



Canada Cares 2.0: Putting Seniors on the National Agenda

With the upcoming federal election scheduled for October 21, 2019 the issue of health including seniors care will gain increased attention as is generally one of the public's top concerns heading to the ballot box. Almost four years to the date and prior to the last federal election in 2015, BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) hosted a special Care to Chat debate. That debate also featured prominent figures who were running in the federal election such as current Fleetwood-Port Kells Liberal MP Ken Hardie as well as previous Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts and former CBC meteorologist Claire Martin.

The focus of the next 'Care to Chat' entitled Canada Cares 2.0: Putting Seniors on the National Agenda scheduled for September 10, 2019 will be on examining the federal government's role in seniors care and the continuing care sector. Although health care, as outlined in section 91 of the Constitution, is largely a provincial responsibility, the federal government does still have a role in specific areas such as funding, public health, research as well as fostering best practices and innovation. The federal government also has primary responsibility for particular populations including First Nations living on reserves.ⁱ

The BCCPA and the Canadian Association of Long Term Care (CALTC) which it is affiliated with, welcomes actions that the federal government can take with provinces to improve seniors care and quality of life in order to meet the needs of a growing and aging population. Currently seniors comprise about 14% of Canada's population but account for almost half of health costs. By 2036, it is projected more than 25% of Canadians will be older than 65 and, by then, will account for 62% of this nation's health costs.ⁱⁱ

Canada's health system is still largely acute care oriented and not optimally designed to provide care for those with ongoing care needs, such as chronically ill or frail elderly. When Canada's Medicare system was created 50 years ago, the average life expectancy in Canada was 68.1 years. Today, however, the average life expectancy is 81.7 years, yet the health system has not fully adapted to meet the needs of our aging population.ⁱⁱⁱ

In particular, some of the important discussions as part of such a Care to Chat debate could include ways we can better meet the needs of a rapidly aging population as well as the role of the federal government in implementing national strategies on dementia, palliative care, housing or even developing an overall strategy for seniors or health human resources (HHR).

Since winning the last election in 2015, the federal Liberal government has undertaken a number of initiatives such as announcing a new national dementia strategy earlier this year, as well as increased funding for the New Horizon for Seniors Program to deal with issues such as seniors' isolation and elder abuse. The federal Liberals have also signed bilateral agreements with the provinces with new funding commitments particularly focusing on home and community care. Despite such actions, further work



must be done including dealing with health provider shortages and increasing infrastructure investments particularly to many care homes that are outdated and require much needed renovations or repairs.

Additional areas that could be addressed as part of an MPs panel debate on seniors include but not limited to improving access and quality care / quality of life; housing; research and innovation; public health and promotion including chronic disease prevention; supporting caregivers; new funding approaches such as long term care insurance; pharmaceuticals; as well as dealing with elder abuse and social isolation.

END NOTES

ⁱ BCCPA Op-ed. Role of Federal Government in the Continuing Care Sector: Fostering Innovation. May 14, 2015. Accessed at: <http://www.bccare.ca/role-federal-government-continuing-care-sector-fostering-innovation/>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.