

OASW Federal Election Readiness Guide 2015

Dear OASW Member:

July 2015

With the federal election on October 19th, the future direction of Canada is at stake. Policy decisions made by the next Parliament will directly impact on poverty reduction, health care funding, affordable housing, Aboriginal Peoples, refugee health coverage, the long-form census and the physical punishment of children. During the next three months, you will have a chance to meet with political candidates of all parties and find out about their priorities on key issues of relevance to the social work profession.

This OASW *Federal Election Readiness Guide 2015* provides a sampling of national issues that OASW has addressed as it relates to social workers on a provincial level. The Guide contains questions to propose to political candidates that may help you decide on whom you will support. However, I encourage you to do your own research to complement the Guide, especially within your own federal riding.

Sincerely, Dan Andreae, MSW, RSW, EdD, LLD (Hon)
Chair, OASW Government Relations Advisory Committee

Note: The following issues are significant because of the social work profession's core values and principles related to human rights and equality and include: respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons; equitable distribution of resources to meet basic human needs, with special regard for those who are marginalized and disadvantaged; the right to affordable housing; and the child's right to safety and well-being and freedom from violence.

Issue #1: Lack of a federal poverty reduction strategy for a country like Canada, one of the world's wealthiest nations.

OASW fully supports the establishment of a federal Poverty Reduction Strategy with measurable and attainable goals.

- Poverty impacts all aspects of people's lives, has profound implications on physical and mental health as well as on society as a whole. Over 4.5 million Canadians (1 in 7) now live in poverty and Canada ranks 24th of 35 industrialized countries concerning child and adult poverty rates. As a result of an increase in poverty, over 840,000 Canadians now rely on food banks each month to meet their basic needs and over one-third of those helped are children and youth. At a higher risk for poverty are children of immigrants, of single mothers, of racialized families, of Aboriginal identity, and those with a disability.
- Low-income and poverty involving the Social Determinants of Health are among the single greatest predictors of illness for Canadians. Poverty also incurs a cost of approximately \$25 billion each year alone in preventable healthcare, social service and judicial system costs across Canada.
- Campaign 2000, a coalition of 120 national, community and provincial partners (including OASW), works to increase public awareness of the levels and consequences of child/family poverty by publishing research on the indicators of child poverty and developing public education resources. Campaign 2000 recommends a federal poverty-reduction strategy and action plan, in consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty, and to adequately fund its implementation.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. How will you and your Party, if elected, work towards establishing an overall strategy to reduce child and family poverty, with measurable and attainable goals?
2. Is your Party prepared to raise the maximum Child Tax Benefit for low-income families?
3. What are your Party's plans to initiate and invest in an affordable, accessible, quality child care system as a way to support low-income families?
4. How would you propose working with other levels of government (provincial & municipal) to reduce poverty?

Issue #2: Reduced Health Care Funding

OASW fully supports the funding of a universal health care system that meets the needs of all Canadians.

- Health care, which is a fundamental right for all Canadians, is at a critical juncture in this country. By not renewing the Health Accord in 2014, the federal government lost its ability to tie national standards to federal transfer dollars resulting in increasing variability in the quantity and quality of health care services across Canada with some people receiving fewer services and substandard care
- As the federal government decreases its contribution to the total costs of Medicare from 20% to less than 12%, good health care planning is almost impossible.
- The expiry of the Health Accord has also meant the loss of an opportunity to expand public health care into new areas such as **pharmacare** -- Canada remains the only country with a universal health care system that does not include medicines, and continuing care (palliative, home, long-term and hospice) – which we recommend.
- The federal share of health care spending has decreased dramatically at the very time Canada’s population is aging, placing an enormous financial strain on provincial and territorial governments. The need to establish a **national aging strategy** and **public home care system** is imperative.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. What is your Party’s position to ensure that the federal government contributes a significant proportion of the cost of health care in Canada?
2. What is your Party’s position on developing and implementing a universal **pharmacare** program?
3. What is your Party’s position on implementing a **national aging strategy** to ensure a **cohesive continuum of care** (home, long-term, palliative and hospice) in Canada?
4. If elected, what particular health issues would you address and make a priority?

Issue #3: Affordable Housing/Homelessness – Lack of Commitment to a National Affordable Housing Strategy and of Financial Investment in Building Affordable Housing

OASW fully supports a national affordable housing strategy.

- In the 1990s, the federal government significantly reduced investments in affordable housing and yet over the past 25 years, Canada’s population has increased by 30 per cent.
- Today, Canada is the only G8 country without a National Housing Strategy that would commit to funding housing expansion for current and future generations.
- Nearly one in five households spend more than 50 per cent of their income on rent. Moreover, there are 150,000 to 300,000 Canadians who are visibly homeless, plus an additional 450,000 to 900,000 people who are among the “hidden homeless”.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. What is your Party’s position on affordable housing and homelessness?
2. If elected, how would you as an MP take action in regard to affordable housing and homelessness and would you make either or both a priority?
3. What is your position on public-private partnerships regarding affordable housing development?
4. How would you propose working with other levels of government on affordable housing and homelessness, or either issue?

Issue #4: Underfunding of Services for Aboriginal Peoples, Especially Those Living on Reserves (Child Welfare, Adequate Housing & Safe Water)

OASW fully supports the necessary funding of services for Aboriginal Peoples.

- A ground-breaking complaint was filed before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in 2007 charging that the Government of Canada is discriminating against First Nations children by underfunding services. Following a series of delays, a ruling is expected in 2015. (For more information, visit <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness>).
- Access to adequate housing and safe water is a critical concern. For example, the continuing housing crisis in Attawapiskat (in the news since 2011) requires both short-term and long-term solutions based upon the core principles of self-determination, respect for culture and sustainable support for community-based solutions.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. What is your Party's position on how to address challenges faced by Aboriginal Peoples due to the underfunding of child protection services, health, education and housing?
2. What is your Party's position on how the complaint against the Government of Canada before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal should be resolved?
3. If elected, how would you as an MP take action in regard to Aboriginal Peoples?
4. If elected, will you work to establish a national public inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls?
5. In your opinion, which of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission related to residential schools require the most immediate attention?
6. How would you and your Party ensure that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples becomes a foundation for relations with First Nations, requiring federal and provincial governments to make regular accounts on its implementation?

Issue #5: Cuts to Refugee Health Coverage

OASW fully supports the reinstatement of refugee health coverage.

- Currently, most sponsored refugees are no longer covered for supplementary health benefits and the burden has been transferred to the sponsors. This dates back to June 2012, when the Federal Government implemented cuts to its Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP), claiming that the cuts will save taxpayers' money. This program covers basic health care for refugees and refugee claimants. In July 2014, the Federal Court struck down the cuts to the IFHP as unconstitutional, on the basis that the Federal Government had a responsibility under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* for a population that have already endured extreme hardship and victimization in their countries of origin.
- The government appealed the decision and extended coverage for only some groups.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. What is your Party's position on refugee health coverage?
2. If elected, how would you as an MP take action in regard to refugee health coverage and would you make it a priority?
3. What is your position on family reunification among refugees and immigrants who have frequently experienced separation for prolonged periods of time or indefinitely, due to policies and practices that block or delay reunification?

Issue #6: Long-Form Census – Lack of Comprehensive Census Data to be Used for the Planning & Funding of Services

OASW fully supports reinstating the mandatory long-form census.

- Census data has long been used by a wide variety of organizations for a multitude of purposes ever since Confederation and within the social work profession, it has been used to plan needed services, take action on issues, inform the development of social policy and understand, for example, the dynamics of poverty.
- In 2010, the mandatory long-form census was abolished and replaced with a voluntary census instrument which has been considered inferior, because the data it yields is not as comprehensive. The government's rationale was that it wanted to protect privacy; however, it was difficult to justify this argument with the fact that all the data is depersonalized for statistical purposes, and therefore cannot be traced to any individual.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. What is your Party's position on the long-form census?
2. If elected, will you advocate for re-instituting the long-form census?
3. If you support a return to the long-form census, would you make it mandatory or voluntary?
4. If you do not support the long-form census, how do you justify the lack of evidence to plan and fund health care and social services and programs?

Issue #7: Physical Punishment of Children Sanctioned in Section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*.

OASW fully supports the repeal of Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

- Section 43 dates back to 1892 and sanctions the use of physical punishment for children by teachers and parents in the name of "correction". In fact, Canada is in violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child despite its ratification in 1991.
- This law should not contradict the growing and persuasive body of research evidence that physical punishment has no benefit and poses only risk to children and youth.

Sample Questions to Ask Political Candidates

1. What is your Party's position on the repeal of Section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*?
2. If elected, how would you as an MP take action in regard to the use of physical punishment for children by teachers and parents as sanctioned by Section 43?
3. Do you believe that Canadian children's rights to physical integrity and dignity must be recognized in the repeal of existing legislation?
4. Do you believe that children in Canada must be given the same protection from physical assault as that given to Canadian adults and to children in a growing number of countries?