



June 24, 2024

Hon. Pierre Poilievre, P.C., M.P.
Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Poilievre,

As you are likely aware, to help address the recruitment and retention of professionals in rural and remote locations, Budget 2024 committed to the inclusion of social workers in the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program which currently serves doctors and nurses.

As a party deeply concerned with the well-being of Canada's numerous rural and remote communities, I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) to stress the importance of including a commitment to social workers in the Conservative Party of Canada's upcoming election platform specific to the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program.

As the national professional association for social work in Canada, comprised of ten Partner Organizations in the provinces and territories, CASW has a mandate to support not only the profession, but to work towards the increased well-being of all those in Canada.

CASW has met with the office of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages of Canada and staff have indicated the expanded program is not set to begin until late 2025.

With the timing of the next federal election in mind, we are seeking to ensure that your party appreciates the value of this policy both in terms of its impact on Canadians' health and social well-being, and as a potential election issue.

There are approximately 60,000 social workers in Canada. As the most numerous mental health providers in the country, social workers are indeed often found in mental health and substance use roles but have a much broader scope of practice and unique training that spans across health and social care settings. Moreover, social workers can provide many of the same types of care as other professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health nurses, but at a significantly lower price point.

At the same time, an egregious discrepancy between the availability of health, mental health and social care services in urban and rural areas persists. And, considering Canada's particular context

in which Indigenous communities are often also rural or remote, already underserved populations are further disadvantaged.

CASW agrees with the current government that this policy is undeniably beneficial not only for those living in rural and remote communities, but also in terms of helping to address rural-urban disparities and control rising health care costs. And CASW's membership agrees, as well: CASW held a letter writing campaign on this issue that generated thousands of messages to Members of Parliament.

Depending on the federal election's timeline, we hope to see a commitment either to delivering or to maintaining an expanded Canada Student Loan forgiveness program which includes social workers in your platform.

Finally, as social and health professionals closely connected to various social issues, social workers bring a unique perspective and can add value to your policy discussions regarding our country's most pressing issues. To this end, CASW would be delighted to meet with your party's platform team – at their convenience – to discuss the many pressing issues facing our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Fred Phelps', enclosed within a circular scribble.

Fred Phelps, MSW, RSW, CAE
CASW Executive Director