

National Cancer-fighting Strategy

A comprehensive plan to reduce the incidence of cancer, facilitate treatment and improve quality of life

The Green Party of Canada

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1. Executive Summary

With the ever-growing incidence of cancer in Canada, creating a National Cancer-fighting Strategy is the only effective way to save the lives of millions of Canadians while also preventing an economically damaging situation due to the projected health care costs associated with the disease and loss of government revenue from rising mortality and reduced productivity.

Canada is one of the few nations in the developed world that has failed to implement a strategy for cancer control. We are now paying the price for this failure, as cancer has become our nation's leading cause of premature death. In 2004 alone, it took 68,000 lives – a number that is projected to double by 2010. The risk to our well-being and the economic costs of health care expenditure are making Canada's non-existent cancer plan a national threat.

The Green Party's plan is to construct a sound cancer-fighting strategy ensuring peace of mind and better quality of life. The Green Party aims to create cost-effective strategies for management and treatment of various cancers. Through a systematic and equitable implementation of evidence-based strategies for prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care, an estimated \$39 billion will be saved in direct health care costs alone over the next thirty years. Green Party MPs would pressure the federal government to solidify its commitment to reducing cancer in Canada through the allocation of \$100 million over 5 years to a national cancer plan.

Green Party MPs will work to:

- Avoid preventable tumours and limit cancer incidence by implementing legislation that would reduce exposure to risk factors (such as tobacco use, unhealthy diets, harmful use of alcohol, sedentary lifestyles, infectious agents and occupational hazards).
- Increase survival and reduce mortality by early detection and treatment of amenable cancers, (such as oral, cervical, breast, prostate cancers); thereby reducing late presentation and ensuring appropriate treatment.
- Provide appropriate care in order to increase survival, reduce mortality and improve quality of life, of disseminated cancers that have the potential of being cured or the patients' lives prolonged considerably.
- Enhance relief from pain and other symptoms and improve quality of life of advanced cancer patients and their families.

2. Introduction

With rising cancer incidence rates that threaten the lives of many Canadians, the Green Party will introduce a comprehensive and competitive cancer-fighting strategy. Canada's world-class health care system has been a model to countries world wide. However, without a National Cancer Strategy, Canada has already fallen behind. Canadians are

more likely to be afflicted with some form of cancer than citizens of the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Sweden or Singapore – and are more likely to die from it.

Canada is on the brink of a cancer epidemic. As the risk of cancer increases with age, cancer is poised to strike the overwhelming baby boomer demographic over the next decade. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of new cancer cases diagnosed in Canada is forecast to more than double. Combined with the fact that the Canadian population is growing, it is inevitable that this increase will lead to even greater numbers of cancer cases.

According to statistics from the Canadian Cancer Society, of all cancer cases reported per year, at least fifty per cent are preventable. It's projected that Canada will lose \$248 billion in tax revenues alone over the next 30 years due to cancer mortality and lost productivity.

Some aspects of our cancer care are renowned world-wide, but the Canadian approach to cancer control is inconsistent, flawed and driven by political expediency rather than medical realities. Cancer prevention in Canada is underfunded and fragmented. Cancer patients experience uneven levels of care and quality of service. Care is crippled by a growing lack of health care providers and inconsistent support of research.

Although the federal government has failed to commit to implementing and funding a national cancer-fighting strategy, the Green Party recognizes the need to develop a national plan. Following international guidelines framed by the World Health Organization, the Green Party pledges to provide more funding for the integration and dissemination of cancer information and treatment at the preventative, amenable and palliative levels in order to dramatically improve the chances of survival and quality of life of all cancer victims and their families

Our plan builds upon these initiatives and provides a foundation for greater cooperation with NGOs, research clinics, hospitals and community care facilities to take more action in attaining our National Cancer-fighting objectives.

3. Prevention

It is safe to say that the logical place of departure in the battle against cancer is at the preventative stage. Even before malignant tumours begin to develop, there are several ways in which to reduce the risk of their ever forming. One of these ways is by increasing funding for research into the causes of cancer. It is intrinsically more difficult to deal with an enemy if you do not understand the nature and habits of the enemy first.

Unfortunately, sometimes the enemy is not just the cancer itself, but companies that fail to recognize safety laws that prohibit the use of biological, chemical and physical cancer-causing agents, otherwise known as carcinogens. Sometimes it can be genetics, predisposing a family or an individual to the disease. However, even more commonly, something as simple, inexpensive and easily adjustable as bad habits and an unhealthy lifestyle is the greatest threat to contend with.

Green Party MPs will work to:

- Encourage scientific research necessary to increase knowledge about the birth and causes of human cancer, giving priority to tumours that are amenable to cost-effective interventions.
- Participate actively in implementing an integrated health promotion and prevention strategy targeting risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, harmful use of alcohol and exposure to biological, chemical and physical agents known to cause cancer.
- Give higher priority to cancer control planning and implementation for high-risk groups, including relatives of patients and those having experience long-duration and high-intensity carcinogen exposure.

4. Early detection of amenable cancers

While billions of dollars are being doled out for costly treatments at the advanced stages of cancer, it might be smarter to ask: why wasn't this detected sooner? Notwithstanding the financial burden, the physical pain and emotional suffering of cancer patients and their respective families should be incentive enough for the federal government to even out costs and smooth out fragmented cancer-control programs under a uniform strategy.

Green Party MPs will work to:

- Encourage and frame policies for strengthening and maintaining technical equipment for diagnosis and treatment of cancer in hospitals providing oncology and other relevant services.
- Integrate a national cancer-control program in the existing health system – to provide care for the short, medium and long term.
- Reduce waiting times by establishing well-measured and well-monitored criteria in and among health care facilities across the country.

5. Treatment of disseminated cancers

While the word 'cancer' still strikes at the heart of every Canadian, its stigma has been greatly reduced by the fact that many cancers are treatable. Cutting edge research suggests that cervical cancer may be vaccine-preventable; many children survive the onset of childhood leukemia; breast cancer surgery is now able to save a woman's breast while removing malignant tumours. Cancer is not what it was even twenty years-ago, and in that way, Canada has made enormous headway.

However, this progress is greatly threatened by under funding and an increasing lack of health care providers.

Green Party MPs will work to:

- Set priorities based on the national burden of cancer rates, resource availability and health system capacity for cancer control programs.

- Increase funding for research and development of an effective vaccine against cervical cancer.
- Promote research on cost-effectiveness studies of different strategies for management and treatment of various cancers.

6. Palliative-care programs

While it is inevitable that some patients afflicted with cancer will not recover from the disease, there is still much which hospitals and health-care providers can do to ease their suffering, prolong their life and enhance the quality of life. This includes ensuring that every possible available option was either explored or met, and ensuring the necessary health care professionals trained in dealing with dying patients at this most sensitive time in their lives.

Green Party MPs will work to:

- Ensure access to appropriate information in relation to preventive, diagnostic and treatment procedures and options, especially for cancer patients, and to palliative-care options.
- Promote guiding principles on palliative care for cancer patients, including ethical aspects, and improving quality of life for patients and their families.

7. Conclusion

On 19 May 2005, the federal budget passed, but it did not include designated funding for the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control. Rather than set mandatory targets and decisive incentives to put Canada on a par with other countries, the federal government chose to delay the process once again.

Already, cancer costs the Canadian economy more than \$14 billion annually. If cancer rates could be reduced just a few percentage points, a major investment in a national strategy would more than pay for itself. But it's not just about costs, it's also about common sense and, most importantly, the friends and families of thousands of Canadians who suffer from the disease.

Canadians can wait no longer. Action must be immediate and swift in order to reduce our dangerously high incidences of cancer rates.

The government must allocate new funding as part of the World Health Organization's integrated health promotion and prevention plan. Through partnerships with the International Union against Cancer (UICC), the Canadian Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute of Canada, we can create a system that satisfies both international and national standards for well-being.

The Green Party's action plan will help prevent cancers from surfacing, will treat and rehabilitate patients afflicted with cancer, and will prolong the lives and ease the suffering of palliative patients, all for the betterment and peace of mind of Canadians well into the future.