

September 1, 2015

Nadine Henningsen
Chair, Advocacy Committee
Quality End-of-Life Care Coalition of Canada
c/o Tamir Virani, Communications Officer
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Dear Ms. Henningen,

Thank you for your letter of August 10, 2015 inviting the New Democratic Party's response to questions from the Quality End-of-Life Care Coalition of Canada. Please find our responses below:

-How would your party ensure that all Canadians understand and receive an integrated palliative approach to care across the country?

Palliative care is an important pillar in the NDP's continuing care plan and a New Democratic government will make improving access to palliative care a priority. The need for palliative care impacts on all Canadians and meeting that need should depend neither on the supports an individual can rally for themselves, nor on where in the country they happen to live.

An NDP government will breathe new life into federal-provincial-territorial collaboration and provide the much-needed federal leadership in public health care abandoned by Stephen Harper. Nothing exemplifies this abandonment more than Harper's disbanding of the Secretariat on Palliative and End-of-Life Care in 2007 – the focal point and facilitator of collaborative action nationally – and closing down work on the national palliative and end-of-life care strategy.

We will move quickly to initiate a new national Health Accord with provinces and territories. These important negotiations will set the course of public health care over the coming years and will include strategy discussions aimed to improve palliative care.

A New Democratic government will, meanwhile, undertake additional measures to support caregivers and to increase public awareness.

As Canada's Official Opposition, New Democrats persistently pressed Stephen Harper to take action on palliative care. We proposed positive measures to improve palliative care for Canadians, including the following four parliamentary initiatives:

NDP MP Charlie Angus proposed a motion, M-456, calling for a pan-Canadian palliative and end-of-life care strategy to (1) ensure all Canadians have access to high quality home-based and hospice palliative end-of-life care, (2) provide more support for caregivers, (3) improve the quality and consistency of home and hospice palliative end-of-life care in Canada, and (4) encourage Canadians to discuss and plan for end-of-life care. This received the unanimous support in the House of Commons.

NDP Seniors Critic Irene Mathysen introduced motion M-529 that called on the federal government to develop a National Aging Strategy in collaboration with the provinces, territories and other stakeholders. The NDP would develop pan-Canadian standards for care, targeting funds across the spectrum of home care, long term care and palliative care.

Former NDP Health Critic Libby Davies sketched out, through her Continuing Care Act (Bill C-545), elements of what an NDP approach might look like. C-545 would have required the establishment – within two years – of national standards for delivering continuing care services based on a pan-Canadian assessment of Canadians' home, long-term and palliative care needs by a broadly-based advisory committee. These services would be

based on an integrated model of health care delivery with transitions between different types of care and the provision of federal funding to help meet those standards.

And, NDP MP Claude Gravelle pressed for a National Dementia Strategy in his Bill C-356 that was, regrettably defeated by the Harper majority.

These parliamentary initiatives have moved our conversation forward at the national level and we look forward to continuing to work with Canadians to make sure better services and supports are available.

-How would your party leader issue a proclamation recognizing the role and value of family caregivers?

The optimal opportunity to increase public awareness of family caregivers' critical role, their needs and their annual contribution of billions of dollars' worth of care is National Family Caregiver Day.

Under pressure, the Conservatives adopted the NDP's proposal to extend EI Compassionate Care Benefits from 6 weeks to 6 months. Unfortunately, they failed to address the narrowness of eligibility criteria, so too many families caring for loved ones will still be left out. The NDP continues to pursue improvements in this regard.

-Will your party support the establishment of federal funding to develop an integrated workforce plan for Canada?

A New Democratic government will work with our government and non-government partners to promote standards and best practices, as well as the appropriate education and training of health care providers, home support workers, volunteers and family caregivers.

We will further work to monitor, as effectively as possible, formal and informal care providers in order to develop, in collaboration with provinces and territories, a comprehensive, integrated human resources strategy and to evaluate the supports necessary to meet future needs.

-Does your party recognize the value of Advance Care Planning (www.advancecareplanning.ca) and would your party continue to support this important initiative?

New Democrats recognize the considerable value of advance care planning to those who reach a point of needing someone to speak for them on matters of care, especially those facing palliative and end-of-life decisions – and for those who are caring for them. Such discussions are even more critical in light of the Supreme Court decision on the legal status of doctor-assisted suicide. Yet surveys show that the majority of Canadians have not had an advance care discussion with family members and an even greater number haven't spoken with their health care provider.

We will continue to work with organizations like Advance Care Planning to raise awareness and encourage Canadians to formalize their plans with family and care providers. It is encouraging that the Canadian Medical Association has recently updated their policies to make such discussions with patients routine and to honour their decisions. Integrating advance care decisions into electronic medical records would logically follow. We find it regrettable that the Harper majority in Parliament this spring defeated NDP MP Claude Gravelle's bill to implement a National Dementia Strategy that spoke to these issues.

Thank you,

Canada's New Democrats
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