

PSAC Votes 2021 Questions to ask candidates and their parties

Last updated August 12, 2021

Health care

Question

What steps will you and your party take to uphold the Canada Health Act and provide the necessary funding to ensure equality of access and non-discriminatory, non-racist care for all Canadians, regardless of who they are or where they live?

Ideal response

- Specific actions
- Funding and timeframes they will take to ensure:
 - Health care system is universally accessible
 - Publicly funded
 - Publicly delivered
 - Based on need and not ability to pay

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted health inequalities within racialized, Indigenous, Black and low-income communities. A report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information showed that people living in low-income neighbourhoods were hospitalized due to the virus at over double the rate of those living in higher income areas. A survey among the trans and non-binary community conducted prior to COVID-19 indicated that almost half of all respondents reported having unmet healthcare needs. A robust, well-funded, and accessible health care system will create healthier outcomes, as well as a stronger safety net against future pandemics.

Pharmacare

Question

What action will you and your party take to implement national pharmacare as an integral part of universal, accessible health care?

Ideal response

Specific action to implement a universal, single payer, public drug plan with a comprehensive drug formulary, and a commitment to a 'people before patents' approach to pharmacare and drug purchasing.

Background

Inequalities exist in Canadians' access to prescription drugs. About one third of working Canadians don't have employer-funded prescription drug coverage. The less you earn at work, the less likely you are to have prescription drug coverage.

Long term care

Question

Will you and your party support the transfer of Revera long-term care facilities from the Public Service Pension Plan to public ownership to protect the lives of seniors?

Ideal response

- A commitment to facilitate talks between the Public Service Pension Investment Board (PSPIB) and provincial and territorial health ministries to move Revera long-term care facilities from private to public ownership and a timeframe for these talks.
- A commitment to work with the PSPIB to ensure that the investment in Revera Inc. is replaced by socially responsible investments that support the financial health of the Public Service Pension Plan while not endangering users of services, the environment or public sector jobs.

Background

The federal government through the crown corporation Public Service Pension Investment Board is the sole owner of Revera Inc. Canada's second-largest chain of for-profit long term care facilities. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the evidence has clearly shown that residents in private long-term care facilities were more likely to die from COVID-19 than those in publicly owned and operated long-term care facilities. As of April 12, 2021, 701 people had died in Revera facilities.

Wealth tax

Question

Will you and your party commit to introducing and/or supporting a wealth tax?

Ideal response

A commitment to introduce and/or support a tax on extreme wealth.

Background

The wealthy have benefited from the pandemic while many others have struggled. Now is the time to reverse that injustice, and ensure that those who can, pay their fair share. A June 2020 report by the Parliamentary Budget Officer found the richest 1% hold more than 25% of net wealth in Canada. Despite this deepening wealth gap, the richest Canadians don't pay taxes on financial and other assets. Canada's top 47 billionaires added \$78 billion to their wealth over the last year.

Public services

Question

Will you and your party commit to rejecting post-pandemic austerity measures designed to cut or eliminate public services?

Ideal response

A commitment to maintain and expand federal public services to ensure they are accessible, and responsive to the needs of Canadians. Specific actions could include:

- keeping privatization out of Canada's pandemic recovery plan, committing to bringing work that has been contracted out back in house, and ensuring that infrastructure projects are publicly owned and publicly operated.
- ending the federal government's reliance on temporary staffing and implementing the recommendations of the June 2019 House of Commons Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) Committee Report on Precarious Work ensuring that automated solutions introduced to facilitate emergency benefits during the pandemic are used to help workers who provide public services, not replace them

Background

Living through the pandemic has reminded us of the vital role of public services in our lives. As the economy necessarily shut down to protect Canadians from COVID-19, the federal government implemented a range of public supports at breathtaking speed, protecting Canadians from catastrophe. PSAC members stepped up and were at the forefront of delivering a wide range of programs and benefits that supported both people and businesses. The post-pandemic economic recovery must be built on investment in strong public services and the workers who provide them.

Question

What steps will you and your party take to ensure the country is prepared for future pandemics?

Question

What steps will you and your party take to ensure Canada is fully prepared for public health crises and to ensure the Public Health Agency of Canada is in a position to continue to monitor the progress of COVID-19 and future infectious disease outbreaks?

Ideal response

- A commitment to fill and main this critical position, in addition to other steps to ensure an optimum level of infectious disease surveillance by the agency.
- A commitment to ensuring the necessary public services are in place to support Canadians in the event of future pandemics or other crises.
- A commitment to developing a national research and public health strategy that puts people before patents and ensures that Canada is prepared for public health crises and never caught having to rely on other countries for developing and producing vaccines again.

Background

Outbreaks of infectious diseases, like COVID-19, can strike quickly, with huge and unpredictable results. Rapid action by public health officials can save lives and reduce the impact on Canadians and the economy. The report of a 2021 independent review of the Canada Public Health Agency revealed that the position of chief health surveillance officer had been vacant since 2017 and was due to be eliminated. As a result, disease surveillance was not well-coordinated in the four years leading up to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Question

What steps will you and your party take to address and reverse the culture of harassment in federal public service workplaces?

Ideal response

- Make it an immediate priority to work with unions to put in place the necessary measures, including training, protocols and accountabilities, to reverse the culture of harassment in many government departments, agencies and crown corporations.

Background

Reports of sexual harassment in the military have been made public but a new [position paper](#), written by DND Ombudsman, Gregory Lick, echoes what union members have warned. “The most recent sexual misconduct scandal has put on display a culture that insulates its bad actors and demands silence of its victims. This is not a new problem, nor is it limited solely to sexual misconduct. It applies to all forms of discriminatory behaviour and misconduct where there is a power imbalance and fear of reprisal.” But, as PSAC members have experienced, harassment and discriminatory behaviour is not restricted to the military or to one government department.

Human rights

Indigenous peoples

Question

What action will you and your party take to implement all of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ seven Calls for Justice?

Ideal response

- A commitment to an action plan, funding and timeline to complete all of the Calls of Action and Calls for Justice as soon as possible.

Background

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action were released in December 2015. More than five years later, only 14 have been completed, and 20 have seen no progress at all. It has been over two years since the release of the report National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls with no plan of action. Dozens of Indigenous communities still [lack](#) the basic human right of safe drinking water. As the remains of more and more children on the grounds of former residential schools are revealed, non-Indigenous Canadians can no longer turn a blind eye to the structural injustices and violence faced by Indigenous peoples.

Persons with disabilities

Question

What steps will you and your party take to improve income support for persons with disabilities?

Background

The pandemic impacted people with disabilities more severely than many Canadians. A Statistics Canada survey showed over one third of people with long-term health conditions or disabilities experienced a temporary or permanent job loss or reduced hours during the pandemic. Over half had difficulty meeting at least one financial obligation or essential need. The pandemic exposed the inadequacy of current financial support provided to persons with disabilities compared to the amount of financial support the federal government paid through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to help compensate for lost income during the pandemic.

Ideal response

A commitment to consult with people with disabilities and their organizations and a commitment to negotiate with the provinces and territories to provide liveable amounts of income support. Any federal income support must not result in the loss or claw back of benefits provided by other levels of government.

Gender equity

Question

What will you and your party commit to do to assist women whose employment was affected by the pandemic?

Ideal response

Funding for programs to support women re-entering the workforce and provide re-training to women who may need to enter a new line of work.

Background

Women were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, whether because they took on most of the burden of home schooling, child care, and elder care, or because they were more likely to be working in front line service sector and health care jobs, or because they were more likely to have lost work due to the pandemic. Even women in academic research indicated increased difficulty applying for and securing grant funding, and data show that women in academia published significantly less than in previous years, and significantly less than their male counterparts.

Systemic racism

Question

What measures will you and your party take to combat systemic racism in our society?

Ideal response

- A commitment to a comprehensive anti-racism action plan and a stand-alone anti-racism secretariat to oversee and provide directions on initiatives aimed at combatting anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian and all other forms of racism.
- As part of the action plan, commit to implement and support a disaggregated data action plan in key areas such as the labour market, criminal justice system; health care services; housing; social services and benefits; and immigration.
- Develop and implement an anti-Islamophobia Action Plan to counter the rise of anti-Muslim hate and violence.
- Ensure bargaining agents are meaningfully involved and consulted in all stages of the work of the Employment Equity Act Task Force Review.

Background

Research has shown that health, social and economic inequities have led to the pandemic having a greater impact on Indigenous, Black, Asian and racialized communities, who are significantly more at risk of exposure to COVID-19 and who experienced far higher rates of infection and mortality than other communities. Workers in these communities experienced much higher rates of unemployment during the pandemic because they face systemic disadvantages like lower paid precarious work, fewer career advancement opportunities and less access to basic services.

Temporary foreign workers

Question

What steps will you and your party take to fix the Temporary Foreign Workers Program to provide these workers with the protection, rights and benefits received by other workers in this country?

Background

Temporary foreign workers are often at the mercy of their employers who may charge them illegal recruiting fees, make no effort to ensure that they know or understand what minimal rights they do have, and not allow them proper access to health care. These workers do not raise their concerns about working conditions or report abuse for fear of employer reprisals.

Ideal response

A plan for a comprehensive overhaul of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program to provide all migrant workers with the opportunity for permanent residency and meaningful access to labour and human rights, health and safety protections, and services and benefits that other workers receive.

Post-secondary education

Question

How will you and your party invest in the post-secondary education system to ensure it is high-quality, equitable, affordable, and accessible.

Ideal response

- Commitment to boost direct transfers to the sector (recommended minimum \$3 billion), and to work with the provinces and territories to ensure that increases in core funding are used to reduce precarious work among post-secondary staff and faculty.
- Commitment to increase funding for Indigenous post-secondary education by a minimum of \$650 million annually
- Significantly increase base funding for Canada's three research granting councils.
- Permanently eliminate interest on federal student debt and replace the Canada Education Savings Program and Tuition Tax Credit with direct funding for student grants.

Background

Universities, colleges, and polytechnics are the foundation and infrastructure of Canada's knowledge advantage. But, after years of underinvestment from governments, the system is in crisis. Coupled with growing inequity and stagnant wages, access to a high-quality education is out of reach for too many students—particularly students from low-income families, racialized, Black, and Indigenous students, and students living with disabilities. The rising costs of education means that many more students are burdened with years of debt.

The environment / Climate change

Question

How much will you and your party spend, and when, to mitigate and slow climate change including reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

How will you and your party ensure a just transition away from a fossil-fuel driven economy to a green economy that supports workers and their communities?

Background

The latest report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) again warns that governments around the world must take steps to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions or face the dire consequences of increasing global warming. In Canada, these changes include rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, a significant reduction in Arctic ice cover, and events caused extreme weather such as wildfires, tornadoes, and heatwaves. Globally, climate change causes flooding, drought, and other extreme weather. Global warming also impacts the world's food supply, access to drinking water, and exacerbates existing inequalities between rich and poor countries.

Ideal response

- Specific spending commitments, timetables and reporting requirements to address climate change and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as eliminating subsidies on fossil fuel extraction and transportation.
- Specific plans and funding commitments to create meaningful, high-wage jobs with guaranteed work and training for those affected by the creation of a green economy.

- Public investment in infrastructure to build a 100% renewable energy economy without the use of private-public partnerships (P3s).

Greening government

Question

What measures will you and your party take to meet a net-zero emissions target as soon as possible?

Ideal response

A commitment to

- Requiring urgent, specific emissions reductions from all departments, agencies and Crown corporations to meet concrete targets
- providing specific support for public service workers to reduce emissions including remote and flexible work options, highest standard energy efficient equipment and energy efficient workplace best practices
- Involving unions in the Greening Government Strategy in the workplace and through collective bargaining
- Helping remote workers cut emissions at home

Background

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has recently released a report - "[Leading the Way? A critical assessment of the federal Greening Government Strategy](#)" – which warns the federal government needs to do a better job of getting its emissions to net-zero by 2050, the *Greening Government Strategy* target deadline. Government emissions fell by 28 per cent between 2005 and 2015, but have risen by 11 per cent since 2015, the report notes. Government property was responsible for 50% of total emissions while national security operations including National Defence, the RCMP and the Coast Guard produced 45%.

Child care

Question

Will you and you party commit to supporting a national system of universal, accessible, publicly-funded child care?

Ideal response

- Support the current commitments to early learning and childcare (ELCC) spending and continue negotiating funding agreements with the provinces and territories to provide regulated, affordable, inclusive, culturally safe, flexible, high quality ELCC.
- A commitment to provide adequately resourced federal funding to support the construction of publicly owned childcare facilities/assets and fund childcare operations according to a formula that factors in proper and fair compensation for staff, other operational costs, and affordable parent fees by the province/territory aligned with current federal reduction goals.

Background

Many women were forced to leave the labour force to assume caregiving responsibilities, setting back their careers and worsening the gender pay gap. This was especially true for racialized, Black, and Indigenous women and single parents. Affordable high-quality childcare for all will enhance children's well-being, increase women's labour force participation, promote gender equality, and grow the economy.

Sick leave

Question

What commitments will you and your party make to improving paid sick leave for all workers?

Ideal response

- A commitment to work with provincial labour ministers to prioritize the implementation of provincial employer paid sick leave plans that provide an adequate number of sick days, fully pay workers' wages, have no barriers to access, and apply to all workers.
- A commitment to maintain, at a minimum, any paid sick leave provisions in collective agreements negotiated by bargaining agents with the federal government.
- A commitment to improve paid sick leave provisions under the Canada Labour Code.

Background

Canada is one of the few remaining high-income countries that does not yet have legislated employer-paid sick leave at a national level and more than half of all Canadian workers have no access to paid sick leave. Yet, research shows that workers are less likely to take time off for injury or illness when they do not have paid sick leave and less likely to obtain preventive medical care. Workplace outbreaks and transmissions during the pandemic have made it clear that paid sick leave is critical to protecting public health. It can also reduce the overall frequency of time off work, as workers are less likely to spread disease to co-workers and the surrounding community, while increasing workplace productivity, offering more stable income for workers, and reducing health costs for governments.

Employment Insurance

Question

What steps will you and your party take to modernize and strengthen the EI program in order to make it more resilient to and protect workers from future emergencies, pandemics and recessions?

Ideal response

A commitment to

- eliminating the one-week waiting period before a claimant can receive benefits
- raising benefit rates to 75% and improving supports for low-paid workers with a minimum payment similar to the \$500 weekly CERB or to a comparable low-income supplement based on individual earnings
- increasing EI sickness benefits to 35 weeks

- waiving indefinite EI disqualifications and moving to a model that specifically outlines EI claimants' disqualification period after a review
- ensuring that Service Canada is fully staffed, and frontline workers have access to the tools and training needed to provide high-quality service to Canadians

ensuring that frontline workers and their unions are included in the government's upcoming EI review and are consulted on any proposed changes to service delivery methods

Background

Even before the pandemic, the Employment Insurance program needed to be changed in order to respond to issues such as the increased participation of women in the labour force, an aging population, and the rise of precarious employment. The pandemic highlighted the EI program's inability to keep pace with a rapidly changing labour market. As a result, many unemployed workers were unable to meet EI's qualifying rules or relegated to an impossibly low benefit rate. This was particularly true for workers who are employed in precarious, temporary, or part-time jobs – many of whom are women, racialized, Indigenous, newcomers to Canada or migrant workers.

Labour rights

Question

What steps will you and your party take to ensure all workers have the Charter right to join a union and access to free and fair collective bargaining, to ensure that all workers have access to fair labour standards?

Ideal response

A commitment to:

- modernize federal labour legislation to ensure that all workers can join a union and gain access to collective bargaining and that labour standards are reflective of the new reality of non-standard and precarious employment.
- reform the *Canada Labour Code* and the *Public Service Employment Act* to strengthen workplace harassment and discrimination provisions in the legislation
- reform the *Canada Labour Code* to clearly define “employee” and “independent contractor” to ensure that workers are not mis-classified in an attempt to avoid labour standards
- fund the Labour Program to ensure that there are enough labour inspectors to engage in necessary pro-active enforcement of standards and to respond to complaints about infractions in a rapid fashion

Background

An important contributor to rising wage inequality in Canada is the decline in unionization rates. Unions improve wages and benefits for all workers, not just union members. Unions also reduce racial disparities in wages and raise women's wages, helping to counteract differences in income caused by race and gender that result from occupational segregation, discrimination, and other employment inequities related to structural racism and sexism.

Question

Will you and your party commit to respecting the right of workers to bargain collectively?

Ideal response

A commitment to

- not use back to work legislation under any circumstances
- reform the Canada Labour Code to explicitly ban the use of replacement workers

Background

Successive federal governments have enacted back-to-work legislation denying workers their right to freely bargain with their employers. Examples include legislating an end to strikes by workers at the Port of Montreal and at Canada Post. Meanwhile, federal governments have taken no action to end the use of replacement workers. The ability to replace striking workers gives employers a significantly unfair advantage in bargaining and unnecessarily prolongs strikes.