

National Strategy on

Aging in Canada

Dear Canadians,

Our seniors worked hard to build a society of prosperity, generosity and sound institutions. Older Canadians continue to make valuable contributions. Now our country owes them a debt of responsibility.

No one should have to grow old in poverty, insecurity and isolation.

As the number of Canadian seniors increases, we urgently need a plan in place to meet their needs and ensure that everyone can age with dignity. We need to make sure that our institutions and vital public services are strong and ready to meet the challenge of providing necessary services efficiently and effectively.

All partners need to be working together on this—the federal government, provinces and territories, municipalities, care providers, seniors’ organizations and most importantly seniors themselves.

New Democrats have conducted extensive consultations with Canadians. You’ve told us what priorities you believe the federal government should be addressing for seniors. You’ve told us what kind of leadership you want to see from the federal government to tackle the challenges confronting us.

I am excited to take your ideas to Ottawa and to push for the National Strategy on Aging we so urgently need.

Sincerely,



Irene Mathysen

Seniors Critic, New Democratic Party of Canada

A national strategy on aging

Canadians are worried about their retirement years. For families struggling just to make ends meet, saving enough for retirement seems more like a dream than a real possibility. But instead of taking action to address financial security for seniors, the Conservative government has acted recklessly, raising the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and backtracking on plans to support and expand the Canada Pension Plan and Quebec Pension Plan.

Today, more than a quarter-million seniors live below the poverty line. If we don't take action now, how many more will fall into poverty in the future?

“A national strategy on healthy aging is necessary...Such a strategy would improve quality of life for seniors and caregivers.”

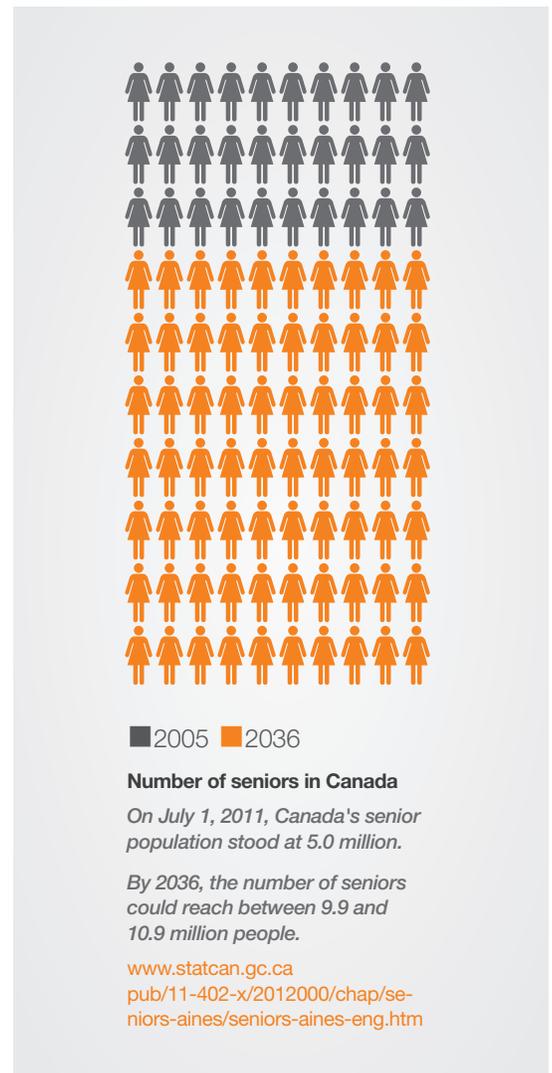
—Canadian Nurses Association

The Conservatives have cut health care funding and unilaterally announced that in the future, funding to provinces will no longer be based on need. As Canadians age, we need to have a strong, stable healthcare system that efficiently targets funding to where it will make the most difference—not an irresponsible approach that ignores the needs of Canadians.

Seniors also need adequate and inclusive housing, a supportive social environment that fosters quality of life, and targeted support for the most vulnerable populations.

Over the next two decades, the number of seniors in Canada will increase significantly. People should be able to age with dignity. We need the federal government to work with the provinces and territories, and with seniors and their organizations, to make that a reality.

We need a strategy in place now to meet the needs of Canada's seniors.



Health

High-quality, accessible public health care is critical for seniors managing the demands of aging—often coping with multiple and chronic health challenges. That’s why our growing seniors population needs a proactive approach to their health care—one that will also ease the upward pressure on health care costs.

What the federal government should do:

- ✓ Make sure seniors have timely and convenient access to the health care professionals they need.
- ✓ Increase affordable access to safe and effective prescription medications for seniors.
- ✓ Bring provinces and territories together to ensure better access to home-care services and high-quality, affordable long-term care.
- ✓ Ensure that friends and family members who care for older loved ones on an informal basis have appropriate support and financial assistance.
- ✓ In cooperation with the provinces, develop a national neurological health strategy to improve support for caregivers and increase investment in neurological research.
- ✓ Work with provinces to ensure that the growing demand for doctors and nurses specializing in gerontology is met.

“There are only 242 certified geriatricians in Canada...No one knows what the ideal complement is, but the roughest estimate is that we need around 700 geriatricians, and we’re only bringing in 15 to 25 a year.”

—Canadian Medical Association

NDP MP Claude Gravelle has tabled Bill C-356 to create a National Dementia Strategy, supporting the Alzheimer Society’s call for a national approach to support more people with the disease and their caregivers across Canada.

Housing

As Canadians age, affordable and appropriate housing that adapts to changing needs is crucial for seniors' quality of life. We've heard from seniors that remaining in their own homes and communities is a priority for them.

What the federal government should do:

- ✓ Invest in affordable housing, including housing targeted to low income seniors.
- ✓ Work with the provinces and territories to develop more flexible housing options for seniors so couples can continue to live together for as long as possible.
- ✓ Make it more affordable to retrofit homes to accommodate seniors' needs.

“After the federal government froze investment in social housing in 1993, the availability of rental units dropped sharply in large cities. As a result, rental costs soared and the quality of lodgings decreased.”

—National Advisory Council on Aging

“Some cities are already showing a significant and growing need for seniors' social housing. Seniors are on social housing waiting lists and are at risk of becoming homeless.” —Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Bill C-400, introduced by NDP MP Marie Claude Morin, would have required the federal government to work with partners to create a national housing strategy ensuring every Canadian has access to secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing. Unfortunately, the bill was defeated by the Conservatives.

Financial security

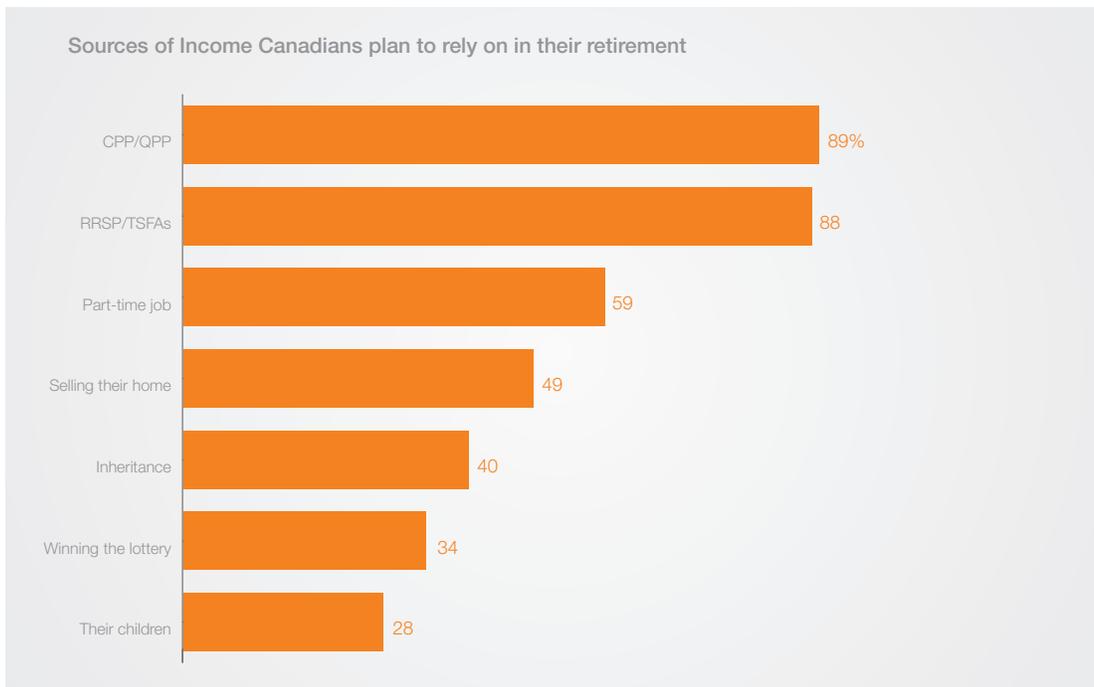
Too many Canadians do not have sufficient retirement savings and far too many are living in poverty. Canadian seniors should not have to struggle to make ends meet.

What the federal government should do:

- ✓ Restore the age of eligibility for Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) to 65.
- ✓ Negotiate with the provinces to improve the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) / Quebec Pension Plan (QPP)—where a modest increase in premiums can finance a significant increase in benefits.
- ✓ Raise the GIS to ensure that no senior faces poverty in retirement.

“A well-designed improvement to the CPP is the best option for addressing the inadequate savings dilemma. It is the lowest-cost way to improve retirement savings... and it leverages one of the best-regarded national pension schemes in the world.”

—Paul Forestell, Mercer Canada



- ✓ Amend the Employment Equity Act to include ageism, and launch an awareness campaign to dispel the prejudice many older workers face.
- ✓ Work with the provinces to protect employer pension plans.
- ✓ End pay-to-pay fees, limit ATM transaction fees to no more than 50 cents, and ensure that all banks offer at least one low-cost credit card with an interest rate no higher than 5% above the prime lending rate.
- ✓ Ensure that all eligible seniors are automatically enrolled for the GIS.

NDP MP Murray Rankin is calling on the government to take immediate action on increasing CPP and QPP benefits with his motion M-471.

Quality of life

While the basic needs of food, shelter and medical care are extremely important, seniors also deserve quality of life and initiatives that improve their lives.

What the federal government should do:

- ✓ Take a systemic approach to fighting elder abuse, including prevention programs.
- ✓ Ensure that seniors can access necessary services within their own communities—working in collaboration with provinces, territories and municipalities.
- ✓ Create a Seniors Advocate to ensure that seniors' welfare is reflected in government policies and programs.
- ✓ Support provincial and municipal initiatives that implement adapted day centres and activity centres to promote seniors' physical and mental health.
- ✓ Create policies that promote healthy eating and active living, and strengthen regulations to make sure our food is safe, nutritious and properly labelled.

Inclusive society

Some seniors face additional hardships in retirement. Groups facing additional challenges include women, First Nations, LGBTQ and ethno-cultural communities.

What the federal government should do:

- ✓ Ensure language is never a barrier to accessing programs for seniors.
- ✓ Take into account the impacts of government policies, programs or initiatives on women and other marginalized groups.
- ✓ Address the particular cultural, social and infrastructure needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis seniors.
- ✓ Cooperate with provinces, territories and Aboriginal communities to make sure First Nations, Inuit and Métis seniors can access the long-term care they need.
- ✓ Adopt and promote a Charter that protects LGBTQ seniors and includes training for creating an inclusive caring environment.

The New Democrat approach

Collaborative federalism

A New Democrat government will work cooperatively with provinces and territories, municipalities, First Nations governments, and seniors and their organizations to achieve positive change for seniors.

Put people first

New Democrats believe that government should be shaped to meet the real needs of people. We will ensure that seniors and their caregivers always have a say in how programs and services are delivered.

Ensure better value

We need to make the investments that have the most impact and ensure that existing resources are allocated as efficiently as possible. This means taking a strategic approach, instead of making haphazard cuts.

Think long-term

Today's young people are tomorrow's seniors. High youth unemployment, stagnant incomes and growing inequality all prevent Canadians from saving for retirement. New Democrats will take the long view in policy development, instead of making reckless, short-term decisions with long-term costs.

Recognize contributions

New Democrats recognize the wide range of abilities and resources of older Canadians. We believe in promoting seniors' inclusion and contributions to Canada.

Listen to the evidence

All policies must be based on the best available evidence, ensuring that we make the most of proven initiatives and target all programs wisely.