

May 23, 2018

Precious Maseko and Holly Gauvin  
Co-Chairs  
Ontario AIDS Network

Wendy Pinder  
Acting Executive Director  
Ontario AIDS Network

Dear Precious, Holly, and Wendy,

Thank you for your letter and questionnaire. And thank you for the dedicated work and advocacy of the Ontario AIDS Network (OAN) and your member agencies.

In communities across Ontario, AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) and community-based programs provide exceptionally important services to people living with HIV, their families and loved ones, and people at risk. It is because of the tireless efforts of frontline workers, advocates, and community members that significant progress has been made to diagnose, treat, and prevent HIV. Thank you for your continuing efforts to improve the health of Ontarians and ensure that everyone lives with the support they need – and the dignity they deserve.

Ontario's New Democrats are proud to strongly support your efforts. In June 2017, Andrea Horwath hosted a roundtable discussion with representatives of ASOs to discuss the importance of ensuring access to medications for the treatment and prevention of HIV. Ontario NDP Health Critic France Gelinias advocated for the public release of the new provincial HIV strategy, after community members waited almost two years for the Liberal government to approve it. And on November 28, 2017, Mme Gelinias filed the following motion in the Legislature to urge the Government of Ontario to officially adopt the Ontario Accord:

*That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should officially adopt the Ontario Accord and urge the Government of Ontario to facilitate the greater involvement and meaningful engagement of people living with HIV/AIDS in all decisions, taken across government, that relate to the health, well-being, and dignity of people living with and affected by HIV.*

If Ontario's New Democrats have the privilege of forming Ontario's next government on June 7<sup>th</sup>, we are absolutely committed to working with you to implement the *HIV/AIDS Strategy to 2026*, to invest in the supports that people and communities need, and to end the epidemic by 2026. Together, we *can* make history – and the actions and decisions of Ontario's next government will be crucial to making that happen.

An Ontario NDP government led by Andrea Horwath will adopt the United Nations' 90-90-90 targets and make ending HIV/AIDS in Ontario over the next eight years a priority for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. To help achieve this, we will support enhanced early diagnosis initiatives as well as proven prevention and harm reduction programs. And we will commit to working with the Ontario AIDS Network, ASOs, and people living with HIV, and at risk of HIV to meet the UN targets by 2026. Most importantly, we will ensure greater and more meaningful involvement of people living with HIV in every government decision that impacts people living with and at risk of HIV, in line with the principle of "nothing about us without us."

As we work to achieve our shared goal of ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic – and ending stigma – we must make crucial investments in health care, housing, and income security.

We will invest in health care, including an additional \$1.2 billion this year for hospital funding and an investment in 35 new community health centres across Ontario to expand access to non-profit community-based care that meets the needs of all Ontarians, including the most vulnerable and at-risk priority populations.

We will improve access to medications for all Ontarians and help treat and prevent new infections. Ontario's New Democrats will build Canada's first universal Pharmacare program – a prescription drug program for everyone. Today, Ontario's existing patchwork of private employer-provided benefits plans and public drug benefit programs leave at least 2.2 million Ontarians with no prescription drug coverage. We will change that by delivering public drug coverage for all Ontarians. Our Pharmacare plan will improve access to medications required to treat and prevent HIV. It is based on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines, which includes HIV treatment medications and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medications for the purposes of preventing HIV.

In addition to building universal Pharmacare, New Democrats have a plan to deliver dental care for everyone. With our Ontario Benefits plan, all workers will have health benefits for themselves and their family – and we will provide public funding to deliver dental coverage for all seniors without retiree benefits and all social assistance recipients. Drug and dental coverage for all Ontarians will make Ontario a better place to work. This is a particularly important commitment for employees of community-based non-profit organizations, including ASOs, who have not been able to receive drug and dental coverage at work. With the NDP plan, all workers will know that they can continue to devote themselves to the work they love, including non-profit community work, while having the security of prescription drug and dental coverage for themselves and their family.

Furthermore, New Democrats understand the importance of stable, affordable housing for all Ontarians – including people living with HIV and people at risk. That’s why our platform includes a commitment to build 30,000 new supportive housing units over the next ten years, as recommended by community advocates and experts. We will build at least 3,000 supportive housing units each year and fund ongoing rent supplements and support staff costs. We will invest \$228 million per year in capital funding, plus operational funding that increases by \$50 million per year.

We also recognize that income security is vital for all Ontarians – and we know that the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) provides crucial income support and access to medications for many people living with HIV. We will increase ODSP rates by five percent annually for three years. Future increases will be based on achieving income adequacy and set by an independent panel. We endorse the call by income security advocates, including the provincial *Income Security Roadmap for Change* report, to develop a minimum income standard over the next decade that will lift people out of poverty.

Thank you, once again, for the incredible work and advocacy that the OAN and your member agencies are doing every day to improve people’s lives. Together, we can close the gaps, improve care for all Ontarians, and achieve what was once unthinkable – we can end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2026. We look forward to working with you to make history.

Sincerely,

Ontario’s New Democrats