. Access is a right or entitlement of citizenship, and not based on one’s ability to purchase in the market. Universality is important for several reasons: durability (less vulnerable to government cuts), higher quality of services, less stigma for users, social inclusion for users and providers, cost efficiency, solidarity and creation of a shared identity. There must be space for progressive

universalism – programs designed to meet the unique needs of specific communities (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

There are a number of policy options that could lead to greater universality of services in Nova Scotia in the Liberal Party platform. For example:

- Investing in recruiting and retention of physicians, as well as expanding the number of Nurse Practitioners in the province, in order to improve access to primary care.
- Investing in walk-in clinics for mental health services across the province, so that there is less disparity in accessing mental health services.
- Investing in the modernization of health care delivery services by improving access to virtual care for all Nova Scotians, rather than subcontracting this to a private company.
- Investing in the infrastructure of the healthcare system in order to improve access and physical resources across the province, so that the facilities in rural communities are at the same level as those in urban areas.
- The Liberal Party is to be commended for its commitment to created affordable childcare that will be accessible to all Nova Scotians. Such a proposal fulfils the principle of universalism and provides an important step forward in terms of equity of work access.

However, an example of the lack of universality in the Liberals approach to solving widespread problems for Nova Scotians is its proposal for a pilot program to address child hunger: \$3 million a year to pilot a P-6 school lunch program entitled The Healthy Lunches for Healthy Kids program to provide healthy, locally sourced, low-cost lunches. 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.

In addition, much of the Liberal Party's plan for health care and long-term care is a focus on erecting buildings rather than process improvements. As such, the current inequities and disparities are likely to continue, given its lack of investment in people and its lack of a plan to do so. For example, The current mental health care system is a two-tiered system where those with private insurance are able to access better and faster care than those without (Brown et Al, 2021).

What is also missing from the Liberal platform is a commitment to creating universality in social programs particularly those that affect families, children and youth. For instance, our social safety net is still a residual welfare system, which generally limits involvement to those who are perceived to be the most in need (NSCSW, 2021). This is just one example of the ways in which the Liberal Party's plan misses out on the principle of universalism.

In brief, the Liberal Party does partially address the principle of universalism in its platform.



Social Inclusion

Ensuring social policy solutions address the deeply rooted systemic barriers in our policy, programs, and services means they should foster greater social inclusion. Social policy must focus on and redress the legacies of colonialism, racism, and slavery; remove socially created barriers to access and strive for inclusion for people with disabilities (including invisible disabilities); challenge gender-based and heteronormative inequality; support newcomers and people living in the deepest poverty; and work for those in urban and rural locations.

Social inclusion must be guaranteed for the users of public services, as well as those who provide those services to us. Achieving social inclusion requires that we advance both equity and equality (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

There are a few policy proposals that can lead to social inclusion in Nova Scotia in the Liberal Party platform. For example:

- Creating an affordable and inclusive childcare policy that will help ensure that more Nova Scotians are able to work, signing the new Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement, an historic \$645 million commitment that will make childcare much more affordable for families, while expanding access to quality care across Nova Scotia. This investment will support parents, especially women, to enter or re-enter the labour force.
- Increasing access to virtual care for primary care and mental health care and continuing to increase access to the internet across the province, so that regardless of where someone lives, they can access care.
- In February 2021, the Liberal Party created the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism and launched a \$3 million compensation fund to settle land title claims in five historic African Nova Scotian communities. This will ensure that community members can finally receive – and maintain – clear title to their land at no cost, while accelerating efforts to address the legacy of systemic racism in the land registry system.

- Amongst its initiatives to redress systemic racism is the investment of \$4.8 million in a new community-led African Nova Scotian Justice Institute to support African Nova Scotians in contact with the law, and help address overrepresentation and anti-Black racism in the justice system. This will be led by community and will be led by the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition.
- The Liberal government has allocated \$500,000 over three years to create an African Nova Scotian student cohort of 25 students to enter the BSW program at Dalhousie in September 2022 in order to create a tailored experience for students of African descent.
- While efforts to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as those in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report are glaringly absent, there is a proposal to 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'kmaw values.
- While no specific platform is dedicated to working toward reconciliation and justice for Indigenous communities, some project proposals do have earmarked funds to invest in Mi'kmaw communities, such as the allocation of \$723,100 to the PTECH program for information technology in Cape Breton to provide in-demand digital skills to Mi'kmaq and Indigenous students.

While the Liberal Party does take important steps to ensure social inclusion for certain groups, it does not for others. The creation and commitment for the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute is commendable. Also commendable is the Liberals commitment to create an Afrocentric social work program at the School of Social Work. However, the lack of policy regarding disabled Nova Scotians is problematic. Data collected by the Disability Rights Coalition of Nova Scotia shows the disturbing trend backward of the province since 2013, when it first committed to the Coalition's Road to Inclusion by 2023 (Road Map, 2013).

While the Liberal's platform addresses some important elements of social inclusion, its lack of focus on completing the recommendations for the Road Map to Inclusion is problematic.



Decolonization

Re-imagining social policy requires abandoning government paternalism, and addressing the legacy of colonialism (Findlay *et al.*, 2020). Indigenous communities in Nova Scotia are not faring well in terms of their overall due to years of colonialism, residential schools and trauma, and a lack of culturally relevant services and resources to support the social determinants of health. As violent acts of racism are continually directed at Mi'kmaw communities through the fishery dispute, there must be efforts made to provide culturally relevant mental health care in collaboration with our indigenous leaders and communities.

There must be leadership towards reconciliation at every level of government and within policy and programming. Nova Scotian fishing communities have been struggling through conflict and crisis — worsened by the intersections of a pandemic, economic uncertainty, and racism. While the federal government has made some important steps and spoken to these principles, the provincial government of Nova Scotia has failed to do so.

We call on the Liberal Party, and indeed, all parties to explicitly include in their platforms all provincial Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and report annually on our progress. In brief, the Liberal Party's platform does not address any decolonization principles, and the fact that it does not do so during a summer when the nation is awakening to shock and horror of the legacy of colonialism speaks volumes and is profoundly troubling.

In brief, the Liberal Party does not meaningfully address the principle of decolonization in its platform.

Public Provision



Delivery of care in our society must move away from the current approach, which relies heavily on either the market or the private sphere of the family (especially women) to meet our social needs. We see the limitations of this approach in caregiving, post-secondary education, employment training, and particularly within mental health care (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

Public services are superior for reasons that include quality of services, equity and access for users, working conditions of providers, and accountability to citizens. However, we also need to recognize that not all communities have the same relationship with public institutions. Thus, we must bear in mind decolonization and social inclusion (Findlay *et al.*, 2020). Public provision ensures that we are reducing the burden on community organizations, families and predominantly women by strengthening public services and making sure everyone has the basics.

The Liberal platform works against public provision particularly in their health care infrastructure plan. Its largest development, the QEII redevelopment, will be built through a Private Public Partnership (P3). The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS) and the Nova Scotia Health Coalition produced a paper in 2019 that concludes that the Liberal government's justification for pursuing P3s rests on misleading claims about P3 advantages and public procurement flaws. Among these are claims that P3s offer more value for money and are more reliable in delivering services on time (Atikson, 2019). In fact, data retrieved from provincial audits and Infrastructure Ontario show both of these justifications to be false. Moreover, claims about the value of transferring risks associated with these projects to the private sector overstate the risks of public procurement, such as the likelihood of cost overruns, and understate, or ignore altogether, the risks the government assumes in entrusting its infrastructure to private consortiums (Atikson, 2019). Finally, the Liberal platform pledges an extension of online tele-medicine through the use of for profit, private firms, instead of building capacity through the public systems to deliver these services.

Similarly, the Liberal platform emphasises highway expansion as a way to stimulate the economy, pointing to the Sutherland's River-Antigonish Highway 104 Expansion project also planned as a P3. CCPA-NS has determined that it might cost \$66.6 million more in interest payments than it would cost to finance the project through government bonds (Majka, 2019).

The Liberal Party's platform seems to work against public provision of services in many ways. For example, the maintenance of the status quo when it comes to resolving many of the province's problems, in particular its two-tiered approach to mental health and substance use services, whereby those Nova Scotians without access to private insurance face different treatment options (Brown *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the Liberal Party's plan to provide funding

for yoga studios and other athletic clubs is likely to increase the disparity between social groups. Designating private wellness studios for taxpayer funds that ought to go to increasing the infrastructure for health and well-being through partnerships with publicly owned municipal recreation centres is yet another example of this party platform's risk to the public provision of services.

Yet another example of the Liberal Party's reliance on private sector solutions for public issues can be seen in its strategy to address housing and homelessness, by proposing to "bring together provincial, municipal, non-profit organizations and private sector developers to create mixed-use projects" in order to build affordable housing with less stigma. This approach aims to offer financial incentives and partnerships with the private sector to operate and own affordable housing units, increasing the financialization of housing (Housing for All, 2021). Public housing should be not sold to the private sector, because this will spell loss of a major public asset that all Nova Scotians own (Levitan- Reid and Saulnier, 2021). The evidence tells us that selling these public assets to the private sector, employing 'business-like' practices, charging higher rents, and using 'mixed-model' developments with time limits for 'affordable' units will end up displacing low-income tenants and result in a net loss of permanently affordable units. (Levitan-Reid and Saulnier, 2021).

In brief, the Liberal Party does not meaningfully address the principle of public provision in its platform, and indeed, runs the risk of harming this provision.



Decent Work and Well-Being

Social policy needs to attend to both paid work and unpaid caregiving through policies that address precarious work and caregiving for children, aging parents and/or partners. Caregiving is associated with high rates of depression, financial burden, and social isolation, which are especially acute for women, and affect their economic security and health. Social policies must recognize the value of caregiving with money, services, and time (including improving paid maternity and parental leaves and pension supports; investing in social infrastructure, like childcare, home care, and long-term care; and

increasing leisure time with more time out of the labour market to spend with family and to engage in our communities) (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

The Liberal Party's plan to provide grants to support caregiving activities for older adults along with its commitment to ensure affordable childcare suggest that the potential for this value to be addressed in its platform. Nevertheless, it is not explicitly addressed.

Furthermore, the Liberal Party's lack of a meaningful plan to create well-paying jobs for Nova Scotians is troublesome. Wages are stagnant in Nova Scotia. While the GDP has grown by 17% over the past 10 years, wages have only grown 7% (Findlay *et al.*, 2021). The Liberal Party's policies have ensured that the minimum wage and labour standards remained low, and labour unions have seen a decrease in membership (Casey, 2019).

The Liberal platform's primary investment in decent work and well-being is its commitment to invest in affordable childcare. However, without a commitment to update labour laws including minimum wage, the platform lacks a commitment to decent work and well-being.

Climate Justice



Social policy must be developed to ensure that the brunt of adjustment in the transition to a green economy does not fall onto marginalized communities, and ensuring these communities benefit as much. A just transition relies on addressing environmental racism (which is a determinant of mental health) and on strong social policy (income support, skills retraining, infrastructure investments, pharma care, child care, housing). It means taking the opportunity to develop holistic policies (Findlay et al., 2020).

The Liberal Party has dedicated significant money and planning to address the issue of climate change and climate justice.

- It has set the most ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets in the country, working to reduce Nova Scotia's emissions to 53 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 and to net-zero by 2050. Guided by the Sustainable Development Goals Act (SDGA) consultations currently underway and building on the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA), it seeks to create a Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth by the end of the year.
- These plans include a commitment to building new jobs to replace those jobs lost by such policy changes, such as the Liberal government's recent call for proposals to support the development of 350 megawatts of renewable energy projects which it anticipates will stimulate over \$550 million in construction activity while creating over 4000 new jobs in rural Nova Scotia.
- The Liberal Party platform provides for an investment of \$20 million in each of the next two years from the Green Fund in energy efficient home retrofits to help low-income families to live more affordably by reducing their energy costs. Additional investments of \$2 million per year in affordable housing retrofits and \$3 million for the Multi-Unit Property Energy Upgrade program will further enhance the energy efficiency of our housing stock.
- The Liberal Party's platform has further committed to develop 350 megawatts of renewable energy projects such as wind and solar, stating that this investment will stimulate over \$550 million in construction activity while creating over 4000 new jobs.
- To address some of the justice and equity concerns related to climate change, its platform states that "a re-elected Liberal government will commit an additional \$2 million over 4 years to the Clean Leadership Summer Internship Program, to meet the growing demand for youth learning and training for the green economy. Participants will complete internship projects across the province in focus areas such as climate change mitigation, clean tech, waste management, and food security. Youth will work in a paid hands-on environment, connect with mentors, and access professional development training. Specialized streams will be available for youth who identify as Indigenous, Mi'kmaq, Black, African Nova Scotian, or a person of African descent."

The Ecological Action Centre (EAC) advocates that Nova Scotia has a legislated target to reduce GHG emissions by 53 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 (EAC, 2021). The Liberal platform commits to this. The platform includes getting to 80% renewables by 2030, which is less than what the EAC advocates (90%). The platform commits to the inclusion of community

focused initiatives (innovation fund, community solar) which are important. Ensuring community benefits has enabled Nova Scotia to avoid conflicts in other places over renewable development (Haley, 2021). The platform is unclear if a community carve-out for wind is intended, or if it will be industrial projects.

The renewable electricity mandate also comes with some transportation electrification ambitions. The platform includes lots of specifics regarding buses, ferries etc. What is missing is a regulatory requirement for minimum EV sales like in BC and Quebec (Haley 2021). Eliminating fuel oil and likely replacing with (mostly) electric heat pumps also lacks specifics. The aggressiveness of an 80-90% renewable target depends on extent of electrification assumed, which can be best managed by ramping up energy savings to offset costs.

Expanding low-income efficiency to fight energy poverty is up-front. This will likely keep NS investments in the lead compared to other provinces. However, it is only 2-year commitment, while eliminating energy poverty needs a long-term plan (Haley, 2021).

There is no commitment to net-zero building codes and any serious plan should include ensuring every new building is efficient and zero emissions. The platform includes a “refresh” of energy efficiency programs, which raises opportunities and concerns. (Haley, 2021). The platform says a “thorough review of each program.” The current model works because government and regulators set objectives and lets experts design programs. Inviting undue political influence on program details could destroy the successful Nova Scotia energy efficiency model (Haley, 2021).

The Liberal Party’s platform contains a comprehensive plan to address climate change, with some effort to focus upon justice and equity, although there is room for growth in this area particularly in the area of energy poverty.

Fiscal Fairness



We cannot have high quality, affordable and accessible services without also transforming our taxing and spending. We need a progressive tax system, where those who can afford it pay their fair share. And we need to reject tax benefits (such as income splitting) that benefit the wealthy, encourage traditional family and gender relations, and discourage women’s labour market participation. Tax measures can’t replace the direct provision of services. We must challenge the politics of scarcity and invest in our communities (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

Grants and tax credits are not a substitute for meaningful policy, nor does it ensure public provision of services that can benefit all people. For example, suggestions such as exploring “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” does not help the growing number of Nova Scotians facing homelessness.

Similar proposals, such as providing a rebate for the provincial portion of the HST on construction costs for new affordable housing units does not guarantee the construction of new affordable housing units in ways that can address the housing shortage. Such proposals leave the solutions in the hands of developers, and such whim-driven strategies do not ensure that those most in need will benefit (Housing for All, 2021).

The health care platform contains solutions such as increasing the health of Nova Scotians by providing funding to private businesses such as yoga studios. This not only is ineffective in resolving the systemic inequities leading to unequal health outcomes, but it also has the potential to further increase the divide between the wealthy and those who do not have the luxury to engage in these behaviours and access these benefits, because they are dealing with the repercussions of a system that discriminates against them (MacDonald, 2017).

Fiscal fairness is the weakest pillar in the Liberal platform. Prior to the pandemic many in Nova Scotia were not doing well, with many in our province struggling with food and housing insecurity and a lack of adequate public services due to government spending cuts (Saulnier, 2021). The pandemic exposed the disastrous result of those government cuts to vital investments in people, especially in health care and long-term care. While the Liberal government was running surpluses, households were burdened with increasing costs for housing or food, struggling to pay for childcare and private health care costs. The current housing crisis resulted, largely, from a lack of sustained and significant government investment in non-market, affordable housing (Housing for All, 2021).

The Liberals fiscal platform of returning to a balance budget in four years, while cutting \$209 million from next year's budget, contains many problems in term of fiscal fairness. It also does not follow the evidence that tells us that the pandemic mitigation strategies (Scott, 2021) have been uneven: the lower your wage, the more likely you were to have lost your job or a majority of your working hours (Saulnier *et al.*, 2020). The sectors that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 employ more women and racialized workers. None of this is addressed in the fiscal platform presented by the Liberals. The largest spending in this platform is on buildings and roads, employing predominantly male construction workers with higher paying jobs (Saulnier, 2021). As mentioned, while the new childcare agreement is a major steppingstone towards building a caring economy where women will benefit, there continue to be deep inequities in the care sector when comparing wage equity (Casey, 2019).

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the provincial government had accumulated surpluses of more than \$500 million over the previous four years (Public Accounts, 2020). The current 2021-2022 projected deficit of more than \$700 million is primarily the result of increased spending to fund the pandemic response and the concurrent drop in revenue arising from the resulting recession (Saulnier, 2021.) While the estimated debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to rise from 33.3% to 37.9%, much of this increase is due to the temporary drop in GDP caused by the recession. Though it is too early to accurately predict how rapidly the economy will recover following the pandemic, the early signs are positive. Economic growth should resume relatively quickly, resulting in greater revenues and a more favourable fiscal balance (Saulnier, 2021).

Most significantly, despite the hit to revenues and extra expenses associated with the pandemic, debt-servicing costs continue to fall, and government debt has become substantially more affordable. This is because the government continues to replace old, expensive debt with new, inexpensive debt. Since borrowing rates have fallen well below the projected growth of nominal GDP, there has rarely been a better time for the government to invest in Nova Scotians long-neglected public services (Saulnier, 2021).

The Liberal platform misses an opportunity to bring in progressive tax measures, to ensure that those who can actually pay their fair share do so. As identified income inequality was a problem before the pandemic, and it's important to note that while low-waged workers were the hardest hit, many higher incomes people have not had their income negatively affected at all. Yet, there are no changes to taxation in this platform. Instead, the platform prioritizes getting back into

running surpluses in four years' time (Sauliner, 2021). When governments don't spend on programs that make life more affordable like, housing, pharamacare and post-secondary, these costs get passed on to individuals. Given that Nova Scotians have the lowest median wages and highest rates of poverty, the austerity fiscal framework presented by the Liberals risks recovery and further intrenches inequality

In brief, the Liberal Party does not meaningfully address the principle of fiscal fairness in its platform.



Shared Governance

Federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments need to cooperate in order to deliver programs and services such as mental health care to Nova Scotians. We have moved away from this model in favour of federal government retrenchment and “flexibility” for provinces and territories, resulting in weakened accountability, the erosion of national standards, and further fragmentation of Canada’s patchwork of social programs. The federal government must work with the provinces, territories, municipalities, and First Nations in the funding of services and the setting of standards. Federal transfers to the provinces and territories and equalization payments are integral to supporting universal programs in Canada.

Certainly, a Liberal provincial government and a Liberal federal government have been granted the opportunity to collaborate together on projects such as the recently signed Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement. Nevertheless, the absence of more projects reflecting shared governance is concerning.

For example, current health care transfers are tied to population rather than needs. Our current health care system in every area of health has been devastated by a lack of cooperative federalism. In the 1990s when the Liberal government brutally cut transfers to provinces for health and social spending for the purpose of reducing debt, lowering corporate taxes and controlling inflation, they put in jeopardy the health and wellness of all Canadians (Jackson, 2010). Currently, in the middle of a global pandemic, provinces who don't have the same tax base as the federal government are paying 75% of the total health care spending for their provinces, while the federal government contributes 25% in most cases. When the Canada Medicare Act came into being, the initial financial split was 50/50; these cuts need to be reversed. The Liberals' plan does not provide for a return to shared governance.

What is also missing from this platform is a commitment to press for increases to the Canada Social Transfer program, and commitment for greater accountability on principles for how this money is spent. For health, it has long been understood that in order to support equitable services across Canada, the provinces and territories must be held accountable to the funding they receive through the Canada Health Act – upholding principles, such as fairness, accountability, and public administration. These principles and accountability are lacking in social transfers and must be applied (CASW 2015).

In brief, there is room for the Liberal Party to more meaningfully address the principle of shared governance in its platform.



Democratization

Public policy that works for everyone must ensure that everyone has a say in its creation. The rising influence of corporations and business organizations in politics, alongside the declining power of labour unions and the weakening of equality-seeking civil society organizations has damaged our democracy, and citizens are increasingly disillusioned with their governments. Governments need to consider the potential social impact of each policy they introduce, break down policy silos, and apply substantive gender-based and intersectional analyses. Communities need the capacity to engage and to shape public policy. In our economy, unions, worker control and ownership are essential for addressing inequality (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

Unfortunately, much of the platform's economic policy proposals are focused on "cutting red tape", which in turn will lead to deregulation. Since many of the laws exist to protect the public and ensure public input in policies such as housing, such "red-tape" cutting is likely to lead to a decrease of democratization and reflect a trickle-down economics argument that has long been proven to be ineffective. Priorities such as a balanced budget, in the midst of a pandemic, risk further marginalizing segments of the population. The principle of democratization holds that governments invest in their most important resource: people.

What is also deeply troubling is the lack of commitment for a Child and Youth Advocate Office in Nova Scotia. As the NSCSW has previously written the creation of a Child and Youth Advocate Office is crucial in Nova Scotia and will ensure the provision of holistic and coordinated services to the whole child in collaboration with all stakeholders as found in other provinces. The office could ensure effective collaboration and coordination between and among various government departments, timely, accessible and adequate service provision for youths at risk and their families within their social location (NSCSW, 2018).

In brief, the Liberal Party does not meaningfully address the principle of democratization in its platform.

Conclusion

The Liberal platform misses an opportunity to create greater equality and equity by not fully utilizing the 10 policy principles laid out in the CCPA-NS and NSCSW social policy framework to create its platform.

The Liberal platform does have some clear strengths, particularly a commitment to the new Canada-Nova Scotia Early Learning & Child Care Agreement, which will support parents, especially women, to enter or re-enter the labour force. The Liberal Party is to be commended for this transformational proposal. The Liberal Party platform does make a significant commitment to the principle of universality through the childcare platform. The platform also as takes some important steps to address the systemic racism in our province through the justice institute. There are also important policy positions regarding climate justice.

However, there are substantial opportunities missed by not addressing the social determinants of health or working to redefine primary care through a collaborative model. The platform's primary investment in decent work and well-being is its commitment to invest in affordable childcare. However, without a commitment to update labour laws including minimum wage, the platform lacks a full commitment to decent work and well-being. Many of the proposals in its

platform perpetuate the status quo, and the emphasis on deregulation runs the risk of harming the safety and rights of the citizens it seeks to serve. Most troubling of course is the Liberal Party's fiscal framework which will bring about more austerity, managerialism and under investments in social and health services

The NSCSW awards the Liberal Platform a C. This is mostly because of the commitment to universal \$10 a day childcare which is a game changer.

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