

NDP Response: Canadian Association of Professional Employees

- 1. In August, the government announced that it will make vaccines mandatory for all federal employees or face penalties.**

Q. a) What is your party's official position on mandatory vaccination for essential and non-essential public service employees?

b) What types of accommodation is your party willing to consider for unvaccinated public service employees?

Vaccinations for COVID-19 are a key element in protecting public safety, stopping the spread of COVID-19, preventing our hospitals from being overloaded, and ending the COVID-19 pandemic. New Democrats support mandatory vaccinations for public service employees, along with education and work to remove barriers to vaccination. For workers who are unable to be vaccinated for health reasons, we will ensure that accommodations are put in place that respect collective agreements. For workers who refuse to be vaccinated, without a reason related to health status, we would expect that the collective agreement will be followed, including, where required and as a last resort, progressive discipline.

- 2. The Covid-19 global pandemic led to unprecedented government spending measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians.**

Q. What are your key priorities in a post-pandemic economic recovery plan?

We need to build a recovery for all Canadians, not just those at the top. The NDP fought to deliver real help to workers and families throughout the pandemic, and we will continue to fight to ensure that the future is more affordable, more secure, and more hopeful for all Canadians.

We are coming out of the pandemic with our health care services stretched to the breaking point, rising costs, stagnant wages, and a looming climate crisis. The NDP's recovery plan takes climate change seriously, while investing in the programs and services that make life easier and more affordable for Canadians. This includes creating a national pharmacare strategy, a dental care plan, investments in affordable housing, and access to affordable high-speed internet and cell phone service in every region of the country. We will create good green jobs through our investments in communities and infrastructure. We will boost wages and working conditions for those who care for our loved ones. We will tackle poverty through the creation of a guaranteed livable income. We will work side by side with Indigenous Peoples towards true reconciliation.

And we will make sure that the super rich pay their fair share, rather than downloading the costs onto ordinary families and small businesses, who have already borne the brunt of the pandemic.

- 3. Canada's public deficit is estimated to stand at \$155 billion in 2021 and \$60 billion in 2022-23, according to an April 2021 Global news [article](#).**

Q. How will you address the public debt while ensuring continued public services to Canadians?

Canadians depend on the public services and programs delivered by Canada's professional and dedicated public servants. That's why we need to ensure these programs are as strong as possible and funded sustainably. New Democrats' investments in our public services and in our communities will help our economy return to strong growth, while also reducing inequality and making life more affordable for ordinary people. We will also make sure that wealthy individuals and corporations are paying their fair share through the implementation of a wealth tax, a temporary COVID-19 excess profit tax, a roll-back of the Conservative corporate income tax cut, and by cracking down on tax evasion and cheating.

We will manage Canada's public debt responsibly, borrowing when required to rebuild and defend the services that Canadians rely on, and moving to balance when it is prudent to do so, keeping Canada's long-run finances fiscally sustainable according to the PBO's fiscal sustainability measures.

- 4. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most public service employees have been working remotely/teleworking since March 2019. As part of Public Services and Procurement Canada's "pathfinder project", 200 public service employees recently volunteered to participate in a pilot project that "will inform a broader plan for a return to the workplace."**

Q. What will your party do to ensure the health and safety of federal public service employees?

All workers have a legal right to safe and healthy workplace, while Canadians need to know that they can access public programs and services safely. That's why the NDP supports mandatory vaccinations for COVID-19 for federal public servants. We will work with the public service unions to provide education to workers and to remove barriers to vaccination where necessary. We will also work with the public service unions on safe workplace protocols to ensure that workers can return to workplaces safely when the time comes, to provide accommodations for workers who are immune-compromised, and to protect the safety of Canadians seeking services.

- 5. The review of the *Employment Equity Act* is currently underway – something that has not happened since 1995.**

Q. What does your party see as key changes necessary to the current Employment Equity Act and how do you propose making those changes come to fruition?

Unfortunately, the current Employment Equity Act has not done enough to root out systemic problems such as discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or ability. A New Democrat government will conduct a comprehensive review of the existing employment equity regime to help close the gap for workers who identify as women, as racialized, and/or as persons living with disabilities. We will also ensure diverse and equitable hiring within the federal public service.

The Act also fails entirely to provide protection to Canadians who are discriminated against because they are LGBTQI2S+. A New Democrat government will add sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to the Employment Equity Act in order to address the disadvantages experienced by the LGBTQI2S+ community in employment.

6. **Raymond Th  berge, Commissioner of Official Languages, in the tabling of the 2020-2021 [annual report](#), wrote that “profound changes [are] needed in the federal public service to ensure effective bilingual services to Canadians.”**

With the dissolution of Parliament, all bills, including Bill C-32, an *Act for the Substantive Equality of French and English and the Strengthening of the Official Languages Act*, died on the order paper.

Q. Given the critical importance to modernize the Official Languages Act, do you commit to introduce/reintroduce a bill to strengthen the Act to bolster the capacity of the public service to defend and promote our linguistic duality within the first 100 days of forming the government

Canadians are proud of our two official languages, which constitute an important part of our identity and of our communities across the country. The NDP is firmly committed to the right of minority language communities to receive services from the federal government in their own language. But for too long, the Liberals have ignored the difficulty that many francophones face in accessing services in French. The Liberals cynically waited until the last week of the Parliamentary session to introduce a bill to reform the *Official Languages Act*, then they called an election before it could even be debated.

An NDP government will take swift action to modernize the *Official Languages Act*, strengthening oversight and accountability, expanding the scope of language rights, and improving access to services in the language of choice for all Canadians.

7. **The Federal Court of Appeal recently ruled that federal agencies cannot violate an employee’s right to work in French “by forcing them to communicate daily with monolingual Anglophone specialists...”. This ruling came after a retired public service employee took his employer to court in 2019 because he had to work predominantly in English, as his work required “daily contact with monolingual English-speaking colleagues...”. He failed in federal court in 2019 and appealed the ruling.**

Q. How would your party ensure the rights of Francophone public service employees are protected when carrying out official duties?

The NDP strongly supports the bilingual nature of our public institutions and public service. That’s why we have fought to ensure that Supreme Court Justices and Officers of Parliament are bilingual. We have also fought to protect bilingual positions within the public service, including submitting a complaint to the Commissioner of Official Languages when the Conservative government arbitrarily and unilaterally changed bilingual positions within the CRA to unilingual positions. We know that when the right to work and receive services in the official language of your choice is allowed to erode, it is always francophones who are at risk of losing their right to receive services or work in their own language.

An NDP government will continue to fight to protect minority language rights. We will enhance the Action Plan for Official Languages to improve access to services in the language of choice, including working with the provinces and territories to improve minority language education. We will also adopt the principle of asymmetry, which recognizes that as a minority official language, French requires particular protection and promotion.

8. **The federal government is recognized as the national champion of the promotion and protection of Canada’s official languages. However, the quality and uniformity of translation and interpretation are in constant decline: Since 1995, not all translations have been quality-controlled by a central body. The lack of quality and uniformity of communications in the two official languages has resulted in significant financial costs. (Translation Bureau – *Economic Assessment of the Service Delivery Model*. PWC. September 2018.)**

During the Government’s review of the *Official Languages Act* of 2019, CAPE recommended making the Translation Bureau the Federal Government’s Official Language Centre of Excellence and to expand the pool of employees as a way to address the quality and uniformity of the language and to reduce those excessive costs.

Q. Do you commit to seeing this recommendation through if you were to form the Government? Yes or No. Explain.

The NDP recognizes the important role of translation and interpretation in making our public institutions fully bilingual and accessible to Canadians. The mission of the Translation Bureau is more than just inputs and outputs; it is about supporting the *Official Languages Act* by maintaining the equality of both official languages and preserving the integrity and quality of translations. We recognize that the Translation Bureau needs resources and permanent employees in order to accomplish this mission. We also acknowledge that building up the skills of young people is essential to developing the skills of the next generation of translators and interpreters. An NDP government will work with the public service unions to ensure that we are doing everything we can to reinforce and support the excellence of translation and interpretation within the public service.

9. **Through its participation on the Joint Task Force on Mental Health and other working groups and committees, CAPE has invested time and effort to keep government’s attention on the mental health of its employees, advocating for more and better measures to support employees struggling with mental health issues.¹**

Q. What would your party do to strengthen current mental health initiatives and what additional measures will you support to address the severity of this problem, especially considering the extra challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic?

COVID-19 took an enormous toll on the mental health of Canadians, but non-emergency mental health care is excluded from our public health care system. New Democrats will work to expand our public health care system to include all mental health care, beginning by ensuring that Canadians who do not have insurance for mental health care services can access care at no cost. Our comprehensive pharmacare plan will also mean that prescription medication for mental health care will be available free of cost to Canadians.

For workers who need paid sick time to access mental health care or because of mental health challenges, an NDP government will move immediately to legislate 10 paid sick days for workers in federally regulated workplaces. We will also work with the provinces to bring in a permanent safety net of paid sick leave across the country, and to close the gap until every worker has access to paid sick

¹ <https://www.acep-cape.ca/en/news/world-mental-health-day>

days, we will fix the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and keep it in place until all Canadians have access to paid sick days.

10. A total of 188,786 employees in 87 federal departments and agencies responded to the 2020 Public Service Employee Survey, for a response rate of 61%. Overall, 11% of survey respondents reported facing harassment, and 7% reported facing discrimination.²

Q. What measures will your party put in place to address racism, sexism, and overall discrimination in the workplace, whether from supervisors or colleagues.

All workers have the right to a safe workplace, free from harassment and discrimination, yet unfortunately, harassment, discrimination, and toxic workplaces are all too common in the federal public service. In fact, harassment complaints have risen sharply at some federal departments and agencies. Sadly, the Liberal government, although aware of this situation, has refused to take action to protect workers, including workers at Rideau Hall who were subject to abuse and harassment from the former Governor General. The NDP will take complaints of harassment and discrimination seriously, responding swiftly and in accordance with collective agreements and human rights legislation. We will also work with public service unions to build a culture of respect, to put an end to practices that contribute to stress, precarity, and discrimination in the workplace, including the extensive use of contracting out, and to support equitable hiring and compensation within the public service.

11. In recent years, there has been a heightened awareness of harassment and discrimination cases in the federal workplace.

Q. What specific measures will your party undertake to address these issues?

See answer above.

12. In June 2021, the Government of Canada announced a [Digital Government Strategy](#) to digitalize the government to better serve Canadians.

Q. What is your party's stance on artificial intelligence and digital transformation in the public service?

New Democrats recognize that new digital tools can provide an opportunity to provide better, more efficient services to Canadians. But we also acknowledge that there are significant privacy concerns and security risks when using digital tools and platforms. Furthermore, the transition to new digital tools and programs can have a detrimental effect on Canadians and on workers if it is not handled with great care. The rollout of the Phoenix pay system is an all too unfortunate example of this.

An NDP government will strengthen privacy protections for Canadians by adopting a digital bill of privacy rights and boosting the powers of the Privacy Commissioner to make and enforce orders and levy fines and penalties. We will work with public service unions to put measures in place to support

² https://nouvelle.news/2021/07/the-reality-of-discrimination-harassment-in-canadas-public-service-op-ed/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=the-reality-of-discrimination-harassment-in-canadas-public-service-op-ed

workers and to build skills during the transition to new tools and to ensure that new digital tools are used to enhance services to Canadians, not to replace good jobs.

13. Federal leadership is critically needed to address environmental degradation and global warming. Public programs and budgets are needed but the federal government must also lead by example, internally.

Q. What does your party propose to make sure government operations are greener and sustainable?

New Democrats recognize that climate change is an existential threat and we are running out of time to address it. We need a government that doesn't just talk about climate change but actually takes action; a government that will tackle the climate emergency with the same sense of urgency Canadians felt about COVID-19. We need a comprehensive approach to build a cleaner, greener future, an approach that includes the federal government leading by example. Under an NDP government, the federal government will be a trail-blazer in energy efficiency, clean technologies and renewable energy use. We will ensure that federal buildings use renewable energy, move the vehicle fleets of the federal government to electric by 2025, and implement a procurement strategy focused on Canadian companies producing clean technology.

14. Canada's public service is one of the most effective and highly performing in the world. It is nimble, adaptable and attracts competent professionals that are the backbone of our federal government.

Q. What is your party's plan to create a work environment that continues to attract and retain excellence within the federal public service?

New Democrats recognize the crucial role that the public service plays in delivering the public programs Canadians depend on and we support Canada's dedicated and professional public servants. We will work with public service unions to build a culture of respect for workers, to support diverse and equitable hiring, implement measures that ensure pay equity and eliminate racial discrimination in wages, take action to put an end to harassment, and work to reduce the inefficient and costly practice of contracting out government work.

15. A wide range of issues affect the performance and effectiveness of federal public service employees.

Q. What does your party consider the most pressing issue affecting public service employees and why?

New Democrats believe that the most pressing issue affecting public service employees is the lack of respect afforded by your employer, the federal government, whether it's due to the failed Phoenix pay system, the increase in workplace harassment, discrimination against Black and racialized employees, and the long failure to take action on pay equity. Public servants make an incredible contribution to our country and they deserve a government, and an employer, that treats them with respect. We will work with public service unions to build a culture of respect for workers, to support diverse and equitable hiring, implement measures that ensure pay equity and eliminate racial discrimination in wages, take action to put an end to harassment, and work to reduce the inefficient and costly practice of contracting out government work.

16. In May 2020, the federal government announced that SAP (a German multinational that creates business management software) had been selected to work on a replacement for the beleaguered Phoenix pay system – the bane of existence for thousands of public service employees due to persistent problems.

Q. What lessons has your party learned from the financial and technological disaster of the Phoenix pay system and how will you ensure that public services employees will not be subjected to similar or new problems with a new system?

The implementation of the Phoenix pay system was an unmitigated disaster – one that should have been addressed much sooner by the Liberal government. No other workers in Canada are expected to work without pay or for the incorrect amount of pay; it was completely unacceptable that the federal government as an employer could tell public servants that they needed to. The failure to address Phoenix also had ramifications for other public programs and services, with public servants afraid to move to new positions for fear that their pay would be stopped if they did. Phoenix represented a failure on many fronts – a failure to invest the resources necessary to understand what was needed and build an appropriate system, a failure to adequately test an important system before rolling it out, a failure to listen to warnings that the system was not ready to go, a failure to address problems swiftly once they were identified, a failure to provide adequate training, support, and resources for the staff who were supposed to implement Phoenix, and a failure to acknowledge, apologize, and provide restitution for the very serious harm that was done.

An NDP government will work with public service unions in replacing the Phoenix pay system to ensure that these problems are not replicated, that the needs and the expertise of public servants are listened to and that their feedback is incorporated. We will also ensure that there is adequate training and resources for the staff who process pay and enough agents to ensure that public servants have someone to turn to when there are issues to resolve.