

April 8, 2019



Questions for Alberta Political Candidates Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) – Provincial Election 2019



One in 66 Canadian children live with autism¹, and many more are impacted as caregivers and family members.

Alberta's provincial election will be held on April 16, 2019. It creates an opportunity for community members to take action and speak with candidates about issues that impact people with autism. The more we talk, the greater influence we have in shaping policy and programs.

Key Messages

The lifetime costs of caregiving for a high needs individual with autism will exceed \$5.5 million. A family would need to invest \$1.6 million at a five percent return on their child's 2nd birthday to cover these lifetime disability-related costs.² Few Alberta families are so privileged, as a result, our community needs to invest strategically in effective services and supports to address quality of life and decrease the needs for intensive lifelong supports.

Despite any economic challenges, do you remain committed to protecting Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, living in urban, rural, and remote regions of the province? Do you propose incentives or programs for attracting specialists to rural or remote regions?

Discussion Topic: Education

- ▶ What will your party do to ensure appropriate education supports for students with Autism to position them to learn, and families are not routinely called to bring their children home?
- ▶ How do you propose ensuring accountability to educational guidelines that eliminate restraint and seclusion, replacing these practices with positive behavioural-based supports? (Ongoing Staff Training, Resources, Regulations, Detailed Reporting Requirements, etc.)
- ▶ What will you do to support the ongoing professional development of front line staff, including both teachers and educational assistants?
- ▶ Do you support diversity in programming and an education system allowing families to make informed decisions?

¹ National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System (NASS) 2018 Report

² The Value of Caregiver Time: Costs of Support and Care for Individuals Living With Autism Spectrum Disorder, SPP Research Paper No. 7-1, University of Calgary

Discussion Topic: Healthcare

- ▶ Early Intervention has been demonstrated to improve outcomes for individuals with Autism greatly, increasing independence and decreasing intensity of lifelong supports. What will your party do to reduce waitlists for diagnosis so that families can begin treatment earlier? (Program Unit Funding, Family Support for Children with Disabilities)
- ▶ What are your plans to address Alberta's Mental Health crisis, ensuring children, adults and families living with Autism have access to services and are not left in detrimental living conditions?

Discussion Topic: Family Support for Children with Disabilities

- ▶ Knowing that the FSCD Act and Regulations set Alberta as a national and global leader in supporting children and families living with all disabilities, what will you do to ensure the program is effective by providing supports based on individual family needs, thereby balancing fiscal and social responsibility?
- ▶ Are you committed to ensuring we invest in timely access for children with disabilities to the right services at the right time minimizing lifelong needs for more complex and costly systems of support?

Discussion Topic: Adult Supports

- ▶ Nearly 80% of individuals with Autism do not qualify for Alberta's Persons with Disabilities Program based on IQ Criteria. Given the evidence against this criteria, the result is an arbitrary process missing people with both intense and moderate support needs. Will you replace IQ criteria with an evidence-based assessment approach focused on adaptive functioning?
- ▶ How do you propose advancing government and corporate culture to understand the business advantage in investing in a diverse workforce, including persons with Autism and other disabilities?
- ▶ What will your party do to support both accessible and affordable housing options and independent living supports for individuals with Autism, reducing the strain on more costly alternative supports?
- ▶ As our society now accept persons with disabilities (regardless of severity) as equally deserving of lifelong learning opportunities, how would your government continue to advance post-secondary programs and continuing education?

Autism Edmonton, Autism Calgary and Autism Society RMWB do not endorse any political party and offer no opinion on who anyone should vote for. All references to Alberta's political parties' statements, platforms or actions are based on information publicly available at the time of writing.