



Ms. Yvette Coffey
President, Registered Nurses' Union
P.O. Box 416
St. John's, NL A1C 5J9

Dear Ms. Coffey,

Thank you for your correspondence.

On behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners across Newfoundland and Labrador. Your commitment to patient care, especially in these challenging times, does not go unnoticed. The compassion, expertise, and resilience you bring to your work every day are vital to the health and well-being of our communities.

We have heard clearly from many of you that the current state of our healthcare system is not working as it should. Too many residents are struggling to access timely care, and as a result, they're entering the system when their conditions have worsened — something we all know could and should be prevented.

The Registered Nurses' Union and its members are essential voices in the conversation about improving healthcare in our province. You understand the gaps and pressures in the system better than anyone. You see firsthand what needs to change — and your insight is key to making meaningful, lasting improvements.

Should I be given the opportunity to lead, I am committed to building a government that listens to and works closely with Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners. Open communication, respect, and true partnership will guide our approach every step of the way. Your perspectives won't just be welcomed — they'll be instrumental in shaping solutions. In fact, I cannot fix the healthcare system without your guidance and involvement: we need to work together. That is why, I am prepared right now to commit that within the first two weeks of being sworn in, I will arrange a meeting where I and my Minister of Health will sit with your leadership and immediately get to work on tackling the challenges your members face.

Please see the enclosed pages for my detailed answers to your specific answers.

Sincerely,

Tony Wakeham
Leader
Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador

1. Permanent Nurse Practitioner (NP) Funding Model

Will your party commit to implementing a permanent, sustainable funding model for Nurse Practitioners that allows them to provide timely, equitable care - particularly in underserved communities? What would your party's NP funding model look like? How will it enable NPs to practice to their full scope in both primary and collaborative care settings? What is your timeline for implementation?

Yes. First and foremost, our plan will be implemented in lockstep with the Registered Nurses' Union and the Nurse Practitioners Association. The funding model will be designed with your input, not designed based on presumptions or imposed from the top down, and it will enable Nurse Practitioners to practice to their full scope in both primary and collaborative care settings, because this ensures patients everywhere can benefit from the full value of your training and abilities.

Under a PC government, no one in Newfoundland and Labrador will have to pay to see a Nurse Practitioner. No strings attached.

We will set up a billing system that will allow Nurse Practitioners to bill the government directly for their services. All Nurse Practitioners will be able to participate.

We will act quickly to implement this billing system. The timeline will be determined by our consultations with you on the design of the funding model, but the era of the government dragging its heels will end. In short order, you will see changes that are urgently needed and will greatly benefit everyone.

Never forget that, year after year, the governing Liberals absolutely refused our calls to cover Nurse Practitioner clinic visits, despite the terrible impact on patients needing care. It is important for nurses to be heeded after elections, not just on their eve.

Nurse Practitioners play a vital role – indeed, an indispensable role – in our healthcare system. We firmly believe that making full use of the skills of Nurse Practitioners will strengthen our healthcare teams and better serve people needing care, leading to better outcomes.

Recognizing that some 163,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians do not have access to a family doctor, giving Nurse Practitioners the ability to bill the government directly for their service will allow people to access care when they need it, without paying out of pocket.

2. Province-Wide Travel Locum Program

Will your party commit to establishing a permanent, province-wide travel locum program that allows registered nurses and nurse practitioners to provide primary care and essential services in rural, remote, and underserved communities? What is your implementation timeline and plan for ensuring the program is equitable, sustainable, and available to all communities that need it?

Yes. The ongoing reliance on out-of-province travel nurses is disrespectful to local healthcare workers. It is shocking that the Liberals and NLHS let the travel nurse scandal occur. We heard from local Newfoundland and Labrador nurses who have left their jobs due to the travel nurse scandal. Nurses tell us that they feel disrespected and ignored – and of course they feel this way when they have been subject to mandatory overtime and working next to someone who costs four times as much as their salary. Had the Liberals listened to nurses instead of ignoring and lecturing you, the vacancies that these agencies filled would never have occurred to begin with. This was a crisis of the Liberal government's making, as nurses remember better than anyone.

We will create a permanent province-wide team of local, Newfoundland and Labrador nurses and Nurse Practitioners. This team will complete locums in different parts of the province, when and where they're needed most - especially in rural, remote, and underserved communities. This will reduce the reliance on expensive out-of-province travel nurses.

We are determined to implement this quickly. We will do so in lockstep with the Registered Nurses' Union and will listen to your advice on the size and composition of the team, and where and when locums should start.

3. Core Staffing Review

Will your party commit to completing the core staffing review within six months of forming government? How will your party ensure the results of the review are implemented? What steps will you take to modernize and implement safe, data-informed staffing levels across the province?

Yes. Tolerating the burnout and exhaustion of Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners is unacceptable. Your workloads and schedules must be reasonable so you can perform your duties as health care professionals to the best of your ability. Having a safe, accessible, and quality health care system starts with supporting our health care workers.

The first step in this process is to identify the root causes and challenges facing Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners. The Registered Nurses' Union must play a key part in helping a PC Government identify these issues.

Informed by those discussions, we will work together to put together a realistic and achievable plan to address the issues of burnout and exhaustion. We will work together to minimize the amount of overtime Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners need to endure.

To help support our nursing staff, a PC Government will conduct a core staffing review. Successive Liberal government have wasted too much time already not getting this done. It is time for real change, and a review is the first step toward meaningful change, so I will commit to having this review completed within six months. Again, this will be a collaborative process, involving consultations with Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners.

Once this review has been completed, we will give the results to the Registered Nurses' Union. We will work with you to implement the results. This is your profession. You know it best, and you ought to be given leadership roles in ensuring your profession's staffing levels are modernized, safe, and data-informed across the province.

4. Safe Hours of Work Legislation

Will your party commit to enacting safe hours of work legislation for nurses, similar to legislation in safety-sensitive fields like aviation and transportation? What would this legislation include? What is your timeline for developing and passing it? How will you ensure its enforcement protects both nurse and patient safety?

Yes. It is outrageous and unacceptable that nurses are forced to work to their breaking point. This puts patients at risk and also contributes to nurses leaving their positions. We envision a healthcare system where nurses are respected, where students want to become nurses, and where nurses from all over Canada look to Newfoundland and Labrador as a place they want to work. That starts with respecting nurses and listening to you.

As we know from professionals in aviation and transportation, pushing people in life-critical positions until they are too exhausted to focus or perform their skills properly is a recipe for disaster. This is a life safety issue and must be addressed with urgency, with you as nurses taking a lead role in finding solutions that will work.

What we will commit to is first sitting down with the Registered Nurses' Union to explore more about how we can improve working conditions and hours. We will also undertake a jurisdictional review to see what best practices exist and how we can implement them here.

We want to work with nurses and the Union to improve safety, work-life balance, and working conditions for nurses.

5. Workforce Planning and Ending Reliance on Mandatory Overtime.

Will your party commit to ending the reliance on mandatory overtime as a staffing tool, and investing in proper workforce planning? What specific measures will you implement — including but not limited to: Over hiring to manage peak demand and unexpected absences; Improving forecasting and staffing management systems. What is your plan and timeline to shift the system away from mandatory overtime?

Yes. As noted in the previous answer, we want to work with nurses and the Union to help nurses achieve a healthy work-life balance and avoid exhaustion, and for that reason, we are committed to understanding how we can improve working conditions and hours, and getting



meaningful change happening. Working collaboratively with you, we will develop a working plan, a timely implementation schedule and a meaningful process to evaluate and improve how it is working.

In addition, we will create and follow a Health Human Resource Plan. This will publicly outline the mix of healthcare providers who are needed, where they are needed, and when they are needed. Healthcare workers themselves will be fully involved in creating this plan. The era of top-down, half-hearted decision-making will end. We know that the current government has released a plan, but it is incomplete and based on outdated data. It is imperative that we work together immediately to replace the failed plan the Liberals cobbled together. Our plan will set clear targets for the numbers of healthcare professionals who should be on staff, where and in which departments, and when. We want all Unions to be hands-on in creating this. The plan will have measurable targets and reliable numbers, so health care professionals and patients can hold us accountable.

6. Nurse-Patient Ratios (NPRs)

Will your party commit to establishing safe nurse-patient ratios that reflect the acuity and care needs of patients and support retention? What ratios or ratio-setting frameworks will you consider? How will these be implemented and enforced? What is your proposed timeline?

Yes. As noted in the previous answer, we will follow a robust and transparent Health Human Resource Plan. A part of this plan will focus on the issue of nurse-patient ratios. We want the Union, and nurses themselves, to help lead the process of setting these ratios, because we know that it is the frontline healthcare workers who truly know best how to fix our healthcare system.

7. Hiring Nursing Graduates into Full-Time, Permanent Roles.

Will your party commit to hiring all nursing graduates into full-time, permanent positions? What is your strategy and timeline for ensuring this transition province-wide?

Yes. Nurses have heard us make this commitment time and again. It defines our approach, and sets us apart.

First and foremost, we believe that every nursing student should be given an offer of employment at the beginning of their studies, not at the end. We understand some students may not know which area of nursing they may want to pursue - and that's okay. But we want to give students the certainty of knowing that a job is waiting for them, that they don't have to look outside the province, and that their service will be fully valued as it ought to be. This will start with the first nursing class in 2026. We will also give every student who is now already training to be a nurse an offer of employment at the same time.

But more than that, we will stop the practice of hiring nurses in temporary, full-time roles only to continue to extend their “temporary” placements. Temporary hiring helps no one. It doesn’t give nurses job certainty which they need to further their lives. It doesn’t give the system the ability to plan long-term for staffing needs.

We do know that there are some cases where part-time or temporary nursing is needed, but we will work to limit this. Additionally, we know that there are some nurses who prefer to work part-time for personal reasons, so we will accommodate nurses according to their own choices.

8. Collective Bargaining Commitments

Will your party commit to engaging in good-faith collective bargaining with RNUNL and addressing member priorities, including but not limited to: Equal pay for equal work; Fair and competitive compensation, especially compared to private agency contracts; Guaranteed access to vacation leave; Concrete, measurable actions that demonstrate respect for nurses in public policy, compensation, workload, and workplace culture. Please describe what your party will do to ensure that collective bargaining leads to meaningful improvements for nurses. What principles and outcomes will guide your negotiating mandate?

Yes. We will always bargain in good faith with the RNUNL.

We respect nurses. We respect the Registered Nurses’ Union. We will ensure all our dealings with you are in good faith. We will listen to your concerns and try our very best to address them.

We will start the process of collective bargaining on time, we will commit to timely responses, and we will treat our province’s nurses fairly. We envision a healthcare system where nurses are respected, where students want to become nurses, and where nurses from all over Canada look to Newfoundland and Labrador as a place they want to work. That starts with respecting all nurses and the leaders they elect to represent them, and listening to them.

Instead of telling you what we will do, we believe it is better to talk and collaborate with you on what you need us to do. Priorities and actions ought to be driven collaboratively around the table, and never imposed from the top down. We really need to move past the Liberal era when nurses were told how things would be, were berated for not working hard enough, and were unceremoniously shown the door if they objected. That attitude not only created the current crisis that has cost our province hundreds of nurses and hundreds of millions in travel agency waste, but it also bred tremendous hurt and mistrust. We need to turn the page on that failed approach and instead work together as partners to fulfill the common goal we share – providing the best of care for Newfoundland and Labrador’s patients.

9. Accountability for Private Agency Nurses

In light of the Auditor General's findings, will your party commit to holding those responsible for inappropriate or potentially fraudulent private agency contracts accountable? What specific actions will you take — including but not limited to investigations, disciplinary measures, and referral to the appropriate authorities? How will you restore public trust and nurse confidence in NLHS and government leadership?

Yes. We will hold those responsible for inappropriate or potentially fraudulent private agency contracts accountable.

We will make sure a full inquiry is done - any criminal activity will be referred to the police. And if it is the wish of the RNUNL, we will hold an inquiry to get to the bottom of the issue. We must get an understanding of how this was allowed to happen and put safeguards in place to protect against this, or anything like this, happening again.

It is simply wrong that out-of-province travel nurses cost taxpayers four times the salaries of our own nurses. It is simply wrong to expect local nurses to willingly go to work knowing the nurse next to them costs more and has more perks. It is simply wrong to disrespect local nurses while bringing in out-of-province travel nurses by the dozens.

Those responsible for this scandal will be removed from their positions.

To restore public trust and confidence, we will work with the Registered Nurses' Union, we will publish monthly the number of travel nurses working in the province and the cost. We will set clear benchmarks to reduce reliance on out-of-province travel nurses. And wherever possible, we will always seek to hire local nurses first.

We will create a permanent province-wide team of local, Newfoundland and Labrador nurses and Nurse Practitioners. This team will complete locums in different parts of the province, when and where they're needed most - especially in rural, remote, and underserved communities. This will reduce the reliance on expensive out-of-province travel nurses.

10. Vision for Nursing and Public Healthcare

Where do you see the nursing profession and the public healthcare system in four years? What concrete actions will your government take to realize that vision? How will you ensure nurses are meaningfully involved in shaping healthcare reform?

In four years, with a Wakeham PC government, the nursing profession in Newfoundland and Labrador will be transformed into one of strength, stability, and respect. Nurses and Nurse Practitioners will be central to rebuilding a public healthcare system that puts patients first — especially in rural, remote, and underserved communities.

To achieve this, a Wakeham government will add more seats to the nursing school – at least 50 seats in the first year – and expand the Nurse Practitioner program. We will provide paid work terms and job offers at the start of training for nursing students. This will help us train, recruit,

and retain more local nurses, ending the expensive and unsustainable reliance on out-of-province travel nurse agencies.

In rural Newfoundland and Labrador especially, we will establish a permanent team of local nurses and Nurse Practitioners who can travel where needed most — improving access, stabilizing care, and ensuring emergency rooms stay open and fully staffed.

Nurses will be supported to practice to their full scope, reducing wait times and increasing patient care. We'll listen to frontline healthcare workers and include nurses in shaping a Health Human Resource Plan that clearly identifies where staff are needed, and how to get them there.

Most importantly, nurses will no longer be left behind. To improve working conditions, we will always listen and consult with front line healthcare workers and their unions. Nurses have firsthand knowledge of what our healthcare system needs and we will listen.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve more than a name on a waiting list. In four years, under a Progressive Conservative government, they'll have real access to care — and nurses and Nurse Practitioners will be leading the way.

11. Most Pressing System Challenge

What does your party identify as the most urgent challenge facing nursing and the public healthcare system in Newfoundland and Labrador? How will your government tackle this challenge head-on if elected?

Nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador are facing a deepening crisis marked by severe staffing shortages, unsafe workloads, rising burnout, and increasing incidents of workplace violence. Despite long-standing warnings, systemic issues remain unresolved, placing significant pressure on healthcare workers and compromising patient care.

Frontline nurses report being stretched beyond safe limits, with insufficient staffing and support to deliver care effectively. We must fix this. We want to work with the Registered Nurses' Union to stop this crisis and put support in place to help nurses, and that means staffing up. We must hire more nurses, train more nurses, recruit more nurses, and retain more nurses. It all starts with respecting nurses. All of which have been addressed in previous questions.

We will take the Union's suggestion of creating an independent Health Sector Safety Council to lead coordinated efforts in preventing violence and improving safety across the system. But this will just be one step in better supporting nurses.

We want to have more nurses in our public health care system, reducing the burden. We envision a healthcare system where nurses are respected, where students want to become nurses, and where nurses from all over Canada look to Newfoundland and Labrador as a place they want to work. That starts with respecting nurses and listening to them.

12. Use of Agency Nurses

Will your party commit to phasing out the use of agency nurses as a primary staffing strategy? What steps will you take to build public system capacity? What is your proposed timeline?

Yes. We commit to phasing out the use of agency nurses as a primary staffing strategy. We will always prioritize the hiring of local nurses – nurses who can afford to build meaningful long-term careers in our communities, and dedicate their lives to providing continuing and compassionate care.

It is simply wrong that out-of-province travel nurses cost taxpayers four times the salaries of our own nurses. It is simply wrong to expect local nurses to willingly go to work knowing the nurse next to them costs more and has more perks. It is simply wrong to disrespect local nurses while bringing in out-of-province travel nurses by the dozens.

To reduce reliance on out-of-province travel nurses we will work with the Registered Nurses' Union, we will publish monthly the number of travel nurses working in the province and the cost. We will set clear benchmarks to reduce reliance on out-of-province travel nurses. And wherever possible, we will always seek to hire local nurses first.

We will build the capacity needed to reduce this reliance. To achieve this, a Wakeham government will add more seats to nursing school – at least 50 seats in the first year – and provide paid work terms and job offers at the start of training for nursing students. This will help us train, recruit, and retain more local nurses, ending the expensive and unsustainable reliance on out-of-province travel nurse agencies.

In rural Newfoundland and Labrador especially, we will establish a permanent team of local nurses and Nurse Practitioners who can travel where needed most — instead of relying on out-of-province travel nurses we will have our own team of nurses who can complete locums when and where needed.

13. Paid Clinical Placements for Nursing Students

Will your party commit to paying nursing students for their clinical placements, acknowledging the direct contribution students make to patient care and correcting the gender-based inequities in how student work is valued? How will your government fund and implement this change? What timeline do you propose?

Yes. We will pay nursing students for their clinical placements. Not only is it wrong that nursing students don't get paid for their service, but it's further shameful that they have to pay to participate in these clinical placements. Nursing students will be paid for their clinicals – because it's the right thing to do. Our timeline is to correct this injustice immediately, because it is discriminatory, financially burdensome for nursing students, and frankly indefensible to allow such inequities to persist. This should have been remedied years ago. The measure will be financed through general revenues as part of the normal budgetary process, because doing the right thing should be part of the normal course of action.