

# **Nova Scotia New Democrat 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](https://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 will evaluate 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 Nova Scotia New Democrat platform on core social justice and advocacy issues of concern to social workers.**

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 NDP platform connects evidence based intersectional data through the 10 policy principles laid out in the CCPA-NS and NSCSW social policy framework. There is significant focus on addressing social determinants of health and caregiving which are important interconnected principles. There is a clear push for decent work and well-being and social inclusion. The NDP's platform put forward an ambitious plan for climate justice and are committed to decolonization as the platform commits to implementing all provincial calls to action through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

While many of the principles are addressed, further policy is needed in areas of fiscal fairness, public provision, shared governance and universality. What was lacking in the NDP platform is

clear commitment to build 33,000 housing units over the next 10 years, a commitment to creating universal access to programs that strengthen families, the clear tax tools that will provide the revenue to fund these social programs, and commitment to press the federal government for a stronger commitment to social transfers.

Should the NDP win government and hold the moral courage to implement all these policies and their commitments there is little doubt that Nova Scotia would become a more equitable and equal province enhancing well-being for all. **The NDP platform receives an A- from the NSCSW on their commitments to greater equity and equality.**

### *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 demonstrated that Nova Scotia 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 perpetually 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 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 9), 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 NDP Platform*

When evaluating the NDP platform many of the above issues are addressed and policy solutions are put forward in their core vision statement. This includes a more equitable health care system including substantial policy options to address the upstream social determinants of health, such as poverty, housing and wages. As well, there is a push for more collaborative care and the use of social workers to support health outcomes. The document states that if they form a government, they will invest in children and youth, by creating a child and youth advocate office and a comprehensive childcare program. There are commitments to address inequity by implementing all provincial recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and to create a Justice for African Nova Scotian Communities framework. There is also a clear focus on climate justice with an ambitious target of reducing Nova Scotia emissions by 50% below 1990 levels.

**There is also a focus within the vision document on becoming the first jurisdiction in North America to eliminate poverty.**

It seems clear that there is a large focus on both evidence-based and intersectional analysis in the development of the NDP vision document



### **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 are several intersectional policies with the NDP vision document.

These include:

- Making sure people have the basics: food security, shelter, adequate income and community supports.
- Working closely with childcare providers to establish a system of universal, \$10/day childcare.
- Investing in community health centres to work with communities on primary care needs.

- Establishing a Mental Health Bill of Rights and moving to funding mental health services to the World Health Organization’s recommended 10 per cent of the health budget.
- Establishing a Right to Housing Act, which would create a roadmap to eliminate homelessness, address systemic barriers to housing, and require the government to create a housing strategy, including regular reporting on progress.

The social determinants of health greatly impact our overall well-being and quality of life. The NDP platform recognizes this and makes a connection that the provincial government needs to ensure that social, economic and physical environments operating at different stages of life are meeting the needs of Nova Scotians (Brown et al., 2021). The platform also draws on several rights-based approaches including a right to housing and a bill of rights for mental health services users. These are important as rights-based solutions tackle the commodification of services like mental health and housing (Housing for All, 2021). Affordable childcare is also a vitally important policy as it is a social determinant of health. It can be utilized to catch vulnerabilities before children enter school, avoiding high social and financial costs later. 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 (Findlay *et al.*, 2020). Childcare is also a proven economic development strategy, with every dollar being invested contributing two dollars back to economy (Saulnier and Findlay 2019).

It seems clear there are policies in the NDP platform that embrace the principle of interconnectedness.

### 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 several policy options that lead to greater universality of services in Nova Scotia in the NDP platform. For example

- Introducing free, inclusive, school based, before- and after-school care for children in elementary schools (including pre-primary).
- Establishing a universal school food program that would provide at least one meal during the school day with an emphasis on foods that are locally, ecologically, and ethically produced, nutritious, and culturally appropriate.

- Making same-day/next-day in-person mental health appointments available across the province as a right.
- Integrating mental health services with other services associated with mental distress, such as education, family supports and housing.
- Legislating a right to housing.

These are important initiatives that speak to the importance of universality. Our current mental health system increasingly relies on two-tier mental health care (Brown *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic has contributed to lost jobs and reduced income with mothers facing a significant rise in unpaid labour, taking care of loved ones, homeschooling, provisioning supplies, and finding ways to shoulder the enormous economic and social burdens of this time. The chaotic re-opening of schools and childcares subsequent closures have further compounded this crisis (Bartram and Scott, 2021). The rise in precarious, insecure work also leaves many workers without access to workplace benefits. In Nova Scotia, 47 per cent of people have access to mental health insurance coverage, and this is also increasingly an issue of “intergenerational equity,” as few young workers have the workplace benefits that previous generations enjoyed (Casey, 2019). The policies above create a context for greater universality of mental health services and childcare and set the framework work for universal food programmes and housing.

However, what is missing from the NDP is commitment to creating universality in social programs administered by or in partnership with the Department of Community Services. For instance, our social safety net is still increasingly a residual welfare system, which generally limits involvement to those who are perceived to be the most in need (NSCSW, 2021). What is needed is a commitment to universality in social programming that moves us away from needing to identify risk before programs are offered, moving further away from universal social programs.



### 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).

The Nova Scotia NDP appear committed to the principle of social inclusion in their platform:

- Establishing emergency mental health crisis teams across the province, like the successful models in other jurisdictions. These crisis teams will include a variety of mental health care professionals, such as social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and nurses.



- Implementing a community-developed African Nova Scotian Health Care Strategy that includes collecting race-based data in health care.
- Ending the practice of birth alerts in hospitals that disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous families.
- Expanding MSI coverage to all people living in Nova Scotia regardless of citizenship status.
- Ensuring supports in hospitals are in place for people with disabilities, such as interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Engaging in a widespread consultation process with trans and non-binary communities to determine barriers to accessing health care, with a commitment to identifying and addressing broad access to care issues.
- Establishing a principle of broadly extending MSI coverage to gender affirming procedures that are determined to be medically necessary by a patient together with their healthcare provider.
- Funding housing for African Nova Scotian communities, Mi'kmaw communities, people experiencing criminalization, lone parent households and other marginalized populations. These funds could be used to support alternative ownership models including resident-run co-ops and community land trusts as ways to enable community control.
- Investing in programs that will make schools hubs for services for children and their families including school food programs, a school based oral health program, and more supports for students with disabilities.
- Addressing racism in policing by implementing all recommendations made in the Wortley Report.
- Increasing core funding to women's organizations across the province to ensure that survivors of sexualized violence have access to trauma informed counselling.
- Providing sustainable, multi-year funding for non-profit housing organizations to ensure workers are paid a living wage and access to housing first, housing support and eviction prevention are available across the province.
- Working with disability support organizations to address gaps in transition support and programming for people with disabilities as they age out of the education system.

Many of these policies are aimed at addressing the histories of colonialism and racism as well as to working to challenge the climate of fear in government in the delivery of services to vulnerable people (Barkley and Wright, 2020). The NDP platform is taking on more risks in government and promoting courage in the application of bold and competent interventions, centred in the cultural needs and lives of Nova Scotians (Barkley and Wright, 2019). This is an important shift of priorities, recognising that as a province we can and must more effectively and efficiently care for one another from a collective viewpoint, working to include more vulnerable and marginalized Nova Scotian in our communities.



## 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 mental health, 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 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.

The NDP platform commits to implementing all provincial calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and reporting annually on their progress. these include:

- Eliminating the over-representation of Indigenous adults and youth in custody in jails and report on progress toward doing so.
- Adopting and supporting community sanctions that would provide alternatives to imprisonment for Indigenous people.
- Fully implementing Jordan's Principle.
- Increasing the number of Indigenous professionals working in the healthcare field.
- Maintaining a strong nation-to-nation relationship with Mi'kmaw communities.
- Systematically addressing instances of environmental racism.

The NDP platform makes clear that as a government the party would immediately work in solidarity with Indigenous communities to develop a recovery plan and take the opportunity to implement the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. Indigenous communities have called on policies that should focus on creating greater equity of funding for health, education, and social services to all Indigenous peoples in Canada; these commitments are found in the NDP policy document (Findlay *et al.*, 2020) There is also a commitment to build core infrastructure including housing, healthcare facilities, and clean water.

There is strong commitment to decolonialization in the NDP platform, specifically a commitment to implement all provincial recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



## 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 NDP vision document addresses public provision in several ways. The document commits to:

- Reducing the burden on community organizations by strengthening public services and making sure everyone has the basics.
- Building 1000 new units of housing in the next four years by reinvesting in publicly owned, cooperative, and non-profit housing.
- Supporting a permanent Housing Trust where provincial, municipal, and private resources would go to a pool of money that non-profit housing providers can access quickly in order to acquire and provide affordable housing.
- Exercising a right of first refusal to acquire existing affordable housing that comes on the market.

We have increasingly seen the not-for-profit, charity and family sectors take on more and more of the social care in our society, with fewer and fewer resources being placed into the public system. This can be felt in the provision of child welfare, where family, family resource centres, and not-for-profits are taking on the burden that government is mandated to provide through the children and family services (NSCSW, 2021). A commitment to reducing this burden is key.

However, the NDP plan does not go far enough, particularly in the area of housing. The Housing for All Working Group established that Nova Scotia needs 33,000 new units over the next 10 years and that these must provide through a public or not for profit options. The NDP's commitment on only 1000 new units over the next 4 years, does not even come close to addressing the housing crisis in Nova Scotia (Housing for All, 2021).



## 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 NDP vision document commits to enhancing decent work and well-being by committing to:

- Working towards eliminating tuition fees, beginning with tuition fees at the Nova Scotia Community College.
- Introducing a \$15 minimum wage to get Nova Scotia on the road to a living wage.
- Ensuring the right to join a union is protected.
- Introducing 10 paid sick days into the Labour Standards Code to ensure all workers can afford to stay home sick.
- Conducting a comprehensive review of the Labour Standards Code to ensure that workers in Nova Scotia have access to better working conditions.
- Addressing paramedic burn-out by making sure our entire health system is working as it should.

Increasing access to education by removing financial barriers for individuals, combined with increases to minimum wages, workplace safety through labour standards, and union protection, are key to ensuring greater access to decent work and well-being (Casey, 2019). Currently 54% of workers have access to paid sick leave, and Nova Scotians who work for large companies are least likely to have access (41%) (Casey *et al.*, 2021). When policies allow workers to use sick days to care for family members, they help employees balance work and family caregiving obligations without financial worries, contributing to lower levels of stress and greater overall wellbeing.

Moral distress for frontline health and social service workers has increased throughout the pandemic. The current environment in which social workers function creates huge stressors due to erosion of the social safety net, reductions in resources, and increasing restrictions on the autonomy of professionals, making it very difficult for them to fulfil that desire for goodness in the parameters of the pandemic (Weinberg, 2009). Consequently, professionals sometimes fail in doing what they perceive of as their best, most ethical practice, and the theoretical tool of moral distress allows for a recognition of both that failure and the emotional price that workers pay when failure occurs (Weinberg, 2009). This must be addressed among all those providing care during the pandemic, and time for healing and recovery must be considered.

The NDP platform makes a significant commitment to decent work and well-being, particularly with its commitment to a \$15 minimum wage and conducting a comprehensive review of the Labour Standards Code to ensure that workers in Nova Scotia have access to better working conditions. What is missing is commitment to make sure that all of those providing care during the pandemic can access the tools and resources to heal and recover.

## 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, childcare, housing). It means taking the opportunity to develop holistic policies (Findlay *et al.*, 2020).

The NDP vision document commits to climate justice through the following commitments:

- Doing Nova Scotia's part to prevent catastrophic climate change by setting a new target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.
- Immediately establishing to guide the transformation of Nova Scotia's economy into a sustainable one while creating thousands of green jobs.
- Ending environmental racism.

The Nova Scotia NDP have demonstrated a significant commitment to climate justice, that includes addressing environmental racism. Their plan includes a tripling of Nova Scotia's energy efficiency, a step code to make new buildings net-zero energy ready by 2032, and mandatory building and home energy efficiency disclosure. In addition, it addresses creating and funding test sites for a deep retrofit strategy and recognizes the need to transform the retrofit process and not just increase funding for traditional tools. It sets a target of 90% renewable by 2030, which includes regulations to enable community owned renewables and virtual net metering. It also includes studying the possibility of returning Nova Scotia Power to public ownership (Haley 2021).

The NDP platform makes a significant contribution to climate justice with clear targets and realistic policy solutions. It also commits to ending environmental racism, which contributes to adverse childhood experiences. It names a strategy to connect and ensure a just transition to the green jobs task force.

## 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.

The NDP platform commits to pressuring the federal government:

- Actively pressing the federal government to implement a national pharma care program. Nova Scotians should not have to choose between paying for medication and other necessities.
- Standing up for Nova Scotia's proper share of the Canada Health Transfer.

These are important policies as Nova Scotians continue to age and require more health services. 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 NDP have positioned themselves to fight for a return to shared governance.

What is missing from this platform is a commitment to press for increases to the Canada Social Transfer program and a 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 (CASW 2015).



## 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).

The NDP platform commits to strengthening democracy in several ways:

- Introducing a Child and Youth Advocate office to ensure that government policies and programs respect the rights of children and youth.
- Establishing a Seniors' Advocate Office.

- Establishing fixed election dates.
- Implementing a legislative calendar to prevent governments from skirting democratic accountability and to help encourage more women and gender-diverse people to seek office.
- Creating a Democratic Renewal Commission to address low voter turnout.

As the NSCSW has previously written, the creation of the 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 will 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. The same can be said about the office of Seniors' Advocate.

Fixed election dates and legislative calendar are important policy positions to strengthen and support women running for office, as provides predictability that is needed to provide care at home, which women still predominantly attend too.

Missing from the NDP strategy is a commitment to strengthen housing initiatives by Establish a Provincial Housing for All Council (which must include community-based provider representatives and tenant representatives and no more than one for-profit developer or business interest). So is a commitment to support meaningful, active and democratic tenant involvement in public housing, at different levels (buildings, neighbourhoods, and within housing authority boards). Ensuring housing providers and tenants have positions on all local bodies that have authority over housing including local Funding (Housing for All, 2021)



## 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).

The NDP platform includes:

- Increasing income assistance rates to get people out of poverty.
- Taking the profit out of long-term care by investing any new public money in public and non-profit facilities.
- Reversing the Liberals' corporate tax cuts for big business.
- Making the tax system fairer by making the rich pay their fair share and adding a surtax to luxury items like private planes and yachts.
- Ending corporate handouts, like the \$5 million provided to Sandpiper Ventures.

Nova Scotia is often portrayed as a poor province. While it is true that Nova Scotians' incomes are lower than the Canadian average, from a global perspective, we are among the most prosperous. Smart public investments that address inequality and insecurity not only achieve greater fairness; they also provide more opportunities for economic growth, but not just any kind of growth. Investment to strengthen and extend public services help level the proverbial playing field. All our community members have the right to fully use their skills and capabilities. For this to happen, we must make strategic investments to advance social and economic justice, create jobs, reallocate resources, expand the economy, and broaden our progressive revenue base. It is possible to help those in need now, and ensure a solid foundation for our future, our people, our communities, and our environment (Findlay *et al.* 2021).

The NDP's fiscal framework adds several new progressive tax initiatives including:

- Reversing the corporate tax cut.
- A luxury surtax on private planes and yachts.
- An additional 3% surtax on income earners over \$250,000.

These are a good step towards more progressive tax measures. The fiscal framework also makes investment in people a priority, with record low interest rates. Making investments in people and our public services will support the growth of the economy, combined with providing the care required to reduce the cost of living for Nova Scotians.

The NDP platform embraces the principle of fiscal fairness.

### *Conclusion*

The NDP platform connects evidence based intersectional data through the 10 policy principles laid out in the CCPA\_NS and NSCSW social policy framework. There is significant focus on addressing social determinants of health and caregiving which are important interconnected principles. There is a clear push for decent work and well-being and social inclusion. The NDP's platform put forward an ambitious plan for climate justice and are committed to decolonization as the platform commits to implementing all provincial calls to action through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

While many of the principles are addressed, further policy is needed in areas of fiscal fairness, public provision, shared governance and universality. What was lacking in the NDP platform is a clear commitment to build 33,000 housing units over the next 10 years, a commitment to creating universal access to programs that strengthen families, the clear tax tools that will provide the revenue to fund these social programs, and a commitment to press the federal government for a stronger commitment to social transfers.

Should the NDP win government and hold the moral courage to implement all these policies and their commitments, there is little doubt that Nova Scotia would become a more equitable and equal province enhancing well-being for all. **The NDP platform receives an A- from the NSCSW on their commitments to greater equity and equality.**



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