



Building a more equal society

*A progressive election platform for
New Brunswick in 2018*



*Association francophone des aînés du NB
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian Union of Public Employees
Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations
New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice
New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity
New Brunswick Federation of Labour
New Brunswick Union
Regroupement féministe du NB*

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Introduction

Our group of community organizations and unions wants the upcoming provincial elections to focus on concrete options in order to make our province and our society more equal for everyone.

Our society has made enormous strides in the last fifty years or so. It has created the conditions that brought more justice, more equality and reduced poverty for thousands of men, women and children. Public education, medical care and pensions are just a few of the services and programs that were instrumental in creating a more just society for New Brunswickers.

However, there is much work to be done in order to ensure that citizens from all walks of life are included.

We believe that the following issues should be the priorities for the September 2018 provincial election.

Priorities

- 1 *Making sure no one is left out*
- 2 *Improving our public services*
- 3 *Increasing progressive sources of revenue from individuals and corporations*



1

Making sure no one is left out

Gender equality

Our society has made tremendous steps to recognize gender equality. More women than men are now in the workforce. Their presence in colleges and universities has increased remarkably over the past 40 years and they are present in the business world. Their economic situation has improved but, unfortunately, there are still areas where more work needs to be done.

Women are still not paid the same as men for work of equal value and they don't have full control of their bodies when it comes to reproduction. Too many are still victims of violence, a higher percentage of women than men are living in poverty and finally, their presence in the political arena is minimal.

Pay Equity Legislation for the Private Sector

The next government must adopt proactive pay equity legislation for all private sector employers within its first year in office. Pay equity is achieved when female-dominated jobs are paid the same as male-dominated jobs that have the same value.

The Act must:

- create and staff appropriately an independent body to oversee the implementation of the Act and provide support to employees and employers;
- provide clear timelines, limiting the job evaluation process and adjustment payments to four years;
- include dispute resolution mechanisms;
- include provisions to ensure the maintenance of pay equity over the long term.

Reproductive justice

The government must:

- establish a provincial registry of physicians and pharmacists available to prescribe the abortion pill and the provision of information on the timeline for its prescription;
- ensure more access points for surgical abortion services and conduct a review of government agreements with local hospitals.
- These changes must take into account the experiences of intersex and trans communities.

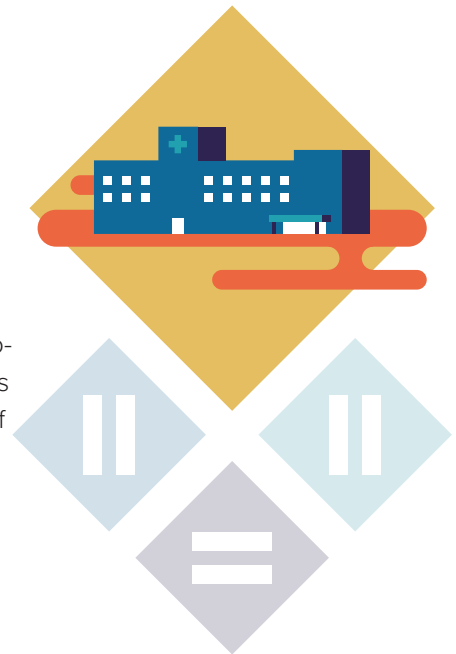
Gender-based violence

- The government must put in place a provincial strategy on gender-based violence that particularly includes the introduction of sexual education programs as early as the elementary school level, to make children and youth aware of the concept of consent.

Political representation and participation:

The government must:

- Ensure greater participation by the diverse population of women in decision-making structures (policy-making committees, commissions, corporations) with priority given to a systemic approach aimed at creating changes in structures of governance;
- Improve political practices, parliamentary culture, and democratic representation through a revision of the electoral system.



Workers

Workers are the force that makes our economy work. Tens of thousands of them get up each day and work at jobs that create wealth and income so that we are able to enjoy an affluent society. Most of them have seen progress in their economic situation over the decades but there is still a small percentage that has been left out. Over the years they were also able to attain some very important protections in their workplace through new legislation, but these Acts need to be modernized in order to reflect the new workplace realities.

Minimum Wage

The government must:

- Over the next four years, increase the minimum wage by \$1.00 an hour each year.
- Provide an added financial subsidy for community organizations it supports each time the minimum wage increases, including the employer's portion for each employee of that organization.

Work-family balance

The government must encourage the adoption of measures favourable to work-family balance (i.e., investing in a quality, affordable and universal child care system that respects linguistic duality).

Labour Law Reform

The government must:

- Review the New Brunswick's Employment Standards Act, Industrial Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Civil Service Act. This must be completed within two years of the provincial election;
- change the following employment standards in the first year after the election.
- Pay overtime hours at time and a half of the employees' regular wage instead of time and a half of the minimum wage. Overtime must be paid after 40 hours of work per week instead of after 44 hours per week.
- Allow five annual paid sick leave days (unused days would not be banked).
- Give 6% vacation pay after five years of full-time employment instead of after eight years.
- Ensure Employers supply free uniforms to employees who are required to wear them on the job.

Citizens living in poverty

The number of citizens living on low income has been relatively constant in our province, at around 100,000 citizens. About one third of them are on social assistance. All have an annual income that is considerably below the poverty line. The situation is worse for those who have a recognized disability.

During the past years, their situation has deteriorated because the provincial government has not increased the basic social assistance rates relative to the rate of inflation. Furthermore, the province has not made any significant changes to their regressive, punitive policies.

Social assistance rates

The government must:

- Adopt a Minimum Income Standard to calculate the income social assistance recipients should receive. This amount should be based on the 2015 Market Basket Measure and should combine social assistance basic rate and income from other sources.
- Increase the basic monthly rate of all categories of recipients to compensate for the loss of purchasing power they have experienced in recent years due to inflation. The “Single Employable” in the “Transitional Assistance” category should have their basic rates increased by 11.74%. The “Extended Benefits” category and all other recipients should get a 4.7% increase.
- Create a New Brunswick Assured Income for the Disabled. This new program would provide income that is 30% higher than the 2015 Market Basket Measure.
- Modify the Earned Income Deduction policy so that recipients can keep the first \$300 of their earnings in a month (\$350 for single disabled) and then 50% of the balance of their earnings, instead of 30% as it is today. The maximum annual income (basic rates, credits and supplements) they could earn before deductions would be equal to the 2015 Market Basket Measure.

The Total Annual Income (basic rates, earned income, credits and supplements) should not be more than the total income identified in the 2015 Market Basket Measure.

Feminization of poverty:

The government must:

- Ensure that tax policies and programs respect and enhance women’s financial independence, by using an Inclusive Gender-based Analysis process in the course of public policy decision-making. IGBA can be applied to numerous priorities.
- Implement a monitoring mechanism that provides a measurement of the degree of poverty and the movement towards gender equality.

Seniors

Seniors (65 years or older) currently make up 19% of the population in New Brunswick and this rate is increasing. Over the years their economic and social situation has drastically changed for the better, but now society needs to take into account their growing number and their growing needs.

Seniors' Bill of Rights

The existing *Nursing Homes Act* and Regulations applied to care facilities must be complemented by the addition of a concise and easily understandable residents' *Bill of Rights*, similar to the one found in the *Ontario Nursing Homes Act*.

Seniors' Advocate and a Council on Aging

The government must:

Introduce a *Seniors' Advocate Act* to build a more accessible, transparent and accountable approach to senior care. The authority of a Seniors' Advocate would be governed by the Act. The advocate would report directly to the Premier.

This legislation would enable the creation of a seniors' advocate to serve as a voice for NB's aging population. The advocate would work with a Council on Aging to promote positive change that will benefit seniors, families and their caregivers.

The Council membership would be selected by seniors' organizations and co-chaired by an anglophone and a francophone senior. Its purpose would be to provide the Office of the Seniors Advocate with advice on issues facing seniors living in New Brunswick. The Council of Aging would be similar to the New Brunswick Women's Council.

The Council on Aging would reflect the importance of a multi-stakeholder and collaborative approach in addressing the challenges of an aging population.

Victim abuse legislation for seniors

The government should adopt legislation requiring caregivers, doctors, nurses and all other interveners to report all cases of abuse perpetrated against seniors.

Services in nursing homes, special care facilities and home services in New Brunswick

The government must:

Ensure that Nursing homes, specialized care nursing homes and the agencies catering to seniors are legally required to deliver services according to the New Brunswick Official Languages Act.

Financial assistance programs for seniors

The government must support the community better in organizing and offering activities targeting the well-being and the health of seniors by creating new funding programs. It needs to create a new, one-stop financial assistance program for seniors' organizations working on behalf of people 50 years old and over.





2

Improving our public services

In the 1960s, the creation of a modern society through the development and expansion of public services was what made our province more equal for all.

For the last thirty years there has been steady pressure to reduce the coverage that these public services provide to citizens. There has also been a movement to turn over, either in whole or in part, these services to the private sector. On the other hand, there is an increasing need to enhance some of these public services in order to respond to the new needs of the public.

Health and community

Home Care

The government must:

- Incorporate Home Care under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health;
- Ensure that the Department of Health is vested with the responsibility for the delivery of Home Care services, through proper expenditure of public funds and in governing, planning, managing, monitoring, evaluating and delivering home care services. Develop a concise and easily understandable guide such as “Your Guide to Home Care Service in Manitoba.”

Community Care Sector

In the past decades, many community care services have been developed as needed or based on individuals' interest in offering these services. These include community residences, family support agencies, ADAPT centres, special care homes and transition houses.

The government must:

- Make yearly investments in the wages of caregiving workers, starting in the first year of its mandate until they reach a living wage and pay equity.
- Put an end to precarious employment in this sector and ensure decent working conditions.
- Integrate most of our community care services into our public system, either in the Department of Social Development or the Department of Health.

Privatization of Extramural Care and Tele Care

The agreement between the Government of New Brunswick and Medavie should be cancelled and the Regional health authorities should take back the control of Extramural Care and Tele-Care.

Keeping public services public

The government should commit itself to end the practice of contracting out, the use of privatization and the Public-Private Partnership (P3) model. These current contracts must be reviewed with the aim of bringing them back under public control and accountability. Public services must be adequately funded in order to improve them for the population and to create good jobs for New Brunswickers.

Public post-secondary education (universities and community colleges)

The government must:

- Merge education (early childhood to university) to form a single governmental department headed by one minister, by 2020.
- Increase the financing of public education in order to eliminate all tuition fees for Canadian students, at all levels, by 2023.
- Remunerate the work of interns completing their end-of-program internships in the public service, and create a form of equivalent financial support (such as a bursary) for interns who complete their end-of-program internships in an area outside of government control.

Child Care Services

The government must:

- Establish a child care system for children aged 0-12, available for all families, regardless of whether or not their parents work outside the home. Services must be publicly funded, universally available, accessible and of high quality, and available in both rural and urban communities. These services must respect linguistic duality and provide pay equity for educators, as stated in the recommendations of the New Brunswick Child Care Task Force.



Housing

Housing is a budgetary item that absorbs a large portion of a citizen's income. In principle, people should not spend more than 30% of their income before taxes on housing. For citizens receiving social assistance or for low-income workers, finding secure and affordable housing is a tremendous challenge.

Currently, the provincial and federal governments are investing considerable sums of money in housing, especially in social housing.

The government must:

- Invest a portion of the money to upgrade existing provincial social housing units.
- Invest substantial funds to build new social housing, focusing on the non-profit sector or the cooperative movement.

New Brunswick Drug Plan

The NB Drug Plan was supposed to cover 150,000 citizens in 2009 but now it covers fewer than 9,000 men, women and children.

The government must:

- Establish a free co-payment for people under 18 years old or adult students
- Expand the coverage of the plan to include dental and vision protection but maintain the same premiums.
- Work closely with the Federal government to implement a national Pharmacare Program in order to cover all individuals and families.



3

Increasing progressive sources of revenue from individuals and corporations

Over the past 35 years successive governments of New Brunswick, along with other jurisdictions, embarked on a social experiment to shift the impact of taxation from corporations and high-income individuals to low- and middle-income people. At the same time they limited the growth of program spending, and the result has been the need for the proposals in this platform.

This experiment has not been successful because it has not produced the promised economic growth, which was supposed to come from greater work effort and willingness to invest by high-income individuals and corporations. Many of the above policy initiatives will increase government spending, though government revenues will also rise because there will be more money in the pockets of low and middle income people, which will be recycled in the form of consumer spending.

Given the private sector's limited interest in creating sustainable economic development in the province, the provincial government must take on a more active role to ensure that the benefits to New Brunswickers from the development of our natural resources and service-sector economy are maximized.

The next provincial government must diversify the economy, by encouraging the value-added transformation of our natural resources and developing a green economy. We must also increase royalty revenues from our natural resources.

Even with stronger and more equitable and sustainable economic growth, New Brunswick will need more revenue and the greatest ability-to-pay is found in the natural resources sector, high-income individuals, and the corporate sector.

The provincial government must also be more vigilant in recovering lost revenues from offshore wealth holding, and must look for revenues that can be collected from the new, rapidly growing digital economy.

The next New Brunswick government must resist pressures to cut tax rates on corporations, high-income individuals and natural resources, and must be prepared to move in the other direction.



Conclusion

Every provincial election represents a choice for New Brunswickers, a chance to reaffirm the current direction or to proceed on a new course. It is time in 2018 for New Brunswickers to recognize that the course that was set 30 years ago has not yielded the promised results, including rising wages, higher rates of employment, sustainable economic development and sound public finances.

It is time to shift the balance back to government policies that express New Brunswickers' desire to care for each other and to live in a society with a more accountable government.

