

CANADIAN NURSES ASSOCIATION: Health is where the home is

Nearly all Canadians say it is important that we have the ability to age at home with access to health care in a home setting. Photo illustration by Megan Goodacre

A hospital is not a home

Canadians want better home-based care, Nanos poll confirms

While waiting for the next appropriate phase in care, approximately 800 Canadians will die in hospital and thousands more will linger. That's because Canada lacks adequate long-term and home-based care, a situation that is costing the health system billions and putting undue strain on Canadian families.

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) has been taking this issue to Parliament Hill. CNA board members and staff hosted a packed breakfast reception with Health Minister Rona Ambrose and pollster Nik Nanos, then met one-on-one with

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CNA PRESIDENT
KARIMA VELJI
RN, PHD, CHE

MPs and senators of all parties to delve deeper into the issue and propose a set of strategies focused on home care.

“RNs are vocal advocates for improved community- and home-based health care because they know firsthand that it makes sense on many levels,” said CNA president Karima Velji. “People don’t go to the hospital because of their age. They go to have illnesses and injuries treated. But evidence shows the needs of seniors today can be well managed in the home with proper support.”

On any given day in Canada, approximately 7,500 hospital beds are occupied by “alternative level of care” (ALC) patients — people who have been approved for discharge but who have nowhere to go. The Canadian Institute for Health Information expects these numbers will grow as the population of seniors increases. Since 1986, Canada’s senior population has doubled and is expected to double again by 2036. Today, seniors make up 14 per cent of our population and use 40 per cent of hospital services.

“The health-care system of today was designed for the population of many decades ago. Governments need to realign resources between acute care in

hospitals and primary care in our communities and homes,” said Velji. “Registered nurses in the home help reduce mortality and depression, improve overall health and the ability to function. This translates into relieving pressure on overcrowded

report poorer health, use more prescription drugs and require expensive treatment and complex care management.

CNA has pledged to continue pushing for better home care during the upcoming federal election campaign. This push,

The Canadian Nurses Association asks the federal government to:

- **ESTABLISH NATIONAL STANDARDS** for home health care to ensure all Canadians have equal access to services that support healthy aging.
- Make the existing **FAMILY CAREGIVER TAX CREDIT REFUNDABLE** to better help Canadians who care for aging relatives.
- **EXPAND THE NEW HORIZONS FOR SENIORS** Program to include healthy and active aging.

facilities and opening access to the health system for others.”

According to Statistics Canada, between 74 and 90 per cent of people over 65 suffered at least one chronic condition and nearly one quarter had multiple conditions. Seniors with multiple chronic conditions

which includes recommendations aimed specifically at the federal government in the hopes it can bring some unity and equity to home care in Canada, are in addition to the association’s ongoing work with the provinces and territories.

The Canadian Nurses Association and Nanos Research asked Canadians in October about healthy aging and seniors care. Here’s what they said.

96%

Almost all Canadians think it’s important (74.8%) or somewhat important (21.1%) to be able to age at home with access to health care in a home setting.

94%

Canadians want more financial aid from the federal government for family caregivers who are caring for aging relatives (67% support and 26.8% somewhat support).

83%

An overwhelming majority of Canadians want the federal government to fund the health care seniors need at home (51% support and 31.5% somewhat support).

94%

Canadians think nurses should have an enhanced role in the delivery of health care to seniors at home (74.7% support and 19.5% somewhat support).

Research data were obtained through a Nanos Research omnibus poll conducted for CNA between Oct. 18 and 21, 2014. Results are accurate within plus or minus 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

‘Just what we do for family’

Caregivers deserve expanded tax credit, CNA says

Every year family caregivers contribute an estimated \$5 billion in unpaid labour to the health-care system. For that amount of money, you could buy the Toronto Maple Leafs — five times.

In 2011, the federal government implemented the Family Caregiver Tax Credit — a \$2,040 non-refundable credit designed to “provide tax relief to those who care for an infirm dependent relative.”

“As a registered nurse, and someone with two parents in their 90s living in their own home, I thought the tax credit was a significant government gesture that recognized the role families play in health care,” said Canadian Nurses Association CEO Anne Sutherland Boal. “It showed a level of caring and support for the real needs of Canadians.”

Today the Canadian Nurses

Association (CNA) is recommending that the government take the further step of making the tax credit refundable. Why? A non-refundable credit does not increase a person’s tax refund. Someone in the lowest income tax bracket of 15 per cent could be eligible for a \$300 Family Caregiver credit, but if they only pay \$200 in taxes, they aren’t entitled to the \$100 difference. A refundable tax credit would refund that difference. In addition, the current non-refundable tax credit only helps those who earn enough to warrant filing taxes.

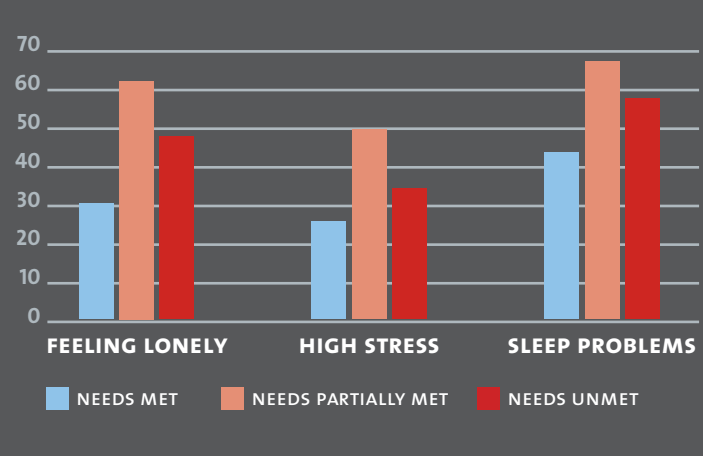
“We care for our aging relatives because that’s just what we do for family,” said Sutherland Boal. “Yet there are Canadians who already struggle enough to make ends meet and raise a family without having to also take time away from work or their kids to drive parents

to appointments or prepare them meals — nor can they always afford to pay out of pocket for their prescriptions.”

The need for health care in the home — whether given by a regulated care provider or family member — is expected to rise with Canada’s aging population. Statistics Canada reports that, in 2012, 13 million Canadians provided some type of care to a family member or friend, with age-related needs being the single most common health problem needing help. One in 10 caregivers spends 30 hours or more a week on such care.

Yet, under the Canada Health Act, home care is considered an “extended health service,” which means governments are not required to fund it. While all the provinces and territories offer some basic coverage, wide variations exist in the access and availability of home care services across Canada.

How does a lack of home care affect Canada’s seniors?



Statistics Canada reports that, in 2012, nearly 110,000 people 65 and older did not receive the home care they needed. The Health Council of Canada cautions that these numbers may underestimate the need and “there is no information in Canada to tell us how many seniors may be falling through the cracks.”

Canadians with unmet home care needs, Statistics Canada, 2014

CNA says making the Family Caregiver Tax Credit refundable would ensure that all eligible households receive some money in return for their caregiving

contributions. A refund could help pay for home care providers, such as registered nurses, and could also fill some of the gaps in provincial/territorial home care services.