



Hon. K. Dorothy Shephard
Minister, Department of Health
Government of New Brunswick
HSBC Place
P.O. Box 5100
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G8

Sent via email: healthplansante@gnb.ca

March 26, 2021

Dear Minister Shephard,

I am writing on behalf of the 38,000 affiliated members of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour (NBFL). It is my pleasure to provide input to the New Brunswick Department of Health on the future of health care as part of the 2021 health care review.

The NBFL is New Brunswick's largest central labour body representing 18 different public, private and para-public sector unions, from 285 locals and 6 district labour councils. Founded over 100 years ago, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour has a long history of raising awareness about the importance of adopting and implementing progressive labour and social legislation, policies and programs.

Our recommendations are based on our organization's values. The NBFL believes that health care is a fundamental service that should be universally available, public, free and of high quality. It should be accessible 24/7 in both urban and rural communities and services be available in both official languages.

Covid-19 has highlighted the weaknesses in our public services, including in our health care system. We will need adequate investments to repairing and improve health-care facilities, long term care, home care and training and staffing levels.

In long-term care facilities, there is a history of privatization, under-investment, and poor regulatory oversight. This has created a pattern of sub-standard care for residents and patients, inadequate staffing levels, low pay, shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and neglect of health and safety precautions.

To address this, the provincial government must take immediate steps to bring long-term care fully into the public system and regulate it under the auspice of the Department of Health as called for in the New Brunswick Nurses Union (NBNU)'s *The Forgotten Generation: An Urgent Call for Reform in New Brunswick's Long-Term Care Sector* research report. The NBFL also supports the report's recommendation of conducting a public inquiry into the long-term care sector in New Brunswick and ensuring a minimum of 4.1 care hours per day per resident.

Here are some of the data found in the NBNU long-term care research report:

- *Staffing levels are inadequate to ensure quality: A comprehensive study of long-term care staffing levels found that a minimum of 4.1 care hours per day is needed to ensure quality care. New Brunswick allows for 2.89 hours of care per nursing home resident per day. Many nursing homes cannot even meet this standard, with 31 nursing homes failing to meet this benchmark 2019 and over 70 non-compliance notices being issued between 2017 and 2019.*
- *Government oversight and transparency is lacking: New Brunswick is one of only two provinces that has not meaningfully contributed to the Canadian Institute for Health Information long-term care databases over the last decade. Government refuses to share any information about its contractual arrangements with Shannex despite repeated calls to do so, including by the New Brunswick's Information and Privacy Commissioner.*
- *Violence is on the rise: Since 2013, employees of nursing homes in New Brunswick have had more than double the number of accepted violence claims (22.5%) as compared to employees working in New Brunswick prisons (9%).*

The NBFL also recommends that the provincial government promote and participate in the development of national standards for the long-term care sector.

If given the choice, many seniors would prefer to stay in their homes and with adequate supports to do so. Seniors will see a greater quality of life at home. It also comes at a reduced cost to the provincial health care budget. The NBFL recommends that the government develop and invest in a home care strategy to allow seniors to remain in their residence and avoid unnecessary hospitalization or placement in long term care facilities. In our view, home care should be transitioned into the public system as public investments are increased over time.

In addition to transitioning senior care under the auspice of the Department of Health, the NBFL recommends reintegrating previously privatized health services into the public sector. Services such as Ambulance New Brunswick, Tele-care and the management of extramural services. It is imperative that significant public investments be accompanied by transparency and accountability and no profit margin.

The New Brunswick Federation of Labour supports strengthening access to primary health care through inter-disciplinary teams. As part of this plan, the government of New Brunswick should make better use of nurse practitioners, as cost-effective a primary care provider. These teams could include physicians, nurse practitioners, dietitians, physiotherapists, psychologists, and other health professionals.

Another way to lower costs and improve patient choice in health care is to make registered midwives available for low-risk pregnancies and births throughout the province. Currently, midwifery care is only available in the Fredericton area. All reproductive health services need improved access, including making surgical abortions available throughout the province.

Our health care system is currently based on an illness model. We have the opportunity to shift it to one that places greater emphasis on health promotion, disease prevention, and chronic disease management. There are several ways to implement preventative care models. Interdisciplinary health teams can certainly play an important role in the delivery of preventative care and chronic disease management.

There is a recruitment and retention problem that touches most health care professionals. Although introducing interdisciplinary teams will alleviate some of that pressure, we also must make sure that our health professionals have fair wages and working conditions. This is especially important for home care and long-term care staff. These health professionals make poverty level wages and face poor working conditions.

Public health care is more than accessing a primary health care provider. Too many New Brunswickers cannot afford the health services that they need. Prescription medications are essential in managing chronic health conditions. Many New Brunswickers go without their prescription medication or ration it because they have no or too little health insurance. The NBFL recommends implementing a universal provincial prescription drug program. The NBFL also recommends increasing access to free public mental health supports, staff by qualified and well-paid professionals, in urban and rural communities throughout the province.

Increased health supports are also needed in our education system. Re-establishing registered nurses and psychologists in our public school system would help counter the long-term poor health outcomes that research suggests New Brunswickers will face in the coming years. In particular, this would better meet the requirement of timely access to mental health for our youth.

It would be my pleasure to meet to discuss these ideas further.

Sincerely

Daniel Legere,
President
New Brunswick Federation of Labour