

Joint Health

Arthritis Consumer Experts' party questionnaire – BC Provincial election 2009

1. Do you agree that arthritis is a serious health condition with tremendous social and economic consequences, requiring immediate attention of the next government of BC?

The high numbers and widespread nature of arthritis underscore the serious nature of this condition that affects people of all ages. This often complex condition leads to patient frustration and practitioner confusion. The BC NDP will review how our healthcare system addresses arthritis care to ensure that patients receive proper care and attention.

2. Do you agree that a program of treatment and care of inflammatory arthritis should be a priority for BC?

Fair and timely treatment of all patients in our healthcare system is a priority for the BC NDP. Funding should be available so that we don't have to necessarily prioritize some patients over others. In order to ensure that patients receive timely and effective care we will immediately provide enhanced funding for healthcare and expand BC's medical schools across BC. We will also provide additional residency positions for foreign-trained specialists to address the shortfall.

3. Do you believe that the BC Government is currently living up to its responsibilities to British Columbians with arthritis?

Liberal cuts to healthcare have left our public system without adequate funding and with serious gaps in treatment. A shortage of rheumatologists and other healthcare practitioners means that it takes some patients far too long to see the professionals they require. Rather than moving money to private healthcare providers and wasting money on insider deals, the BC NDP will re-invest in our public system.

4. If your party forms government, will you work with the BC arthritis community, including family physicians, rheumatologists and patient stakeholders, to create a comprehensive model of care for arthritis in BC?

The BC NDP believes that all stakeholders should be included in meaningful consultation to develop how best to deal with health issues. A comprehensive approach that incorporates all levels of treatment and patient care is necessary if we want to properly address the issues that arthritis sufferers face. Home support needs to be an important part of any care model. Individuals deserve solutions that allow them to receive care, while maintaining a degree of independence and remaining in their own homes. The NDP will increase the number of people receiving home support, and the number of hours of care per week. We will also expand the number of community clinics to ensure enhanced access to chronic disease management.

5. Moving forward, do you agree that all people with inflammatory arthritis in BC should be able to fill the prescriptions their doctors write for them regardless of ability to pay?

Since 2002 British Columbia's families and seniors have been paying more out of pocket for healthcare and prescription drugs. According to Statistics Canada, the cost for private supplementary coverage for prescription drugs and the now-de-listed rehab, eye care and podiatry services, increased from \$256 per household in 1997 to more than \$480 today. These are not insignificant costs, particularly when you compare them with the average wage increases in Canada which was about 2.3% per year during this same period.

The BC Liberal government's decision to move away from universal drug coverage for seniors was clearly wrong and is forcing seniors and other British Columbians to make difficult choices. As resources permit, an NDP government will improve the situation.

We will also work with other provinces and territories and cooperate with the federal government in establishing a Canada-wide prescription drug program, phasing in drug coverage for all citizens, beginning with catastrophic drug costs. The national program would reduce the cost of prescription drugs for average Canadians and save billions of dollars from provincial health care budgets by implementing a bulk-purchasing plan.