

# National Seniors Strategy

## INTRODUCTION

By 2030, adults aged 65 or older will make up 23 per cent of Canada's population and number over 9.5 million.<sup>1</sup> They represent the fastest growing segment of the population, but gaps in Canada's health care and social policies are putting barriers in the way of their independence and their role in maintaining vibrant, healthy communities and economies.

Tackling these issues independently will not give us the results we need. A coordinated national seniors strategy, with dedicated funding and accountable goals, will ensure we meet the evolving needs of older Canadians. Federal Retirees has long called for a national seniors strategy focused on enhancing older Canadians' quality of life at all stages, through income security, access to affordable and appropriate housing and transportation, age-friendly communities and adequate home, community and health care services.

By addressing the social determinants of health, this government can provide a blueprint for an integrated continuum of care that meets the needs of a growing older adult population, supports a strong economy across generations, and addresses the gaps in Canada's social policies that interfere with older Canadians' participation in everyday life.

Implementing a national seniors strategy is an important task. The policy implications are significant and require more than a few pages to properly address. This first part, provided in March 2020, introduces a national seniors strategy and our recommendations for elements that should be included in the strategy. In the following section, we present context for each of the policy areas touched on a national seniors strategy, along with sub-recommendations. Over the coming months, we will provide additional parts that offer more in-depth information about each of the policy areas relevant to a national seniors strategy, focusing on specific priority areas and their importance in creating an effective strategy to meet

the needs of Canadians as they age.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Implement a National Seniors Strategy

As stated in the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance's report, *Getting Ready: For a New Generation of Active Seniors*, a national seniors strategy is needed to control the increasing costs related to an aging population, relieve the pressure being placed on an already stressed health care system and ensure older Canadians get the care they need, when and where they need it.<sup>2</sup>

Implementing a national seniors strategy that meets the growing and changing needs of Canada's aging population requires a coordinated and integrated effort involving all levels of government, as well as the private and public sectors. The only way to ensure the success of such an approach is for the federal government to play a leadership role.

Today, with an average Canadian life expectancy of more than 80, physicians believe Canadians who reach 65 without major complications can realistically look forward to 20 more years of life, 17 of them in good health.<sup>3</sup> However, most policies affecting older Canadians were designed for an age when retirement was something that occurred near the end of one's life. Retirement is becoming something quite different — and Canada's social and health policies for older Canadians must change with it.

For these reasons, Federal Retirees calls on the federal government to **develop and implement a national seniors strategy. Such a strategy should:**

- Addressing the social determinants of health, such as income security, housing, and transportation by:
  - ▶ Reviewing and updating policies related to both public pension programs and retirement savings



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vehicles;

- ▶ Continuing and prioritizing investments that specifically support access to housing for older Canadians;
  - ▶ Implementing targeted funding to help promote the development of age-friendly communities;
  - ▶ Implementing universal design standards and making these a criterion for awarding funding for new infrastructure or improvements to existing infrastructure; and
  - ▶ Identifying and developing popular and accessible transportation options for older Canadians, both in urban and rural communities, through further research and funding.
- Provide for a continuum of care closer to home by:
    - ▶ Bringing home and community care services within the purview of the Canada Health Act, allowing for the implementation of an overarching national approach, as exists with hospital and physician services; and
    - ▶ Negotiating a new national health accord (or, barring that, individual health accords with each of the provinces/territories) and tying funding to the implementation a continuum of care that includes home and community care services, and a strategy to address the specific health care needs of older adults.
  - Ensure resource planning and sustainable financing for health care, health care workers, and caregivers by:
    - ▶ Leading efforts and collaborating with provincial and territorial governments to make certain that Canada's health care system is properly structured and funded so that Canadians have access to appropriate, high-quality health care services;
    - ▶ Establishing a pan-Canadian health workforce agency to gather, analyze and disseminate knowledge and evidence related to Canada's health workforce — one of the key recommendations from the 2010 Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health; and
    - ▶ Tying health care funding to requirements to provide older adult care training to health care professionals to ensure that they are equipped to provide high-quality care to older Canadians.
  - Recognize and support the work of informal caregivers by:
    - ▶ Revising and standardizing the definitions of 'caregiver' and 'dependent' to broaden who qualifies for benefits, financial assistance and other supports;
    - ▶ Establishing a refundable caregiver tax credit like those available in Quebec and Manitoba; and
    - ▶ Creating awareness of these supports and developing accessible and easy-to-understand resources about these supports for Canadians.
  - Pursue innovation in the provision of home and community care by:
    - ▶ Funding and promoting innovative solutions to provide support for activities of daily living as part of a larger strategy to increase access to home and community care; and
    - ▶ Leading the effort to spread these solutions across the country so that innovative approaches from all corners of Canada can be properly identified, scaled up and implemented.
  - Develop and implement policy solutions to address ageism, elder abuse and social isolation by:
    - ▶ Continuing to develop and support information campaigns to help Canadians better understand the specifics of ageism, elder abuse and social isolation, and how to identify and effectively deal with them; and
    - ▶ Recognizing communities and other groups that are dealing successfully with these issues, supporting their work and expanding these programs across Canada so that all Canadians can benefit.

It is in Canada's best interest to facilitate active, healthy and economically stable lifestyles through appropriate public and universal social and health care services. A national seniors strategy would ensure that all older Canadians are receiving the services they need to remain healthy and engaged while controlling costs over the long-term.



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## CONCLUSION

This government has clearly demonstrated its commitment to championing the interests of older Canadians, as evidenced by its appointment of a Minister of Seniors. This appointment makes it an ideal time to implement a national seniors strategy, as there is now someone within cabinet to lead this important initiative.

Canada needs a national seniors strategy that optimizes health, income security and social inclusion for older Canadians. Leaving provinces and territories to tackle these issues independently will not bring about the results we need. Dedicated funding, common and attainable goals and tangible outcomes under a national seniors strategy would ensure that federal, provincial and territorial governments and stakeholders work together to meet the growing and evolving needs of Canada's aging population, so that all Canadians can lead healthy, fulfilling lives and age with dignity.

- 1 Government of Canada. (2014). Action for Seniors report. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/seniors-action-report.html#tc2a>.
- 2 Canada. Parliament. Senate of Canada. Standing Senate Committee on National Finance. (2017, June). Getting Ready: For a new generation of active seniors. 19th report. 42nd Parliament, 1st Session. Retrieved from: [https://senCanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/NFFN/Reports/NFFN\\_Final19th\\_Aging\\_e.pdf](https://senCanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/NFFN/Reports/NFFN_Final19th_Aging_e.pdf).
- 3 Bushnik, T. et al. (2018) Health-adjusted life expectancy in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2018004/article/54950-eng.htm>.



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