

The ‘Make Revera Public MP Challenge’ Final Report

September 18, 2021

I. Introduction

Since May of 2020, several organizations have been actively campaigning to transform Revera and its long-term care (LTC) facilities into publicly owned and not-for-profit homes. The Ottawa Health Coalition, in partnership with the Ontario Health Coalition and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), organized the first open Town Hall meeting on the subject on September 16, 2020.

Since that time, the coalition has been joined by the Ottawa Committee for Pension Security (OCPS) and taken up further actions and campaign activities to bring the pressure needed for fundamental change. As it has become more widely known that Revera is fully owned by the federal government’s crown corporation pension fund – known as PSP Investments – there have been growing calls by health care organizations, trade unions, and others to “Make Revera Public”. This campaign activity is one part of the larger, growing movement to end the failed model of for-profit LTC altogether.

Once the 2021 federal election was announced on August 15, Ottawa Health Coalition and OCPS once again decided to combine forces to launch what we called the “Make Revera Public MP Challenge”. This project was dedicated to activating campaign supporters in ridings across the country to bring the issue of Revera and the disastrous record of for-profit LTC into focus for the federal election. In brief, the idea was to condense our key messages into two brief and simple questions that could be posed – by local constituents and supporters – directly to election candidates. These two questions were:

Question 1: *Do you support the proposal to transfer ownership of Revera Inc’s LTC homes into public hands?*

Question 2: *Do you agree that for-profit ownership of LTC facilities should be phased out as soon as possible, and that LTC should be publicly owned and administered?*

In our August 24 announcement that launched the MP Challenge, we invited supporters to not only pose these questions – by email, in person, etc – but also to record the answers and share any emails or notes received with us in order that a running record of candidate positions could be published through an always-accessible online document (ie our “Candidates List” google doc). That document has been available and regularly updated throughout the election campaign. The latest updated list can be viewed by clicking it [here](#).

We are very happy to be able to report that this project has proven to be a unique and useful way of activating our growing base of supporters to become directly involved in election activity that advances our key goals. Dozens of people – many of whom we did not know before this campaign – have stepped up to participate, not only in the Ottawa area but in many regions across the country. It is clear that many more people are demonstrating through action that they

are not going to let this issue fade from consciousness. There is a widespread determination to continue building the pressure needed until a fundamental transformation of our heavily privatized LTC system is achieved.

The following report aims to summarize what has been learned through this project, and what the candidates and parties have been saying about Revera, and about for-profit LTC provision. We conclude the report with some brief reflections on possible next steps for the Make Revera Public campaign – regardless of which party or parties form government.

II. Candidate Responses to the MP Challenge Questions

When the ‘MP Challenge’ campaign was launched, even Elections Canada did not have a complete list of election candidates – let alone email addresses and campaign phone numbers. So, we began the campaign with a simple list of MPs from the prior parliament, and their ridings, and invited supporters to help us build up our “Candidates List” by adding names and contact information from any riding. We knew that this approach was never going to produce a complete list of candidates – but it gave us a start.

We were very encouraged by the response. Literally dozens of active supporters – most of whom we had no previous contact with – took up the MP Challenge and started adding new names and contact information, and then sending our two questions to candidates. While most supporters chose to submit our questions to their own local candidates, some were keen enough to begin sending the questions to candidates in other ridings. While not a systematic sample, we think the resulting list of hundreds of candidates who received the questions, and the many who responded, offer interesting insight.

As of this writing (Saturday, September 18), we can report that our Challenge questions have now been posed to at least one in every province and territory. As of this writing, we have been able to build up our list to include the names and contact information for 562 candidates, about 315 of whom were on our initial list of incumbent candidates seeking re-election. Over 235 of these candidates were sent the two MP Challenge questions, most by email, and some 73 candidates responded – one way or another. We have included a category of “failed to respond” for candidates who were sent the questions and were provided with at least one email reminder or follow up phone call.

As a very general summary, it is fair to say that the actual responses sent by candidates or their campaign teams were very closely aligned with the official positions of their parties as indicated by the party platforms. To illustrate, every single one of the candidates from the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party responded negatively (or at least, not positively) to the two questions. None of them supported the call to “Make Revera Public”, and likewise none of them agreed with the proposals to phase out for-profit LTC provision. On the other hand, all responding candidates from the New Democratic Party (NDP) – whose party platform expressly promised to ‘nationalize’ Revera and to ‘end for-profit LTC’ -- answered both questions positively. Similarly, nearly all of the candidates from the Green Party contacted by supporters answered both questions positively – a point that is consistent with their party platform’s commitment to “end for profit LTC facilities”.

Likewise, candidates representing smaller parties were also quite consistent. All the candidates from the Communist Party responded positively to both questions, whereas most of the

candidates from the People’s Party, and the even smaller conservative parties, responded negatively.

To be clear, this is not, and was never intended, to be a representative or scientific sample of the candidates. The selection of candidates, as well as ridings, was determined by the individual volunteers that took up the Challenge. Notwithstanding this point of caution, we can summarize the responses to date, grouped by party affiliation, as follows:

Party	Supports Call to "Make Revera Public"			Supports Proposals to "End For-Profit LTC"			Number Contacted
			Failed to Respond			Failed to Respond	
Bloc Québécois							6
Communist	6			6			10
Conservative		6	2		6	2	47
Green	14	2		15	1		35
Liberal		8	2		8	2	52
NDP	23			23			48
PPC	1	5	1	1	5	1	33
Other		3			3		12
Results	44	21	5	45	20	5	237

Note: Results showing include data collected to Sept. 18, 2021. Updates will continue to be collected and reported in the full data set, accessible [here](#).

For those interested to see how each of the individual candidates listed above responded, please see the full list attached in our 2-page Appendix.

Finally, one particularly high-impact usage of this MP Challenge is worth reporting in detail. In the second week of the Challenge, we learned that two seniors’ groups in Sudbury had convened an all-candidates debate on August 31 focused on seniors’ issues. Following a round of initial candidate statements, the floor was opened for questions.

Dot Klein, the chair of the Sudbury Health Coalition, posed the two “MP Challenge” questions and asked that they be posed to all seven candidates on the stage, one at a time, with a “yes or no” response requested. Remarkably, the debate moderator did just that, and the next 5 minutes of the meeting were spent hearing these candidates’ reflections on the proposal to Make Revera Public and to end for-profit provision of LTC. This meeting was also broadcast over a livestream to a broad viewership. This 5-minute segment of that meeting is now posted to Youtube and is viewable here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnkwgrS9FqM>.

III. What the party platforms say about Revera and for-profit LTC

The strong relationship between party affiliations and candidate responses to the MP Challenge questions shown above is explained, in part, by the explicit policy commitments included in the platforms of the ‘major’ parties (which we define here as parties with elected MPs in the last

parliament). The following presents a very brief review of the major parties' statements on LTC ownership issues and the question of Revera.

The New Democratic Party

In this regard, it is notable that only one of the major federal parties made direct reference to Revera and a commitment to "Make Revera Public", and that is the NDP. Their [platform](#) includes the following:

We will end private, for-profit long-term care and bring long-term care homes under the public umbrella, beginning with the federally-owned long term care company Revera.

Coincidentally, on the same day that we launched the "MP Challenge" (August 24), NDP leader Jagmeet Singh convened a press conference focused on LTC in front of the Mississauga head office of Revera. In the course of the widely reported event, Jagmeet Singh stated bluntly that their intention was to "nationalize" Revera. Beyond Revera specifically, the party commits as follows:

It's time to take profit and greed out of the care of our most vulnerable loved ones. It's time for a government on the side of aging Canadians, their families, and frontline health care workers.

The Liberal Party

The Liberal Party [platform](#) does not address Revera, nor does it make any acknowledgement of the problem of for-profit LTC delivery. It does commit to making LTC "better" through the establishment of what it calls a "guaranteed minimum wage" for personal support workers (PSWs) of \$25/hour. It references a specific proposal of increasing funding to LTC by \$9 billion over 5 years, as follows:

We will work with provinces and territories, respecting their jurisdiction, to support seniors with an investment of \$9 billion over 5 years to support safer conditions for seniors and improved wages and working conditions for personal support workers.

The platform also proposes to "collaboratively" establish what they call a "*Safe Long-Term Care Act*", which they suggest will "guarantee the care [seniors] deserve". They do not elaborate in the party platform on how such legislation would achieve such a guarantee, nor address any of the criticisms of maintaining the existing for-profit care companies in the sector.

The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party [platform](#) does not address Revera specifically, nor does it acknowledge any of the problems with for-profit LTC that were made visible by the pandemic. Its specific commitments are confined to two promises: 1) a new \$200 per month payment to individuals who are caring for an ageing parent over age 70; and 2) \$3 billion over 3 years to fund renovations in LTC homes "to improve the quality of care".

The platform also contains a commitment to "invite" provinces to work to develop a set of "best practices", as follows:

We will invite the provinces to work with us to develop a set of best practices for Long-Term Care homes. Like the National Building Code, this will provide guidance for provinces without intruding on their jurisdiction. However, we will work with all those provincial governments who want to commit to this important project and encourage all provinces to incorporate the results into provincial law.

The Conservative Party platform also suggests that they plan to “encourage partnerships with private non-profits” in the sector, a line that would suggest a negative view toward the publicly owned and operated LTC facilities that had the overall best record of preventing deaths from Covid-19 throughout the pandemic.

The Green Party

The 2021 Green Party platform was released on September 7 and contains several brief bullet point proposals for reform of LTC. However, several of these points are substantive, and the most significant are as follows:

- Bring LTC under the *Canada Health Act*
- Create “enforceable National Standards for long-term care”
- Set a national standard of “four hours of regulated care per day” per resident
- End for-profit LTC facilities and reorient LTC towards community-based models

Two of these commitments would be transformative – ending for-profit LTC and bringing the sector under the provisions of the Canada Health Act would effectively accomplish the broad goals of the Make Revera Public campaign. Having said that, there are very few details given regarding the steps that will be needed to accomplish some of their stated goals – such as one to “increase and stabilize staffing in LTC homes”.

The Bloc Québécois

Given the gravity of the pandemic’s impact in Québec’s LTC homes, it is surprising to find that the election [platform](#) of the Bloc Québécois does not make any proposals specific to the sector. They propose an increase in federal funding for health in general, without conditions, but do not speak to long-term care.

Smaller Parties

Elections Canada reports that there are 22 registered political parties with candidates running in the 2021 federal election. For the purposes of this report, there is only one smaller party that has articulated a clear and strong position on Revera and LTC. The Communist Party is running 27 candidates in 8 provinces and has a [platform](#) that proposes to “...end private, for profit long-term care, and expand Medicare to include long-term care, pharmacare, vision, dental and mental health care.” All of the candidates from this party that responded to the MP Challenge questions responded positively to both.

On the other hand, the People’s Party, which has attracted significant criticism for its opposition to the public health measures enacted to respond to the pandemic, takes a nearly opposite view. According to their [platform](#), that party proposes an end to Canada’s existing public health system as established by the *Canada Health Act*, and to shift all decision-making and responsibility to the provincial government level. They argue in favour of private (for-profit) hospitals and call for

provincial “innovation” in health care – a euphemism generally understood to mean US-style private, for-profit health care.

IV. Common arguments in defence of for-profit LTC

As an ongoing campaign, it may be useful to take this opportunity to highlight and respond to the most common arguments used against the concerns raised by the MP Challenge questions, and the proposals to Make Revera Public and to end for-profit LTC.

From the dozens of negative responses received, primarily from candidates of the Conservative Party and Liberal Party (though a few smaller conservative parties as well), there were two that came up most frequently: the issue of jurisdiction and the claimed ‘alternative’ to fundamental ownership changes of establishing ‘national standards’.

First, the issue of jurisdiction. For some candidates, both of our campaign proposals prompted a simple response that changing the ownership of Revera or a federal move to end for-profit LTC provision is not viable because of Canada’s constitutional division of powers which, it is argued, places LTC alongside health care in general in the exclusive jurisdiction of provincial governments.

This view ignores the reality that the federal government has already been exercising a vital presence in health care as both a key source of funding and as the level of government that established Medicare in the 1960s and the federal Canada Health Act in the early 1980s. In fact, Pat and Hugh Armstrong – two leading researchers in this field -- have just [published](#) (August 28) a direct response to spurious claims that the federal government is not legally in a position to challenge for-profit health care provision (including for LTC):

We are told over and over again that health care is a provincial and territorial responsibility. This mantra is used by federal governments to justify their failures in introducing more health care policies, and by the provinces and territories to resist programs that require them to meet specified standards or conditions and demonstrate that they have done so. The provinces and territories demand that the federal government just give them the money without strings, even as these governments attach strings to their own expenditures. Provinces and territories claim they know best what works for their residents, but it is hard to see evidence supporting this claim.

We desperately need a new national plan that goes beyond hospitals and medical care, to include pharmacare, homecare and long-term residential care, at a minimum, supported by a national labour force strategy. Such a plan should begin with explicit principles, based on our shared values, and developed in consultation with the various jurisdictions. The principles or criteria found in the *Canada Health Act* provide a critical basis for such a discussion.

These observations provide a full response to those who try to deflect legitimate questions about for-profit ownership. The simple reality is that these are political questions and political choices, and that the federal government has already demonstrated that it can promote and incentivize public delivery of health care. In our view, it should immediately begin doing so for LTC.

The second most common objection involves a supposed alternative to any transformation of ownership. Most frequently articulated by candidates and spokespeople for the Liberal Party, this objection suggests that deeper changes to the ownership structure of LTC homes are not necessary and that what is needed instead is an increase in funding and a new set of “national standards” for the sector.

It is important to recognize that there is wide and growing support for the establishment of new national standards for LTC. This is a positive development. However, there is also wide agreement among literally hundreds of doctors and academic experts that simply establishing such standards is not enough. In a May 2021 [report](#) for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), Pat Armstrong and co-authors point out that merely establishing “technical” standards is not enough, particularly when profit-focused managers retain a material interest in working around them:

The effect of these welcome reforms will be blunted in cases where LTC providers have an incentive to finesse or circumvent them; especially measures that impose additional costs on for-profit providers.

Further, these same authors point out that leaving a powerful profit-making corporate sector in place leaves open opportunities for it to dedicate resources to actively undermining the standards and regulations intended to protect the public interest:

The commanding position of the for-profit industry undoubtedly allows it considerable influence over government policy for a funding and regulatory environment acceptable to investors. This also puts the lie to the claim that privatization allows governments to shift enterprise risk to its private partner.

Indeed, as they point out, the for-profit industry demonstrated this power in the past year when it persuaded the Governments of Ontario (November 2020) and then Alberta (June 2021) to pass legislation immunizing the companies from legitimate lawsuits for neglect causing death by Covid-19.

Finally, we think it is worth noting that when hundreds of doctors and researchers came together to advocate for pandemic-informed overhaul of LTC as “[Doctors for LTC Justice](#)”, the first of their nine key demands was an “end to for-profit LTC”. The Covid-19 pandemic has given us stark evidence that for-profit operations do not belong in our health care system, and are particularly dangerous for the provision of care to seniors.

V. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

When the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic was ripping through Canada’s LTC homes from March to May of 2020, the death and devastation in its wake came as a shock. After the emergency deployment of Canadian military forces to a number of homes in Ontario and Quebec that were especially hard hit, a scathing [report](#) was published by the military leadership detailing conditions of severe understaffing, which in turn left many residents in situations of dehydration, malnutrition, and general neglect.

In the weeks that followed this report, a number of Canadian political leaders expressed not only concern but a commitment to a deep examination of what has gone wrong in the country’s LTC

system. Ontario Premier Doug Ford [said](#) that it was “so disturbing...the most heart-wrenching report I have ever read in my entire life.”

In response to questions about the federal government's ownership of Revera in the House of Commons, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland suggested that deep, structural change was needed in the LTC sector. She even [suggested](#) that the heavily privatized ownership structure should “on the table”:

After what we have learned this week [in the military's report], all options must be on the table when it comes to how care for elders will be provided in Canada in the future...I think it is clear to us all that root and branch reform is necessary...When it comes to the ownership structure of long-[term] care facilities, it is something that needs to be on the table.

Yet, with more than a year to pursue the “root and branch reform” Freeland then suggested was necessary, the federal government pulled back almost entirely from such ambitions. The Liberal Party, along with the Conservative Party, appear fully committed to maintaining the existing system and, in effect, protecting the presence of large for-profit corporations such as Revera, Extendicare, Chartwell, and Sienna, at its centre.

The information collected through the course of the ‘Make Revera Public MP Challenge’ has demonstrated that the calls for a fundamental transformation of LTC provision have found representation among a number of candidates and parties. Fully 43 of the candidates approached agree with our campaign's calls to Make Revera Public and to end for-profit LTC. This is encouraging – these are policy commitments that were not on the radar of any of the major parties as recently as the 2019 election.

We want to conclude this report with a very clear message. **We encourage all voters who share our goals of transitioning Revera and all of the for-profit LTC companies into public ownership to cast their vote for candidates and parties that have embraced these same objectives.**

Of course, another key lesson learned from this exercise is that the resistance to change and the reflex of defending the for-profit LTC companies is deeply entrenched in the political system and within many parties. It is going to take further, ongoing work to build the power we need to finally end profiteering in LTC and in health care in general.

To do this, we invite all supporters of this campaign and of these goals to get involved in their local health coalitions and advocacy organizations, and to re-commit to the fight for a properly funded and high quality LTC system. If you interested in updates on the Make Revera Public campaign, join our announcements-only email list (requests can be sent to our email address: makeverapublic@gmail.com). Achieving these widely shared goals will be the best way to honour those we have lost, those who have suffered, and all of those who have struggled over many years for an effective, accountable, and respectful system of long-term care.

APPENDIX – Candidate responses to MP Challenge questions, as at Sept 17 (1/2)

Party	Province/Territory	Electoral District	Last Name	First Name	Support Make Revera Public	Support Ending For-Profit LTC
Communist	ON	University—Rosedale	Garvie	Drew	✓	✓
Communist	ON	Ottawa Centre	McDonald	Alex	✓	✓
Communist	ON	Hamilton Centre	Cheriyen	Nigel	✓	✓
Communist	ON	Guelph	Dineen	Tristan	✓	✓
Communist	ON	Ottawa South	Wasslen	Larry	✓	✓
Communist	ON	Beaches—East York	Moxon	Jennifer	✓	✓
Conservative	NB	Beauséjour	Mitchell	Shelly	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Orléans	Wolfe	Mary-Elsie	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Nickel Belt	Humphrey	Charles	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Toronto Centre	Lester	Ryan	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing	Sagman	John	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Sudbury	Symington	Ian	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Nepean	Triemstra	Matt	✗	✗
Conservative	ON	Ottawa Centre	Clemenhagen	Carol	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu
Green	BC	Burnaby South	Curran	Maureen	✓	✓
Green	MB	Winnipeg South	Boettcher	Greg	✓	✓
Green	NB	Beauséjour	Girouard	Stella	✗	✓
Green	ON	Nickle Belt	Gravelle	Craig	✓	✓
Green	ON	Ottawa Centre	Keller-Herzog	Angela	✓	✓
Green	ON	Kingston and the Islands	Khan	Waji	✓	✓
Green	ON	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	Neufeld	Calvin	✓	✓
Green	ON	Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands & Rideau Lakes	Rekmans	Lorraine	✓	✓
Green	ON	St. Catharines	Rhodes	Catherine	✓	✓
Green	ON	Ottawa South	Schram	Les	✓	✓
Green	ON	Ottawa West—Nepean	Stibbe	David	✓	✓
Green	ON	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Lariviere	Michael	✓	✓
Green	PEI	Malpeque	Keenan	Anna	✓	✓
Green	PEI	Charlottetown	Lanthier	Darcie	✓	✓
Green	QE	Pontiac	McArthur	Shaughn	✓	✓
Green	PEI	Egmont	Clark	Alex	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Waterloo	Chagger	Bardish	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	Drouin	Francis	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Ottawa—Vanier	Fortier	Mona	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Sudbury	Lapointe	Viviane	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Ottawa Centre	Naqvi	Yasir	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Carleton	Roy	Gustave	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	York Centre	Saks	Ya'ara	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Nickel Belt	Serré	Marc G.	✗	✗
Liberal	ON	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	Bratina	Bob	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu
Liberal	ON	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	Foxtan	Michelle	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu

APPENDIX – Candidate responses to MP Challenge questions, as at Sept 17 (2/2)

Party	Province/ Territory	Electoral District	Last Name	First Name	Support Make Revera Public	Support Ending For-Profit LTC
NDP	NB	Beauséjour	Godfrey	Evelyne	✓	✓
NDP	BC	Burnaby South	Singh	Jagmeet	✓	✓
NDP	MB	Winnipeg Centre	Gazan	Leah	✓	✓
NDP	NFLD	St. John's East	Shortall	Mary	✓	✓
NDP	ON	York Centre	Ahmed	Kemal	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Durham	Cameron	Chris	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Toronto Centre	Chang	Brian	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Nickel Belt	Chénier	Andréane	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Kanata—Carleton	Coenraad	Melissa	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	Garrison	Steve	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Hamilton Centre	Green	Matthew	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Ottawa West—Nepean	Hameed	Yavar	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Carleton	Hua	Kevin	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Ottawa—Vanier	Inamuco	Lyse-Pascale	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Huron—Bruce	Johnstone	Jan	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Ottawa Centre	MacEwen	Angella	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	Malakos	Konstantine	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Nipissing—Timiskaming	Robertson	Scott	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands & Rideau Lakes	Taylor	Michelle	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Sudbury	Verrelli	Nadia	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Kitchener Centre	Zubi	Beisan	✓	✓
NDP	ON	Nepean	Devine	Sean	✓	✓
NDP	YT	Yukon	Vollans-Leduc	Lisa	✓	✓
PPC	ON	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	Bors	Florian	✓	✓
PPC	NB	Beauséjour	Minor	Jack	✗	✗
PPC	ON	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Ainsworth	David	✗	✗
PPC	ON	Kanata—Carleton	Miller	Scott	✗	✗
PPC	QE	Gatineau	St-Jean	Mathieu	✗	✗
PPC	ON	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	Austring	Brennan	✗	✗
PPC	ON	Kingston and the Islands	Sayle-Udall	Shelly	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu	Failed to respond N'a pas répondu
Animal Protection	MB	Winnipeg Centre	Wall	Debra	✗	✗
Libertarian	AB	Edmonton Strathcona	Stinson	Malcolm	✗	✗
Libertarian	MB	Winnipeg Centre	Buhler	Jamie	✗	✗