

NATIONAL SENIORS STRATEGY

Developing a National Seniors Strategy for Canadians

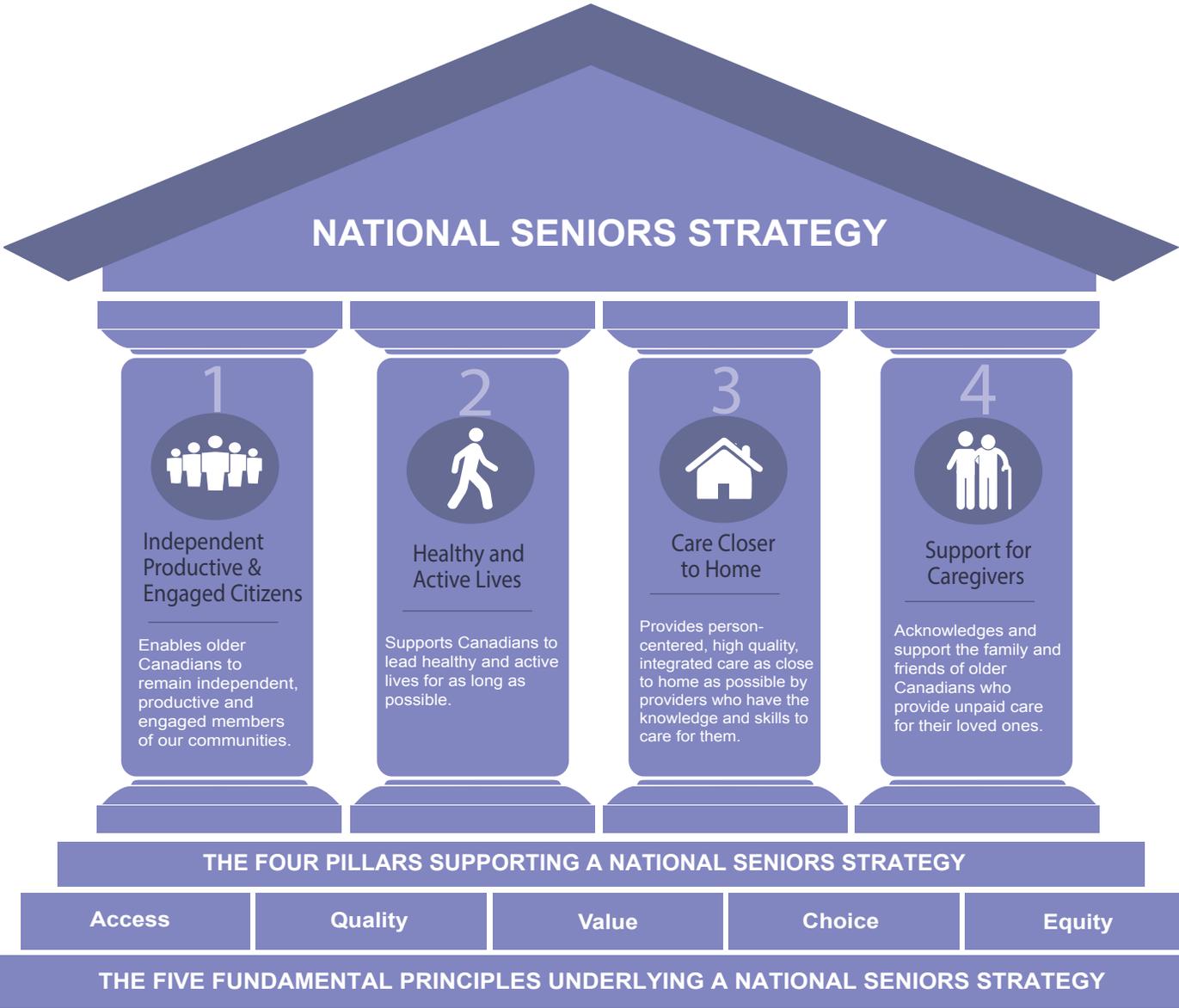
Why Do We Need National Seniors Strategy?

Given that the life expectancy of Canadians has almost doubled over the last century, our coming of age should be recognized as triumph rather than a disease. Older Canadians are now the fastest growing segment of our population with their numbers expected to double over the next two decades so that by then, one in four Canadians will be older than 65 years of age. This unprecedented demographic shift will present both challenges and opportunities. Meeting the growing and evolving needs of our ageing population will require concerted coordination and effort between municipalities, provinces, with the federal government playing a key leadership role on this issue of significant national importance.

Historically, our federal government has been able to play a key role as a standard-setter, catalyst and funder of important social change in areas like the delivery of health care. We believe that in a similar way our federal government can enable the meaningful change that will be needed to meet the needs of ageing Canadians. The way we approach our coming of age will also require coordination and mobilization across government departments as well as between the private and public sectors. Indeed, we will need an integrated approach where the federal government helps keep us all moving in the right direction. The aspiration to deliver on this agenda will be shared by Canadians of all ages across the country.

This document proposes what a National Seniors Strategy should entail.

The Four Pillars Supporting a National Seniors Strategy:



A National Seniors Strategy Should:

1. Ensure older Canadians remain independent, productive and engaged members of our communities.

With the number of older Canadians expected to double over the next two decades, with many more living most of their extra years in good health, we need to ensure older Canadians are given the opportunities to remain engaged and productive members of our society. Since we ended mandatory retirement laws in Canada, the number of older Canadians who continue to work past the age 65 has doubled over the past decade, allowing them to continue contributing their considerable experience and skills.

Older Canadians continue to contribute to our society in many other ways and over represent themselves as volunteers, and unpaid caregivers to Canadians of all ages. They are also the most politically engaged members of our society, Ensuring our communities can continue to support their older residents to remain independent and engaged, will mean we need to continue to strengthen opportunities that ensure older Canadians have access to a reasonable income, affordable housing and transportation services. Ensuring that our physical environments and public spaces are age-friendly and that our community, social and recreational services also are designed with the needs of older Canadians in mind can help to combat the growing levels of social isolation and help reinforce efforts that will be needed to end ageism and elder abuse in our society.

The Federal Government can work with Canada's provinces, territories and municipalities to enable this pillar in a variety of ways.

- Ensuring that we make addressing ageism, elder abuse and social isolation a national priority by ensuring we continue to support activities and policies that continue to value the role, contributions and needs of older Canadians by promoting and supporting volunteerism and other forms of community engagement.
- Ensuring older Canadians don't live in poverty can be achieved by making enhancements to the current Canadian Pension Plan.
- Ensuring a growing proportion of federal infrastructure dollars support the development of more affordable housing and transportation options that will allow older Canadians to remain more independent in their communities.
- Ensuring the development of more age-friendly physical environments and spaces through the incorporation of well-established universal design standards in our national building codes.

2. Ensure older Canadians continue to lead healthy and active lives for as long as possible.

Significant advances in public health and the health care we now have available ensures that most Canadians are now living longer and living better than ever before. In order to ensure that more older Canadians can age in good health and stay independent in their communities for as long as possible, we need to do more to educate and support Canadians to understand and participate in those activities that promote wellness, prevention and overall healthy ageing.

The Federal Government and the Public Health Agency of Canada can work with Canada's provinces, territories and municipalities to enable this pillar in a variety of ways.

- Ensuring Canadians have access to high quality information that helps improve their overall understanding of how to engage in wellness and prevention activities that support healthy ageing and the prevention of age-related diseases like dementia, including regular exercise, falls prevention, and taking routine vaccinations that are recommended for the elderly.
- Ensuring that all Canadians have access to medically necessary and appropriate medications for the management of acute and chronic diseases will allow Canadians to live healthier and longer lives in their communities.
- Ensuring Canadians have a better understanding of the importance of advance care planning will also support Canadians to become more engaged in decision making around their health care and empower them to make more informed decisions that will better respect their values and wishes with respect to the care they will receive.

3. Ensure older Canadians have access to person-centered, high quality, and integrated care as close to home as possible by providers who have the knowledge and skills to care for them.

Older Canadians while representing only 15% of our population, currently account for nearly half of our current health and social care spending. When we established Medicare across Canada over 50 years ago, the average age of a Canadian was 27, while most Canadians didn't live beyond their 60s.

Recognizing that our population has changed and our health care system hasn't fully adapted to meeting the needs of an ageing population, it is clear that we now need to focus on strengthening our Canada Health Act to ensure Canadians can feel confident that our health care system will be ready to meet their needs. With the majority of Canadians making it clear that they want to access care in and close to their homes as much as possible, investing in creating a robust home care system is becoming a top national priority.

Dealing with the fact that our national educational accreditation bodies for doctors, nurses, social workers etc do not mandate training around the care of the elderly as opposed to pediatrics will also help to ensure current and future providers will have the knowledge and skills needed to provide Canadians the right care, in the right place, at the right time by the right provider.

The Federal Government and the Federal Ministry of Health can work with Canada's provinces, territories to enable this pillar in a variety of ways.

- Ensuring older Canadians have access to high quality home and community care, long-term care and palliative and end-of life services as well as medications when and wherever needed can become a focus and priority of a new Canada Health Transfer, that ties increases in federal support to expected performance improvements, in a similar way we addressed the national priority of wait times.
- Ensuring that Canadians have access to care providers from all professions that are trained to specifically provide the care older Canadians will need that is also culturally sensitive as well is an area that our national educational and care accreditation bodies can be encouraged to prioritize to meet the evolving needs of our society through the development of enhance national curriculum and care standards.
- Ensuring that we stay on track in retooling our health care systems to meet the needs of an ageing population will require that Canadians along with our health system funders and planners have access to high quality information that can help us track our performance in meeting our collective goals. Establishing national metrics, information collection and reporting systems through agencies like the Canadian Institutes for Health Information (CIHI), can allow us to link funding to performance and better support all areas of the nation in meeting our collective goals.

4. Ensure that the family and friends of older Canadians who provide unpaid care for their loved ones are acknowledged and Supported.

The Family and Friends of older Canadians are their greatest source of care in our society. With the rising number of older Canadians who will develop chronic health conditions including dementia, more of us will need the support of others to remain as healthy and independent as possible in our communities. Unpaid caregivers last year provided around \$30B of care. Indeed without the continued dedication of these individuals, our health care system would not be able remain sustainable. However, caregiving can take an enormous toll on the health, well-being and economic productivity of Canadians who choose to serve as caregivers.

Providing appropriate support and recognition to meet the needs of current and future caregivers not only will keep our health care systems sustainable, but will also ensure that our economic productivity of our nation can be improved and strengthened as well.

The Federal Government can work with Canada's provinces, territories to enable this pillar in a variety of ways.

- Ensuring Canadian employers are informed about and have access to the tools that can help them better support the growing ranks of working caregivers will enhance our overall economic productivity. Recognizing employers who excel in supporting working caregivers can further bring positive attention to this important issue.
- Ensuring Canadians caregivers are not unnecessarily financially penalized for taking on caregiving roles can be further supported through enhanced job protection measures, caregiver tax credits and enhanced CPP contribution allowances that all have good evidence to support their broad implementation nationally