

## **2023 National Pensioners Federation Convention Summary**

The National Pensioners Federation has wrapped up from our 2023 Biennial Convention and wishes to raise a number of concerns with the current Liberal government and all Party's plan in working toward a more just society that leaves no one behind.

This year, our 77<sup>th</sup> Convention assembled 60 leadership representatives from NPF affiliate groups from coast to coast to coast. While we are by design a federation of seniors' concerned about our health and welfare we cannot sit idly by without reckoning the plight that the COVID pandemic had and continues to have played on Older Adults.

In the face of prevailing policies and regulations, older individuals globally, including those in Canada, continue to grapple with a myriad of egregious human rights challenges and violations stemming from decades of ageism. It is of paramount importance to address this situation urgently, driven by a moral, ethical, and legal imperative.

The NPF and all affiliate organizations overwhelmingly called for the adoption of a dedicated UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons as a critical step to address ageism and such inequities as human rights violations, as we witnessed in the delivery of services and access to Health Care.

Additionally, the convention delegation highlighted and unanimously recommended four main pillars that will enhance the quality of life for Ageing Canadians. Ultimately, securing a National Drug Plan for **ALL** remains urgent and supporting a National Seniors Strategy that encompasses accessible and affordable healthy living for today's growing ageing population.

### **1. NATIONAL PHARMACARE**

Seniors will be major beneficiaries of the universal national Pharmacare program currently being developed by the federal government. And, because the National Pensioners Federation has long been aware of the profound inequities in access to health care for many seniors and other lower income groups in Canada, we have supported the introduction of a universal single-payer Pharmacare program for many years.

Opinion polls indicate that most Canadians support a national Pharmacare Program but we are also aware that big pharmaceutical and insurance companies are lobbying our governments on a continuing basis to halt any change or program that might put a curb on their profits. We have also watched with alarm the demise of the PMPRB which was mandated to control new patented drug prices and the concerted power of the pharmaceutical industry in the courts. We stand up for the one in five individuals in Canada who depend on prescription drugs for a reasonable quality of life and have difficulty adhering to their prescription drugs because of cost (Statistics Canada 2021).

Since one in four seniors were prescribed 10 or more unique drugs classes in 2021, cost is clearly a major factor for seniors many of whom have very low incomes. The median income was \$28,100 for female seniors and \$40,100 for male seniors in 2021. (Statistics Canada 2021).

Canadians who value the principle of equity in access to health care as a human right and respect the contribution that seniors are making and have made to building Canada today need a national Pharmacare program now and will be very disappointed if that does not happen.

### **National solutions needed:**

We remain hopeful as most all Canadians supported the Hoskin's Report recommendation of a single payer national plan and expansion of the Canada Health Act to include prescription drugs dispensed outside of hospital. This would qualify to an approach that would ensure all Canadians have equitable and affordable access to life saving prescription drugs and help save lives.

We want to know that your party cares about healthy Canadians and their financial ability to live with quality of care while saving billions of tax payer money directly in Health Care ER's. Especially given that the elderly are retiring out of out of their workplace private plans in growing numbers today. The growing senior demographic and the rate of chronic mental health supports required rises concerns for immediate attention from your government and our voice must be included.

**Don't plan for seniors plan WITH seniors. Our delegation at this conference urges all levels of government to get this right.**

## **2. LONG-TERM CARE NATIONAL STANDARDS**

When Covid-19 arrived in Canada in early 2020, it triggered a major crisis in the Canadian health care system that profoundly impacted the lives of all Canadians but none more so than Canadian seniors. Covid-19 also exposed the deep-rooted ageism in Canadian society that allowed successive Canadian governments to ignore the neglect and abuse of Canada's most vulnerable citizens in long-term care (nursing homes) to continue unimpeded for decades. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) that rate of deaths was more than 2 times greater in mid 2020 than it was in any other OECD country. (CIHI). Yet, according to academic researchers, about 100 research reports had documented the dire state of LTC and the effects of the deliberate underfunding of LTC over almost two decades.

As the Canadian government began to take steps to improve LTC, Seniors were happy to learn that a significant amount of federal funding was being made available for long-term care initiatives across Canada. Seniors also welcomed the federally funded National Standards for LTC that was quickly developed by experts in LTC and released in early 2023. Seniors also have high expectations that the proposed Canadian Safe Long Term Care Act will be a foundation for major change in LTC across Canada.

### **National solutions needed:**

The NPF strongly recommends the Minister for Seniors office to advise the federal government of the need to incorporate measures that will ensure public accountability and transparency in the delivery of LTC care. And that, in all funding agreements with the provinces and territories for LTC care provides, as its central organizing principle, the quality of life of the residents in LTC services.

This can also be accomplished by the Canadian government supporting the human rights of Older Persons through a UN Convention and systematically work to counter the forces of ageism in Canada.

### **3. HOUSING**

The NPF submitted a policy paper to the National Housing Strategy 'fact finding' consultation. When Minister Duclos presented the **National Housing Strategy**, it was unveiled as a \$40 billion plan to address housing issues in Canada, over 10 years. Again this year (2023) we submitted to the HUMA Committee on Affordable Housing with 24 listed resolves related to an Ageing population and housing security/need.

The NPF has adopted many housing policy resolutions over the decades for governments both federally and provincially to address the disparity in income compared to housing options. Still today seniors' homelessness (or couch surfing of friends and family) is the number one outcome from the difficulty of securing adequate housing due to the current market trends, especially in the new phenomena of the financialization of housing.

The Metro Vancouver homeless count in 2023 was recently announced with over 4,200 persons living in shelters, or unsuitable housing, including over 21% seniors over the age of 55 years. This is an urgent matter as winter is fast approaching.

The National Housing Strategy that is currently laid out by the Liberal government was closely studied and discussed at this convention. While we recognize that the multi-level model of implementation is a great step we also are concerned about lack of consistencies that may result. We support equitable and dependable housing across Canada for our most vulnerable to navigate during this current housing crisis. Homelessness is a dire concern for seniors today with the rising costs of living, property taxes, home repairs, quality of food costs and medically necessary drugs. Often their budget fails to provide on all of these accounts.

We look to the leadership of all levels of government plans to develop quality results together not a pass the buck style of implementation that often finds wasted dollars rather than quality of care.

### **National Solutions Needed:**

Since each province or territory plans for use of dispersed Federal funds, it has become incumbent that housing advocates closely watch the provincial/territorial 'policy-making strategies' to ensure that the funding is used wisely. Three provinces Ontario, BC and New Brunswick have signed bi-lateral agreements for implementing the National Housing Strategy Plan. website [www.homelesshub.ca](http://www.homelesshub.ca)

Support for low cost housing (no more than 30% of income), build age friendly communities, develop for mental health housing (as modelled in European countries) that support dementia and isolation. Seniors are worried, especially women as the economic outlook appears bleak.

Additionally, the NPF advocates for increased accessible housing (new builds and retrofits), more affordable choices of suitable housing as seniors' age, and the protection of vulnerable populations as priority goals over the coming years.

**More confidence in program implementation can be built when governments consult and plan with organized senior groups from coast to coast to coast.**

#### **4. AFFORDABILITY FOR SENIORS**

Seniors living in poverty has to come to an end in Canada. What justification can possibly exist to further maintain desperate choices that vulnerable low income seniors face each day?

In July 2022, the OAS was increased by ten percent for seniors over 75 years of age.

There is no rational explanation for denying this increase to those aged 65 to 75. (Much of this increase would be clawed back for those seniors less in need of assistance.) The cost of living, highlighted above, is the same for all seniors. With the dramatic cost of living increases in the past two years low income seniors who rely on the GIS to exist need an immediate ten percent increase in GIS payments. This is especially urgent in the need for essentials: food, housing, heating and transportation. Seniors are feeling the huge impact of today's substantial increases in grocery cost that are mostly over the rate of inflation. The lump sum Federal grocery subsidies are a failed response to price gouging by Grocer corporate monopolies. We must do better where the divide between the super rich and destitute poor increases at such drastic rates.

#### **National solution needed:**

The good news for government is that GIS payments have a maximum impact in our economy. This is because of the Multiplier Effect of money changing hands. Simply put, impoverished seniors spend their GIS income on life's necessities. They do not place these dollars into savings accounts, foreign travel or other inefficient spending choices. The economic spinoffs advance the Canadian economy.

The NPF advocates for an immediate increase to the Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for all aged 65 and older. Not create a two tier layer of benefits that are in place to support Ageing Canadians equally.

Additionally, we call for the increase in the CPP death benefit from \$2,500 to \$5,000. There has been no real substantial increase in the death benefit in many years. This amount has not kept pace with today's lived reality and the growing disparity of Older Women living in poverty today. An increase in the amount a person is able to earn before claw backs are taken from OAS recipients would allow older adults to contribute to their own well being, both mentally and physically.

**Ageing Canadians are worried about their future so together we must find the political will to PROTECT and ensure social, economic security and equity in our future. It makes good economic cents...**

**And we plan to get this done!**