

During an election campaign, voters often have many opportunities to ask questions of the candidates standing for election in their riding. These opportunities may include:

- **All Candidates Meetings:** in most ridings, these meetings are held at least once, and often more, to give members of the public the opportunity to see their candidates in person. All Candidates Meetings are presented in a question-and-answer format, and people attending are almost always encouraged to ask questions.
- **Debates:** The leaders of the major parties debate one or more times during an election campaign. Sometimes the opportunity exists for citizens to submit questions about issues that are important to themselves and their communities.
- **Telephone calls from the campaign office or door-to-door visits:** One of the primary components of an election campaign is called “voter contact”. In most ridings, the campaigns will be organizing phone calls and/or visits to voters. When you are called or visited, it is important to ask questions about arthritis. Any specific questions asked will be logged by the canvasser and forwarded to the candidate or campaign manager.
- **Radio phone-in shows:** these provide an excellent opportunity to ask a candidate questions about party policy or personal opinion.
- **Walking in to the campaign office:** Campaigns set up offices in part to allow people to walk in and communicate with campaign staff and/or the candidate directly. Simply walk in during campaign office hours and ask to speak with someone about policy. Bring along your list of questions in print form, including your name and contact information, to leave behind in case no one is available.

Whenever possible, it is vitally important that people who care about arthritis issues take this election campaign period to ask questions about arthritis and to express a strong interest in health care issues. If candidates understand that people with arthritis are watching to see which politicians care about their issues, change will begin to occur at the government level.

It is important to frame your questions with a small amount of information at the beginning, so that candidates have some background on the issue. Here are some examples of questions you can ask candidates, or their authorized representatives:

- Currently, the cost of arthritis and related musculoskeletal diseases in Canada is estimated at \$16.4 billion each year, the second highest cost after heart disease, with long term disability accounting for almost 80% of the economic cost of arthritis.
  - **What measures will your government establish to address the detrimental impacts of arthritis and related conditions?**
- Despite the enormous impact on the economy and society, arthritis receives much less research funding than other diseases, with only \$0.94 for every person living with arthritis compared to \$731 for every person living with HIV and \$4.98 for every person living with diabetes.

- **What will your government do to address this discrepancy in research funding?**
- While there is no known cure for arthritis, excellent treatments exist. Unfortunately, many Canadians are unable to access these medications, due to prohibitive cost and a wide disparity between publically funded medication plans.
  - **How will your government ensure that evidence-based treatments are made available to all Canadians regardless of province of residence or ability to pay?**
- In HIV/AIDS and cancer, national and provincial centres of excellence have shown to significantly improve the care and treatment of patients while at the same time reducing the burden of disease on the health system and communities and serving as a driving force internationally in groundbreaking research.
  - **Would your government support the creation of a national centre of excellence for the prevention and treatment of arthritis?**
- Aboriginal Canadians have much higher rates of inflammatory arthritis (19%), and the arthritis they face is more debilitating and more likely to be life-threatening than arthritis in non-aboriginals.
  - **What measures would you take to improve the lives of Aboriginal Canadians with arthritis?**
  - **How would you ensure that Aboriginal Canadians are able to access a timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment?**
- Despite the high rates of inflammatory arthritis, First Nations and Inuit people covered under the Non-Insured Health Benefit plan (NIHB) have some of the worst, most restrictive reimbursement coverage for medications in the country.
  - **What would your government do to ensure that First Nation and Inuit Canadians have care equal to that received by non-Aboriginal Canadians?**
  - **How would you go about reforming the NIHB to ensure that First Nation and Inuit Canadians have care equal to that received by non-Aboriginal Canadians?**
  - **What is your personal opinion about the medication coverage provided by the NIHB drug benefits plan for First Nation and Inuit Canadians?**
- Aboriginal Canadians dependent on the NIHB drug reimbursement plan who live with psoriatic arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis have no coverage at all for biologic response modifiers, the gold standard treatment medications.
  - **What steps will you take to reform the NIHB to ensure that First Nation and Inuit peoples with these types of arthritis will have the same health care coverage as other Canadians?**