



Green Party of Ontario
PO Box 1132 Station F Toronto, ON M4Y 2T8

Dennis Long
Chair
Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance

30 June 2014

Dear Mr. Long,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss the Green Party of Ontario's (GPO) policies on the health care system and the services available for those living with mental health and addictions issues. I am pleased to be able to respond to you on behalf of the GPO.

1. The cost of mental illness and addiction is estimated to be \$39 billion in Ontario. Meanwhile, access to mental health and addiction services is generally very poor and varies widely across the province. Assuming this is unacceptable to your party, what specific measures would your government take to ensure that people with mental illness and addictions across Ontario get the care they need?

The Green Party of Ontario (GPO) aims for a sustainable public health care system that provides every Ontarian with access to the quality health care they require, when and where they need it.

By refocusing the health care system on programs that promote health and work to prevent illness in the first place, we can improve the access to and quality of our health care system. We can create efficiencies, better manage costs, and improve outcomes by making front line health care more accessible.

2. In 2011 the provincial government launched Open Minds, Healthy Minds, Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. Would your government support the continued implementation of this strategy? What would your party do to ensure continued progress in this area?

Yes, the GPO would support the implementation of this strategy. The four guiding goals of this strategy -- including identifying and treating problems early, and providing integrated, person-directed, high-quality health services -- are right in line with our health care plans. We believe in a system that prioritizes prevention of, and rapid response to, health problems. We believe in a system that encourages individuals' involvement in their health care by encouraging community participation in the planning of the system. We believe in a health care system that is integrated and comprehensive and that takes into account the unique needs of each community that it serves.

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3. Supports and services for people with mental illness and addiction often cross many different government ministries. How would your party ensure there is broad, government-wide leadership on mental health and addictions?

We will re-prioritize funding to support doctors and other health professionals for family and community care clinics that are integrated with public health. This includes investing \$1.6 billion over four years in family and community care clinics and practices that team doctors with nurses, other health care practitioners, including psychologists and counselors.

We will also ensure that we advocate for mental health and addictions issues at the provincial level. Finally, we will make sure to initiate meaningful dialogue with both federal and municipal governments about how each level of government can work more efficiently and co-operatively with other levels to better serve people living with mental health and addictions issues.

4. Reducing hospitalization (and re-hospitalization) of people with mental illness requires access to affordable housing with supports. How will your party improve access to supportive housing?

We understand that providing good, affordable housing to those who need it, when they need it, is fundamental to the building of sustainable communities. We also recognize that access to affordable housing provides stability and a safe environment for people living with mental illness.

Like access to health care services, we believe that the Ontario government needs to assist in the development of supportive housing in order to make it more accessible to those directly in need.

We support a target of 10,000 new units annually and believe that the most effective approach to realize this target is to require that all new developments include a set number of affordable housing units. Thus the GPO will work with private builders to include affordable housing units in new builds. This would expand the current supply more rapidly at a lower capital cost and help our communities become more inclusive for all citizens.

By setting a target for affordable units in new housing developments, we will encourage a mix of housing alternatives in every community. Incorporating these targets into the building permit process sets a level playing field for all developers. Provincial leadership is required on this issue to ensure that there is a consistent process for all municipalities.

We will also commit to funding maintenance and repair of already-existing social housing stock. By simply maintaining and repairing the housing that is already built, we will help create and maintain safe communities and we will be able to secure housing options for low-income and marginalized groups. The benefits don't stop there. Retrofitting and upgrading existing stock

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instead of building everything new also makes this plan more environmentally friendly. We will also work to update the building code to ensure that housing standards provide a safe environment and ensure that these standards are being met across the board.

We support creating an assisted living and affordable housing strategy focused on seniors. The focus will be on giving seniors the support they require so they can live as well and as independently as possible, for as long as possible.

The GPO also advocates for the establishment of housing co-ops. They provide stable long-term housing at more affordable rents than do private rental units. Co-ops are member-driven and respond well to local input from the membership so that their housing priorities are addressed.

The Green Party supports strong community-based solutions and believes that co-ops will allow for strong bonds to form within the community.

5. Is there anything else you would want Ontarians to know about your commitment to mental health and addictions services?

Thank you.

We know our health care system needs to address not only acute care, but also mental and chronic health issues. We recognize that there have been multiple studies over the years with good recommendations on how to build a better health care system. What is lacking is the political will to make these changes.

We are committed to having a view beyond the four-year election cycle -- one that will take action and implement changes that will work for today and for the future.

Sincerely,
Jessica Higgins
Policy Coordinator
Green Party of Ontario

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