



Nova Scotia
Federation of Labour, CLC

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New Poll Says It's Time the MacDonald Government Focused on Recruitment and Retention

Premier Rodney MacDonald is moving ahead with changes to healthcare that many believe are unwise. These include a private surgery clinic, plans to consider partnering with the private sector for the construction of so-called P3 hospitals and centralizing some healthcare functions such as lab services away from rural areas of the province.

None of these schemes were ever a part of Mr. MacDonald's last election campaign. So he has no public mandate to affect such controversial changes.

Another important manner of testing public support would be to have his ideas debated in the House of Assembly. But Mr. MacDonald carefully avoids the House. He has only convened it for 16 days since last April.

Since the Premier hasn't talked to Nova Scotians about his controversial plans, we thought we would. A coalition of health care unions in Nova Scotia commissioned Viewpoints Research to conduct a poll of 1,008 people across the province in March to see what they thought about Mr. MacDonald's plans.

The results are in and it turns out most Nova Scotians do not support Mr. MacDonald's ideas. In fact, they want him to get back to the basics and focus his attention on dealing with the shortages in health care.

78 per cent Prefer Public Surgery Clinics

Nova Scotians were also asked whether they supported a for-profit clinic doing minor surgeries or whether the government should create a public clinic to do that work. More than three-quarters (78.2 per cent) preferred a publicly run clinic over the private clinic.

This is good common-sense advice to the Premier. Why pay more money to ensure a profit margin for a private company when the same work can be done in public clinics? The Premier would have people believe its either private-for-profit surgeries or long wait lists. According to the Premier, it's one or the other.

Of course, it's not that simple. The province could maximize use of current operating room space or initiate a public surgery clinic. One has to ask why the Premier is insisting on a plan that will see a private business make a profit off someone's surgery. We now know that Nova Scotians don't support the plan.

P3 Hospitals Are a Bad Idea

Only 37.5 per cent of Nova Scotians agree with the idea of using private partnerships to build new hospitals according to the Viewpoints poll which is accurate with 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20. More than 54 per cent disagreed with the idea.

Once again Mr. MacDonald is actually acting against the wishes of most Nova Scotians who clearly remember what he has forgotten – P3 projects have a long and terrible record of failure in this province.

Whether it's a toll highway, exorbitant fees for after-school use or taking a cut of chocolate bar sales P3 cost much more. The province should simply hire the private sector to construct buildings but keep those buildings in the public's hands. That the most cost-effective method.

Centralizing Health Services

The Viewpoints poll also tested the province's plan, outlined in its Corpus Sanchez report, to centralize some medical services. That plan would reduce things like lab services in rural Nova Scotia and provide them in urban centres.

Again 78 per cent of Nova Scotians disagreed indicating they want rural health services protected.

All Nova Scotians concerned about the MacDonald Government's health care plans should carefully read the province's recently released Corpus Sanchez report. It suggests not just centralizing lab services but also reducing rural emergency room services among other things.

Emergency rooms across Nova Scotia were closed a total of 6,299 hours in 2007. The problem gets worse each year with emergency rooms in places such as New Waterford, Digby, and Tatamagouche closing for long stretches of time.

Rather than recruiting the people required to keep emergency rooms open, the MacDonald government has allowed closures to become routine and is now endorsing a

report which recommends even further reductions. If you fail to recruit the people required to deliver the service, just reduce the service itself, The Premier seems to have concluded.

95 per cent say Focus on Recruitment and Retention

Nova Scotians overwhelmingly supported the idea of focusing on recruiting and retaining nurses and healthcare workers. More than 95 per cent agreed that this was the best way to fix problems with the healthcare system including long wait times.

Nova Scotians are offering sound advice as they often do. Premier MacDonald should think carefully before focusing his government's efforts on P3 partnerships that are proven to fail. And instead of reducing health care services, he needs to focus his government's attention on recruiting and retaining nurses and healthcare workers

Nova Scotians are telling the Premier it's time to focus on the real problems in health care. The coalition of Unions which represents 32,000 health and community care workers around the province couldn't agree more.

Rick Clarke
President,
Nova Scotia Federation of Labour
On Behalf of:
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