



Parkinson Canada



Toolkit 2024 Nova Scotia

parkinson.ca

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HELP MAKE PARKINSON'S AN ELECTION ISSUE

Key Parkinson's Facts in Nova Scotia

Election time is the perfect opportunity to engage with community leaders, raise awareness of issues important to you and in turn, enact change. This election period, we encourage our community to communicate with their candidates and make sure your voice is heard!



There are over **6,000** people living with Parkinson's in the Atlantic region

Wait time to see a Movement Disorder Specialist in Nova Scotia is an average of **three to four years**



Only **31%** of Atlantic Canadians living with Parkinson's saw a Movement Disorder Specialist in the past year vs the national average of **54%**

Almost 70% of Nova Scotia caregivers surveyed pay out-of-pocket for medical expenses.



70% of people with Parkinson's in the region pay out of pocket for exercise classes and palliative care.

2024 NOVA SCOTIA ELECTION TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

Nova Scotians are heading to the polls and we are asking the members of the Nova Scotian Parkinson's community to reach out to your electoral candidates and call on them to prioritize Parkinson's. It is time to raise awareness about Parkinson's, so that our elected leaders in Halifax know exactly how large of an impact Parkinson's has on our province and that our concerns need addressing.

This toolkit provides you with a step-by-step guide on how to effectively engage with candidates, some key Parkinson's information, and the current realities of healthcare in Nova Scotia.



STEP 1

Get Prepared

An overview of Parkinson's in Canada

Canada has one of the highest rates of Parkinson's disease in the world and some of the highest rates of new cases per year. It is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after dementia, with more than 110,000 Canadians currently living with Parkinson's. That number grows by about 35 people every day.

An overview of Parkinson's in Nova Scotia

As of 2021, more than 2,400 of the more than 110,000 Canadians living with Parkinson's are in Nova Scotia. The provincial average wait time to meet with a specialist to get a diagnosis is three to four years. An additional barrier to seeing a specialist is the distance and travel costs that some face when trying to access Parkinson's-informed care options. Most of the Movement Disorder Specialists in Nova Scotia are based in Halifax, meaning many Nova Scotians living with Parkinson's must travel when they need specialist care. This increases both the physical and financial burden on those living with Parkinson's and their care partner.

The 2021 Parkinson Canada Roundtable Series (www.parkinson.ca/roundtable-reports) consisted of eight regional roundtables, including one for the Atlantic Region, and a national session. The Atlantic Regional Roundtable Report ([accessible here](#)) summarizes the common realities faced by the Parkinson's community across Atlantic Canada.

Parkinson Canada also submitted a Pre-Budget Consultation to the Government of Nova Scotia in January of 2024. In this document, we advocated for better access to Movement Disorder specialists in areas outside of Halifax, streamlining the recruitment process so that more movement disorder specialists can be hired, and to ensure that the Federal Canada Disability Benefit does not result in any claw backs from provincial benefits- which the provincial government agreed to earlier this year.

For this election, Parkinson Canada has outlined some key priorities as we have heard them from our community in the province. Below you will find the priorities that Parkinson Canada is engaging the Government in Nova Scotia on in 2024 and into the future.

Parkinson's Priorities in Nova Scotia

1) Wait Times:

- The prolonged wait times to see a Movement Disorder Specialist and receive a diagnosis (three to four years on average) have serious implications for an individual's quality of life and increase the likelihood for both physical and mental health deterioration. This can significantly impact the ability for people to continue to participate in work or other social and community life. It also increases the likelihood that a person will need to rely on disability or healthcare services and supports.
- By streamlining the hiring and recruitment process for internationally trained doctors, clinics and the government will be able to bring in more specialists that will reduce the backlog.

2) Access to Care

- A major barrier to accessing specialist, Parkinson's-informed care in Nova Scotia is that the province's Movement Disorder Specialists are based in the Halifax region, meaning many Nova Scotians living with Parkinson's must travel to Halifax. This travel increases the physical and economic burden of living with Parkinson's and can take valuable time away from them as they drive to their appointments. Having a mobile Parkinson's clinic in Nova Scotia will help to increase access to care by reducing the time and financial commitments it takes for the person living with Parkinson's to see a specialist.
- Many individuals also experience other financial barriers to care, having to pay out-of-pocket in part for medication, speech therapy, physiotherapy, and exercise classes.

3) Health Care Data:

- Health care data is critical in informing governments, health care practitioners, and patients on how best to give and receive care. This is especially true for monitoring chronic diseases, as it allows us to better advocate for policies that will improve care outcomes and gives us a better understanding of the situation in the province. Parkinson Canada calls on all provincial governments to improve data collection on the incidence rate of Parkinson's, as well as other key statistics such as prevalence, ethnicity, and rural or urban residency, and provide that data to Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Chronic Disease Surveillance System.

4) Supporting Care Givers:

- Care partners are vital supports for those living with Parkinson's. Not only do they provide physical assistance with everyday chores, but they also provide psychological and emotional support to those they care for. This vital work helps people living with Parkinson's live well.
- Since care partners provide care that would otherwise need to be done in the healthcare system, we believe that it is only right that this work is compensated fairly. Nova Scotia has the Caregiver Benefit of \$400 a month. While that is helpful, we believe that due to inflation, this Benefit is not providing the financial help and relief it did when it was first established. This benefit should be indexed to inflation going forward. This will ensure that this much needed financial support for caregivers is not eroded over time.

These priorities provided a roadmap in developing our advocacy work in supporting those in Nova Scotia affected by Parkinson's.



STEP 2

Identify your electoral candidate and other relevant voting information.

To find your electoral district, candidates, voting locations, how to register, accessibility services available and more, please visit: [Elections Nova Scotia Information, Statistics and Resources](https://electionsnovascotia.ca/). (<https://electionsnovascotia.ca/>)



STEP 3

Get Involved

Engage with your Candidates

Here are a few ways you can get involved and have your voice heard by your candidate:

1. Visit Parkinson.ca for further information by checking out the Nova Scotia Election Hub.
2. Connect with your candidates through social media, by tagging them, and use the #NSElection hashtag. See some examples on the next page.
3. Meet with your candidates in-person, virtually, or by phone to share your message.
4. Write a letter or email to your electoral candidate. See templates and letter-writing tips below.
5. Follow your candidate on social media and subscribe to their newsletters, if they have one, to familiarize yourself with their activities and priorities.

Strategic Asks for your Candidates

The objective of the meetings is to raise awareness about Parkinson's with the candidate and to find areas of shared priorities.

1. Ask what their top priorities will be if elected and how Parkinson Canada and you, as a constituent, can help them accomplish these.
2. Ask what measures their party intends to take for people in New Brunswick that live with Parkinson's to have access to primary care doctors that can refer them to specialists in the province.
3. Ask how their party intends to support informal care partners who are looking after someone in Nova Scotia.
4. Request that the candidate show their support for what you have discussed by sharing a message on social media emphasizing the importance of improving healthcare for those living with Parkinson's in Nova Scotia, using the #NSElection hashtag.
5. Ask the candidate to learn more about Parkinson's. A great place for them to start is our website www.parkinson.ca or by emailing advocacy@parkinson.ca.
6. Request that the candidate share what they have learned about the need for improved healthcare outcomes for those with Parkinson's with their party and in government.

SOCIAL MEDIA POST EXAMPLES

FACEBOOK & LINKEDIN



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

Improved healthcare support for people with Parkinson's and their care partners is an important issue, as over 2,400 of the 110,000 Canadians living with Parkinson's are in Nova Scotia. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

There are over 35 people diagnosed with Parkinson's each day, and the number of people living with the disease is continuing to rise. The time is now to ensure equitable, timely, and affordable access to care. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

The average wait time to see a specialist for diagnosis of Parkinson's in Nova Scotia is 3-4 years. People with Parkinson's need faster access to Parkinson's informed care. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

Care partners provide invaluable care to people living with Parkinson's and face many out-of-pocket expenses. Without financial support that adjusts with the cost of living, care partners will struggle to provide needed care. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

This election let's make sure access to primary care is a key issue! Timely access to Parkinson's care starts with timely access to primary care. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli

SOCIAL MEDIA POST EXAMPLES

X (TWITTER)



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

More than 2,400 of the 110,000 Canadians living with Parkinson's are in Nova Scotia. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurological condition in Canada, with over 35 people diagnosed each day. The time is now to ensure equitable, timely, and affordable access to care. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

People living with Parkinson's in NS can wait up to 3 or 4 years to see a specialist for diagnosis. This is way too long and can lead to worse health issues. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

Care partners deserve fair financial support. Tying the Caregiver Benefit to inflation would ensure their support stays fair. #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli



[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Bio]

Many people living with Parkinson's must pay high costs out of pocket for essential care. Affordability should not be a barrier to getting needed care #Parkinsons #NSElection #NSpoli

Considerations When Interacting with Your Candidates

1. Candidates are very busy during elections as they are meeting with as many constituents as possible. Depending on their campaign schedule, candidates may or may not be able to take a one-to-one meeting. If your candidate agrees to a meeting, be prepared and expect to have no more than 15-30 minutes with the candidate.
2. Meetings are not the only way to get time with a candidate. Check the news or the candidates' website for local events they will be attending. Local events can be a great opportunity for you to introduce yourself and briefly share your issues and concerns. Remember to be prepared and concise with what you want to say. Sign up for their local newsletters to receive updates on their activities.
3. As a charitable organization, Parkinson Canada is *nonpartisan*. This means that we engage with all parties and their candidates without bias. When advocating on our behalf, please refrain from showing support or favour for one party over another.

Template Agenda for Meeting with Candidates

1. Introductions
 - Share your connection to Parkinson's.
 - Ask if they have a connection to Parkinson's or familiarity with the disease.
2. Parkinson's in Nova Scotia and request
 - Share key information and data on Parkinson's by highlighting some main points that were mentioned in Step 1 of this document.
 - Request their commitment, if elected, to make Parkinson's a priority and to ensure that improved healthcare is seen as important.
 - Make it personal by providing your main points on why this is important as it relates to your personal experience.
3. Questions to ask your candidates
 - Refer to the strategic asks from above, or use some of these sample questions:
 - How do you and your party intend to improve the lives of Nova Scotians living with Parkinson's?
 - How do you and your party intend to reduce wait times for Nova Scotians needing a Movement Disorder Specialist?
 - Can I count on you, if elected, to make Parkinson's a priority?
 - Will you share this support publicly by posting on social media with the #NSElection #NSpoli
4. Thank them for their time and let them know you will follow up!

SAMPLE EMAILS TO CANDIDATES

1. Use this email template for meeting requests:

Dear first and last name,

My name is [FIRST NAME LAST NAME]. I am a resident in the riding of [MUNICIPALITY], for which you are seeking election. I have been [living with Parkinson's disease for X years/month/caring for my [RELATION TO PERSON LIVING WITH PARKINSON'S] with Parkinson's for X years/months].

During this time, I have experienced [add personal challenges with accessing care/services].

As a supporter of the Parkinson's community and Parkinson Canada, I am requesting to meet with you to discuss the need to make Parkinson's a priority and commit, if elected, to improving healthcare for Nova Scotians in the Parkinson's community.

Thank you in advance for your response. I look forward to meeting with you.

[Signed]

[Your Address]



SAMPLE EMAILS TO CANDIDATES

2. Use this email template if you are unable to meet with your candidate but would like to share your story and requests with them:

Dear first and last name,

My name is [FIRST NAME LAST NAME]. I am a resident in the riding of [MUNICIPALITY], for which you are seeking election. I have been [living with Parkinson's disease for X years/month/caring for my [RELATION TO PERSON LIVING WITH PARKINSON'S] with Parkinson's for X years/months].

During this time, I have experienced [add personal challenges with accessing care/services].

As a supporter of the Parkinson's community and Parkinson Canada, I want to bring your attention to the urgent need to make Parkinson's a priority and seek your commitment, if elected, to improving healthcare for the Parkinson's community.

I would like you to consider the following questions:

1. How do you intend, if elected, to improve the lives of Nova Scotians living with Parkinson's?
2. What measures does your party intend to take for Nova Scotians to have equitable access to care across the province?
3. How does your party intend to improve specialist wait times for people living with Parkinson's in Nova Scotia?
4. Can I count on you to commit to making Parkinson's a priority?
5. Will you write a letter to your party leadership requesting their commitment to make Parkinson's a healthcare priority?

Thank you in advance for your response.

[Signed]

[Your Address]

Tips for Writing an Effective Letter and Emails to Candidates

Address your letter correctly: Be sure you have the correct address and salutation in your letter. Also be sure to double check the spelling of the person's name. It's always best to err on the side of being formal with your correspondence with someone seeking election, as this shows respect and builds stronger relations.

Only address one issue per letter: Being concise on one specific topic, like rising awareness of Parkinson's, will make for a quicker and more impactful ask and response.

Be accurate: Beware of false or misleading information. Always double-check if you are not sure!

Make a specific ask: Make sure to ask your candidate to act. Whether it is asking for a meeting, a phone call, or their support for your issue; always ask for their position on the issue you are addressing.

Make it personal: Share your story and how it affects you. Tie in your own experience and expertise using your own words.

Be polite and courteous: Rudeness or aggressiveness is sure to alienate the reader.

Be concise: Keep your letter as short as possible to ensure that your message is fully read. For letters, it should be no longer than one typed page. If sending an email, no more than 3-5 paragraphs is ideal.

Include your return address in your letter: Even in an email, always include your address so that the candidate knows that you live in the riding for which they are seeking election. Make sure your candidate knows how to reach you and include your phone number if you are comfortable.

Express appreciation: Thank them for their time and consideration and add a note about another initiative that they may have taken part in to show that you are following their activities.

Follow up: Candidates are busy, and it may take days to respond. Follow up via phone or email to confirm that they received your letter if you have not received a timely response. When you do receive a response, send a follow-up thank-you letter and ask follow-up questions if their response has not addressed your questions or concerns. Follow-up letters often have a much larger impact than the initial communication as the candidate will recognize the importance of the issue to you.

ABOUT PARKINSON CANADA

Parkinson Canada empowers the Parkinson's community through tailored programs and services, innovative research, and raising the voice of Canadians impacted by Parkinson's through our advocacy efforts. Our purpose is to inspire and empower people living with Parkinson's to thrive.

A national registered charity, Parkinson Canada fulfils its mission through the generosity of donors.

Please visit parkinson.ca, call [1-800-565-3000](tel:1-800-565-3000), or email info@parkinson.ca in English or French for more information.

