

Arthritis Consumer Experts  
Sent via email

October 8, 2024

**Re: BC NDP Response to the Arthritis Consumer Experts**

Dear Arthritis Consumer Experts,

Thanks for the opportunity to share our plans with you. Please see a collaborative BC NDP Response Below.

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**Question 1**

The Arthritis Consumer Experts Arthritis Medications Report Card is designed to help Canadians evaluate where their province or territory ranks in terms of providing reimbursement for medications approved for inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis, axial spondyloarthritis, psoriatic arthritis and lupus. British Columbia is currently ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in Canada in providing reimbursement access to new biologic (originator and biosimilars) medications for people living with inflammatory arthritis.

**What will your government do to improve B.C.'s ranking and address the province's lagging equitable reimbursement access and patient/physician choice in treating inflammatory arthritis compared to the rest of Canada?**

Since 2019, BC PharmaCare has led Canada in launching the biosimilars initiative, saving people money and saving the province over \$730 million, thanks to people transitioning from reference biologics to their cost-effective biosimilars, which are highly similar versions of high-cost biologic drugs used to treat health concerns, such as diabetes, inflammatory conditions and certain cancers. This includes more than \$226 million in savings between 2023 and 2024. These savings continue to be reinvested into BC PharmaCare to improve and expand coverage of other drugs and medical devices. We will keep working to support inflammatory arthritis treatment and improve access to prescription drugs for British Columbians.

John Rustad's Conservatives plan to cut billions from the healthcare budget, and bring in American-style two-tier healthcare, investing in corporate profits instead of people. This would hurt us all, but especially for people who use our healthcare system to manage ongoing conditions, like arthritis. We know there's more work to do, which is why we can't risk losing the progress we've made. Healthcare should always be there when you need it. And David Eby won't stop until the job is done. We look forward to working together to strengthen healthcare in BC.

## Question 2

Indigenous Peoples in Canada have some of the highest rates of serious life threatening arthritis in the world and are at greater risk for becoming disabled by arthritis. Significant gaps in Indigenous arthritis care currently exist in B.C. Care models, such as having an Indigenous community-based patient care facilitator that address health care in a culturally relevant manner and the many barriers to care have been proven to resolve care gaps more effectively and optimize health outcomes of Indigenous Peoples with arthritis and comorbidities.<sup>2</sup>

**Will your government introduce culturally appropriate, patient-centered policies to help Indigenous Peoples navigate the healthcare system and receive coordinated care within their community to manage their arthritis?**

The BC NDP agrees that healthcare is an equity issue and we believe that equitable access to services and medication is a core part of high-quality healthcare. Earlier this year, the BC NDP government opened the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC). This centre is a partnership between the VNFC, the Victoria Primary Care Network (PCN), and the Ministry of Health. The centre provides culturally safe, longitudinal primary health-care services to people who identify as Indigenous and live in the Greater Victoria area and who do not have a primary care provider.

In addition to this clinic, the BC NDP has taken action to fund Indigenous patient navigators at clinics and hospitals across B.C. We know there is lots more work to do, and we continue to improve healthcare for Indigenous people and all British Columbians. We can't let John Rustad undo this progress, it's too big of a risk for people.

## Question 3

The next B.C government must take steps to ensure the sustainability of prescription drug plans and the continued affordability of prescription medicines for B.C. patients.

Over the first five years of the B.C. biosimilars initiative, the Province has saved \$732 million, thanks to people transitioning from originator biologics to their cost-effective biosimilars, which are highly similar versions of high-cost biologic drugs used to treat chronic diseases, such as inflammatory arthritis, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis, age-related macular degeneration, and certain cancers.

**Will your government commit to reinvesting biosimilars savings to increase accessibility to new medicines and expand coverage for existing medicines for people living with inflammatory arthritis?**

The BC NDP are committed to reinvesting these savings to continue to improve and expand coverage of other drugs and medical devices, including for people with arthritis.

John Rustad is planning tax breaks for those at the top and will make the rest of us pay for it through cuts to healthcare. John Rustad's healthcare plan calls for a \$4.1 billion cut in health spending. We can't afford to let Rustad slash healthcare like he did before. Healthcare should always be there when you need it — and David Eby and the BC NDP will keep working to ensure people get the care they need.

#### Question 4

Some individuals with severe osteoarthritis require joint replacement surgery to achieve better quality of life, less pain and more joint function. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the guideline for knee and hip replacement is to receive surgery within 26 weeks. In B.C. in 2023, only 57% of knee replacement patients and 65% of hip replacement patients were treated within that guideline and below the Canadian average. This deeply impacts the lives of B.C. residents with osteoarthritis who require these surgeries.

**Will your government take steps to ensure timely, specialized care for B.C. residents struggling with osteoarthritis, including joint replacement surgery wait times that are within medically recommended guidelines?**

David Eby and the BC NDP will protect, improve, and shorten your wait time for the health care you need. We will keep making diagnostic imaging technology more available, reducing the time spent leading up to surgery. Since 2017, we have almost doubled the MRIs completed to 330,000 each year — thanks to adding 18 more MRI scanners around BC while expanding their hours of operation. In addition, B.C.'s surgical renewal commitment delivered more surgeries for patients than ever by March of this year.

In contrast, John Rustad forced health authorities to absorb hundreds of millions in cuts, reducing services like MRIs, causing longer waits. He's done it before and he'll do it again.

There's much more to do to bring down wait times, but we're starting to see some promising results — BC now has the second-shortest wait times in Canada for hip and knee replacements and MRIs — we need to keep going, and we won't stop until the job is done.

#### Question 5

The time to address models of care in arthritis is now after years of being at the back of the line of health care planning and delivery in B.C. There is a pressing need to explore, invest in, and innovate different care models that allow British Columbians to receive timely access to suitable care and support for managing their disease.

**What will your government do to provide high quality, accessible, evidence-based models of care, such as team-based care or expanded virtual care, for B.C. residents living with arthritis?**

The BC NDP is committed to providing innovative, high quality, evidence-based care to make healthcare more accessible to everyone in B.C., especially people with chronic conditions like arthritis.

We know how team based and virtual care benefits people immensely and makes taking care of their health easier. Since the BC NDP launched Primary Care Networks, more people are benefiting from team-based care as their physicians, nurse practitioners, pharmacists and other health professionals are able to share records and target services around a patient's specific health-care needs.

We are also working to continue to serve people through virtual care options that save time for patients and care teams. All of this is also possible as we're finally starting to turn the corner on healthcare, connecting over 4,000 people to a family doctor every week. Now is not the time for John Rustad's promised health care cuts — we will keep hiring more doctors and nurses, opening a new medical school in Surrey, recognizing internationally credentialed doctors faster, empowering pharmacists and nurse practitioners, and building new hospitals.