

Dear Brandon,

Thank you for your email and the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire.

First however, I would like to give you a little background of my own activism as an ally. I was among the first high school teachers to support and mentor a GSA in my school. I gave many presentations and workshops at various conferences and training sessions for teachers in the need for GSAs and the tools to use in supporting students in this way. These presentations led to my being identified by some right-wing media as “The Enemy Within.”

I was aggressive in promoting Equity policies in our school board, to include gender and sexual diversity, leading to much derision and even physical attacks, however also leading to implementation of a successful policy.

I was among the key figures, as president of my unit, to have the union local and eventually the provincial body of the Ontario Catholic Teachers to endorse and participate in the Toronto Pride parade. I was the author of several successful resolutions establishing support for the student and teacher members of the community.

I was part of the initial meetings of York Pride and most recently I was invited to give a workshop on Transgender students’ rights and needs and how schools can (must) make accommodations for inclusion.

So, I do have some history as a very active ally and have not come to the struggle recently.

1. What do you believe are the main concerns of gender and sexually diverse people in Ontario? What specific actions will take to improve the lives and wellbeing of gender and sexually diverse communities?

3. Trans and gender diverse people lack quality, accessible healthcare in Ontario. In what ways do you think the Government can better support access to medical services and specialists for trans patients in the province? In what ways will you bolster access to trans-inclusive healthcare?

11. What steps will you take to end invasive, medically unnecessary operations on Intersex children?

Thanks to strong community activism, the LGBTQIA2S+ community has won many important victories over the past 15 years. Access to safe, inclusive, and equitable environments, however, continues to be a struggle. Access to vital medications remain largely inaccessible for those between the ages of 25-65, and access to primary gender affirming surgery remains elusive, particularly for those living outside of Toronto.

Secondary gender affirming surgeries are viewed as cosmetic and are not covered at all by the Wynne Liberals.

Members of the LGBTQIA2S+ communities should not have to fight for these things. Access to the care needed, delivered in a respectful way, should be something every Ontarian can expect from an NDP government.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will work with advocates and health care providers to reduce barriers to care as well as improve access to transition-related surgeries and gender-confirming surgeries provided here in Ontario. We will also ensure that health care decisions respect the internationally-accepted standards of care established by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. Furthermore, through our universal pharmacare program, we will ensure the necessary medications are accessible to everyone who needs them. This includes fully covering the cost of all transition drugs and medications.

2. Many gender and sexually diverse youth haven't seen themselves reflected in the curriculum. Where do you stand on the current elementary and secondary health and physical curriculum, and how will you ensure that youth get the information they need?

The current Health curriculum is a solid step in addressing the new reality in which youth find themselves and I strongly support it and the consultative process that helped bring it about. Where it is still lacking is in providing the kinds of background resource materials for both teachers and students, especially as relates to addressing identities of gender and sexually diverse youth. So, the document is a work in progress to be augmented by more resources. Personally I particularly benefitted from the work of Egale Canada in preparing much of the material I used in my presentations.

4. The gender and sexually diverse community are disproportionately affected by mental health and addictions due to various social and economic factors. What steps will you take to improve the overall mental health and wellness of our community?

New Democrats recognize that several barriers exist in accessing adequate mental health supports, particularly for the youth in the LGBTQIA2S+ community. As a result, we will hire 2,600 new mental health care workers to provide better, faster access to mental health care for 28,000 more Ontarians every year – and make sure every high school has mental health supports for students. Further, we will cut children's mental health wait times to a 30-day maximum, with a \$590 million investment. Andrea and the NDP believe it's time for mental health and addictions services to get the focus and funding they deserve.

5. Gender and sexually diverse people are less likely to be hired or secure stable employment, and experience wage disparity in comparison to their cisgender (non-trans) and heterosexual peers. What initiatives do you believe the Government can develop or support in order to reduce the rate of unemployment and underemployment in the gender and sexually diverse community?

We know that Doug Ford and the Conservatives are not allies of the LGBTQIA2S+ community. Their record speaks for itself: they have voted against several important pieces of legislation, including against gender identity and gender expression in Ontario's Human Rights Code (Toby's Act, 2012), against Gay-Straight Alliances (Accepting Schools Act, 2012), and against recognizing LGBTQIA2S+ parents (All Families Are Equal Act, 2016). They also have candidates running in this election who continue to be critical of Ontario's ban of conversion therapy.

6. What will you do to help end the one-year MSM ("men who have sex with men") blood ban?

We will continue to push for the end of the one-year MSM ("men who have sex with men") blood ban – which is highly discriminatory.

7. What will you do to help end the criminalization of people living with HIV/AIDS

10. How do you intend on increasing support to HIV/AIDS organizations in Ontario?

We look forward to working with the federal government to advance the issues of the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Our pharmacare plan will also improve access to medications required to treat and prevent HIV, including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medications for the purposes of preventing HIV. Further, 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".

8. The principles of Truth and Reconciliation are important to addressing the impact of colonialism on Two-Spirit/gender and sexually diverse Indigenous peoples. What does your plan for Truth and Reconciliation look like? Will you fully implement the 94 Calls to Action, and how will you address the impacts of colonialism?

Under an NDP government, we will also ensure that our school curriculum reflects the full, rich story of Indigenous peoples, the lasting impacts of colonialism and residential

schools, as well as the need for reconciliation. The reality is that it has been nearly three years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission delivered its report, and its 94 calls to action to heal the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. Yet First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Ontario continue to face systemic barriers to basic rights enjoyed by others in Ontario — dirty water, unsafe housing, gendered violence, unfair treatment by the justice system and more. Reconciliation demands a lot more than ceremonies and symbolic gestures. It demands good faith — and it demands action. We will take action on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations, setting priorities in consultation First Nations and others, with a desire to move first on the recommendations related specifically to provincial jurisdiction

13. Gender and sexually diverse youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population. What specific steps would you take to address the gender and sexually diverse youth homelessness crisis in Ontario?

14. Many gender and sexually diverse people are concerned about moving into retirement communities, care facilities, or having at home care out of fear of having to “go back into the closet” or because they fear they won’t receive sensitive, informed care. How will you ensure long-term care will competently accommodate and work with the gender and sexually diverse community? What steps will you take to improve long term care for our community?

For seniors in LGBTQIA2S+ community, the reality is that they feel they must return to ‘the closet’ when they move to long-term care facilities. An NDP government will ensure that LGBTQIA2S+ people have access to long-term care that is fully affirming and inclusive. Moving into long-term care should never mean having to move back into the closet.

As part of our affordable housing strategy, an NDP government will make the necessary investments in affordable housing to build 65,000 new affordable housing units over 10 years, working with partners such as the federal government and the not-for-profit and co-op housing sectors. We will also build 30,000 new supportive housing units over the next 10 years and expect to have dedicated spots for the LGBTQIA2S+ community — particularly LGBTQIA2S+ youth, who we know are overrepresented in the homeless youth population. New Democrats strongly believe that housing as a human right.

Dave Szollosy
NDP Candidate for York-Simcoe