

October 14, 2020

BC Nurses' Union
4060 Regent St
Burnaby, BC V5C 6P

Dear BC Nurses' Union,

Thank you for your letter and questions. The current pandemic has highlighted more than ever how critical nurses are to our healthcare system, as well as the personal risks they take each day on the job. Supporting our nurses is of great importance to the BC New Democratic Party and we are pleased to respond.

Fixing 16 years of BC Liberal neglect of our healthcare system - and by extension, our health care workers - has been a priority for our government, and while there is much more work to do, we're proud of what we've accomplished so far.

We have put nurses at the centre of our primary health-care strategy, creating 200 new nurse practitioner positions to support patients as part of a shift to a team-based primary healthcare system. Nurse practitioners and registered nurses are integral to the 21 urgent and primary care centres (UPCCs) we have already announced or established, and are the cornerstone of the 3 nurse practitioner-led primary care clinics we've opened in Victoria, Surrey, and Nanaimo. In addition, if re-elected, we will build 10 more UPCCs by the end of 2021.

Of course, we recognize that in order to expand primary and other health-care, we need to address the nursing shortage. We've made some progress, including funding the first nursing degree program in the northeast with 32 student spaces, and doubling the number of specialty nursing seats in B.C.

If re-elected, we'll continue this work by putting in place a comprehensive health care human resources strategy. In addition to expanding training - including a second medical school in British Columbia - we'll be improving the province's credential recognition process and licensing so that people trained in other countries can provide their skills and knowledge here in B.C.

We have also worked to ensure nurses, and other health-care workers are safe and supported. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, B.C. was far from alone in facing a disruption in the usual supply chains and a shortage of PPE. Our government worked hard to get the PPE we needed, by working with supply chain experts to ensure we were dealing with credible and reliable suppliers, and by establishing a robust assessment and testing protocol to ensure that PPE was deemed safe by experts, and by creating the COVID-19 Supply Hub, a made-in-B.C. online platform to coordinate,

source and expedite medical supplies and PPE to support front-line health workers, including those working at long-term care and assisted living residences.

We have also taken steps to ensure nurses and other health-care workers have faster and easier access to WorkSafe benefits. In 2019, we changed Workers Compensation regulations to add nurses to the list of professions that have presumptive coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental-health disorders. And this summer, we added contracting viral pathogens - such as COVID-19 - to the list of presumptive coverage benefits nurses and other health-care workers receive.

Another major priority of our government has been addressing the overdose crisis. That is why, when we formed government in July 2017 we created a stand-alone Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, the only one of its kind in Canada. And we've put more resources toward the overdose crisis in B.C. than ever before - over \$600 million in new funding since forming government, and well beyond what the BC Liberals had planned to spend - and ramped up evidence-based treatment, harm reduction and prevention efforts across B.C., including expanding naloxone and overdose prevention services, and connecting people to treatment.

Before the pandemic, we still had a long way to go, but our collective efforts were starting to make a difference. In 2019, we saw the first drop in the rate of overdose deaths since 2012, and according to the BC Centre for Disease Control, more than 6,000 deaths have been averted in B.C. When the overdose crisis was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, ours was the only provincial government to respond across the full continuum of care: expanding treatment, recovery, harm reduction and safe prescription alternatives - bolstered by over \$25 million in additional funding.

We have just gotten started, and on all of these issues there is much more work to do. We hope that our record demonstrates both the values we hold as a government, as well as our commitment to taking the steps necessary to affect real and lasting change. We look forward to continuing this work, and meeting with you to discuss your priorities, should we form the next government.

Sincerely,
BC NDP