



New Brunswick Election 2018



The New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (NBASW) is an organization representing more than 2,000 members provincially. Its role is the promotion of excellence in social work practice and protection of the public.

Social workers are committed to supporting the wellbeing of all individuals and protecting the most vulnerable in our society. For this reason, the NBASW has prepared this elections document, highlighting social issues that are important to New Brunswick social workers and the people they support.

This document is intended to:

- Inform all candidates and political parties of key social issues
- Provide recommendations that will allow political parties to make meaningful platform commitments, addressing these issues
- Offer NB social workers a guide when discussing these social issues with their local candidates

For more information visit www.nbasw-atsnb.ca



Affordable, Accessible Housing

For many New Brunswickers, having a secure home is a cornerstone of building a stable life. Yet according to the NB Non-Profit Housing Association, 29,565 New Brunswick households do not have a safe, affordable place to call home. With an increasing population of older adults, and the second highest rate of disability in Canada, affordable, accessible housing is a critical need in this province.

The NBASW calls for:

- greater investment in the creation of additional affordable housing units, with requirements that a percentage of new constructions be accessible.
- significant increases in the number of available portable rent subsidies to allow individuals the flexibility to live in neighbourhoods close to their work, health care, community services, and natural support networks.
- a commitment to explore a provincially funded home-sharing program to address the housing needs of older adults, individuals with a disability and individuals with limited income.

Home Support

According to the 2017 report, *We are all in this together: An Aging Strategy for New Brunswick* "In New Brunswick there are 147,929 seniors which is equal to 19.5% of our population. By 2038, with the current trend, it is expected that 31.3% of the New Brunswick population will be seniors". Social workers can play a key role in supporting New Brunswick's aging population to lead healthy lives with the greatest level of independence possible. A focus on a home first approach, with the goal of avoiding or delaying institutionalization, can result in cost savings, while allowing older adults and individuals with a disability to continue living in their communities.

The NBASW calls for:

- increased access to social workers through publicly funded programs including Mental Health, and a commitment to the introduction of social workers in all New Brunswick nursing homes.
- significant investment in home support workers, including providing higher hourly wages for support workers.
- introduction of a formalized support system to assist informal caregivers with navigating service systems, while maintaining the recently introduced Primary Informal Caregiver Benefit.

Income Assistance & Poverty Reduction

Ensuring that New Brunswickers have access to basic needs, such as a liveable income, nutritious food, and secure housing is crucial to health and well-being. According to the New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice, in 2015, 100,000 NB citizens had low income, with one third of them accessing social assistance.

The NBASW calls for:

- reforms to the existing income assistance system including:
 - increased income assistance rates.
 - policy reform to allow individuals to retain more of their employment income while still receiving benefits.
 - introduction of a modernized process for accessing Extended Benefits (social assistance for individuals with a disability) including a transparent process for appeal.
 - policy reform to allow individuals receiving social assistance to live together and share resources, without financial claw backs.
- greater access to supports that allow for participation in the workforce including:
 - inclusive, affordable childcare.
 - workplace supports for individuals with a disability.

Inclusive Education

New Brunswick's progressive inclusive education system (Policy 322) has been internationally recognized for its alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Continued support for this policy and investment in its success is essential to New Brunswick's pursuit of creating inclusive communities.

The NBASW calls for:

- a continued commitment to Policy 322 and support for its effective delivery.
- greater use of social workers in the school system to support the needs of children with challenging behaviours and school staff, in inclusive education settings.

Mental Health Services

In the 2016 *New Brunswick Health System Report Card* published by the New Brunswick Health Council, the province received a grade of “C” for accessibility when it comes to timeliness in accessing health services. The report card indicates that more timely access to mental health services would improve quality of life and reduce hospitalizations. With more than 2,000 social workers registered in the province of New Brunswick, social workers have the skills needed to support individuals who may be navigating mental illness or addictions.

The NBASW calls for:

- investment in more social workers to address the mental health needs of New Brunswickers and reduce wait times.
- a plan to equip New Brunswick’s public mental health system to effectively address the mental health needs of individuals with intellectual and development disabilities. In many cases, these citizens are currently going without the support they require because workers have not been provided with the information, tools and training they require to support them.
- a commitment to the expansion of Mental Health courts throughout the province.

Affordable, Accessible Transportation

Access to transportation is a crucial component for participation in the labour force, accessing health and community services and avoiding social isolation. The rural nature of New Brunswick, lack of public transit in certain communities, and limited accessible options create additional barriers for the full participation of NB citizens. Given the environmental impact of the province’s reliance on private cars, partnered with the growing aging population, prevalence of mobility disabilities, and the number of individuals and families with low income, it’s clear that affordable, accessible transportation is an urgent need.

The NBASW calls for:

- the adoption of an integrated provincial transportation strategy, that would centralize responsibility and coordinate existing services currently being offered by municipal governments, private and non-profit organizations.
- dedication of provincial funding for the province-wide expansion of volunteer-driver programs, rideshare programs and public transit.

Transportation continued

- a commitment to studying and implementing a program that would allow school buses, nursing-home shuttles and other accessible vehicles to be shared for use as community transportation vehicles.
- increased provincial funding for vehicle retrofit and adaptive driving service programs to reflect the growing need for accessible transportation, partnered with the implementation of fully accessible public transit routes and incentives to make accessible taxis affordable.
- continued availability of free and discounted transit passes for individuals with low-income and newcomers, as well as accessible (plain language, audio, visual) transit schedules and support for use of public transit.
- review of the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour and the Department of Social Development's transportation policies to increase access to transportation funding for medical, employment and social inclusion purposes.

