

Seniors Strategy





“It’s interesting. When we think about older people – it’s not simply ‘that group over there.’ It’s a group we’re in and going to be in. People have to start thinking it matters to them, to their families, to the people around them. All people need to be invested in the solutions.” Dr. Paula A. Rochon

Age. Few phenomena inspire such contradictory reactions.

We celebrate birthdays from one to 100. We applaud longevity. Despite these celebrations, perceptions on aging often turn negative as people mature. This negativity is insidious because it is wide-based, and tolerated and promoted even by those most hurt by the negativity. This view on aging must change. It is discriminatory and dehumanizing, and leads to a devaluation of a rich and vital Canadian resource – our elders.

The health-care and financial infrastructures, including psychosocial services, that theoretically support Canadians as they age must be re-designed, re-engineered and built from ground up. This cannot happen overnight, but overnight steps can be taken to get plans in progress.

COVID-19 illustrated the worst kind of neglect ageism inflicts on older persons. No one can argue against changing the status quo. RTOERO as an organization and as individuals and community members can motivate persons of influence and all stakeholders to make a change in the right direction. Measurable change. Change that can be monitored and held up for review and accountability. Change to truly provide dignity and quality to older peoples’ lives.

OPPORTUNITIES



Infrastructure

Encourage the federal government to take the lead and, with the provinces and territories establish national standards that guarantee basic income and health-care rights for Canada’s older adult population. Encourage the provinces and cities to collaborate. Build new models and goals. Clarify who is accountable to them and how. Ensure transparency. Dedicate a task force that includes older adults and caregivers to initiate the process immediately, with the intention of eradicating systemic inadequacies. Ensure older persons are actively involved in every step of the journey. They should be part of the process and help determine the process – not simply experience it. Demand the public be regularly advised on progress.

“We should be very concerned that the system is broken and we are not able to accommodate the needs that are happening now and are going to happen in the future as we age. We need to fix the entire system. It’s economically sound to do so.”

Margaret Gillis

The Conversation

- How do you plan to improve the infrastructure that failed our older population so badly this year? What immediate measures have you taken?
- When we speak with you in six months, what changes do you expect to have in place?
- What does your party platform have to say about this situation? Are you living up to your promises?

Ageism

Encourage all levels of government and public organizations to create awareness campaigns on how ageism presents itself to Canada’s older persons. Demand exposure of the whole range of ageism – from its softest to its harshest expressions. Ask them to develop materials and activities to be used in schools at all levels. Educate and shift the views of the general population, institutions and professionals on what aging is about from the negative to the positive.

“We need to study the whole spectrum of what it’s like to grow old. Get numbers. Good evidence. Research. We must look at what everyone needs along the way to change perspectives around aging.” Dr. Paula Rochon

“Aging happens to all people, but we’re dealing with an inability to think about a future where we are older. We don’t face it. It’s a manifestation of ageism. We need to prepare for aging properly. We need a new perspective on aging. We need an ageism awareness campaign and a UN Convention to address this and other aging issues.” Margaret Gillis

The Conversation

- What programs have you developed to help fight ageism relative to Canada’s elders? How are you talking to the general public, students of all ages, professionals and seniors themselves about ageism?
- How is your party tapping into the resources older adults offer?
- How do you gain insights from older persons’ perspectives on matters important to your constituency and mandate?

UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

RTOERO supports the International Longevity Centre (ILC) Canada’s demand of the Canadian government to “take immediate and decisive steps toward leading and supporting a United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of all Older Persons.”* RTOERO upholds “that an international legal framework to protect the rights of older persons is an essential component of the difficult work of dismantling systemic ageism and ensuring a more just and fair society for all Canadians as we age.”**

*ILC letter to The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and The Honourable Deb Schulte, Minister of Seniors, UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons
**RTOERO letter to The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and The Honourable Deb Schulte, Minister of Seniors, supporting ILC’s demand for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

The Conversation

- Challenge your ministers, elected officials and other people of influence to support this UN Convention, which would have the world witness and hold accountable how countries treat their older people.
- Demand to know why this wouldn’t be a priority.



Financial Security

Statistics Canada indicates 14.5% of Canada’s older adults live in poverty. More than a quarter of older adults who live alone – the majority of them women – live in poverty. The government must monitor the financial needs of older people and ensure the Canada Pension Plan, old age security program and Guaranteed Income Supplement realistically address those needs. Defined benefit pension plans would deliver the same retirement income at half the cost of defined contribution plans.***

***Refer to RTOERO Vibrant Voices *Make Retirement More Secure*

The Conversation

- What measures are you taking to identify older persons in financial distress?
- Do you support the protection and expansion of defined benefit plans?
- What is your party’s current retirement security plan for older persons currently? What improvements are you making and/or requesting?



Health Care

COVID-19 proved Canada needs national standards covering health care for older adults. The standards must govern aging concerns along the whole pipeline and all networks within the pipeline. Health should be viewed holistically – mind, body and spirit. Maintaining well-being involves teams of experts collaborating to find solutions to address physical illnesses, disabilities, social isolation, loneliness and elder abuse. Urban and rural challenges may be distinct. Teams of health-care experts should establish national standards to guide health-care practices for the aging and establish robust and holistic accountability models.

“Health-care evaluations for seniors in residences is task-based and doesn’t address a whole picture. The assessment models ask caregivers to indicate whether specific tasks are performed. For example, we know if a person ate breakfast but do not know if the breakfast was nutritious or whether it was enjoyed. We don’t know how the person ‘experienced’ the day. Current models do not identify nor support quality of life.”

Anita Plunkett



The Conversation

- How does your current practice address the holistic health needs of older adults? How does policy check on the mental and social welfare of the elderly?
- What evaluations are in place to monitor health-care practices? Do the measurements assess quality of life variables?
- May you review the approved metrics for monitoring health-care practices?
- Is the expertise properly organized to take a holistic view on older persons’ health challenges?
- Given the lessons learned from COVID-19, what changes do you and your party want to enforce to guarantee the welfare of Canada’s older adult population?
- Does Canada now have a workable definition of elder abuse? What are you doing to make the public aware of elder abuse? What is the process for detecting older persons “at risk” and addressing elder abuse?

“Give a voice to the seniors. As soon as the ‘pen’ is held by seniors, the tone becomes strong, real and convincing. They are sharing authentic, shared experiences.”

Paule Lebel



INFLUENCE:
THE POWER OF ONE

Meet, phone and write to elected officials and people of influence and stakeholders. **Promote and demand:**

- National health-care standards for older persons.
- A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.
- Financial security for older adults and processes that evaluate individual situations – especially for those living alone.
- Stronger defined benefit pension plans.
- Holistic views of health care that involve teams of experts addressing the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of all older persons.
- Eradication of ageism with campaigns and materials to reimagine older adults’ profiles in terms of value and dignity.
- Older people represent themselves on all task forces, commissions and planning sessions.
- Industry and other facilities within your community be “older persons – friendly” in all ways, from politeness and respect to physical access, comfort and convenience.
- Respectful depiction of the elderly in all media forms.

TIPS

- Probe all political parties for their views on older persons’ issues. Accept no excuses for who is in power or not – what action have they taken?
- Encourage family members, friends and community organizations to support these initiatives. Each “Vibrant Voice” is a vote in the right direction.
- Always ask for timelines and measures of evaluation. Ensure they know you are tracking progress on specific issues.



INFLUENCE:
THE POWER OF MANY

Illustrate your strength. Solicit the help of family, friends, neighbours and community.

- Approach elected officials together.
- Organize meetings in which people of influence see your strength in numbers. Make them understand your influence.
- Collaborate with not-for-profit organizations and associations sympathetic to Vibrant Voices advocacy programs.
- Organize volunteer programs. Contribute to initiatives that help improve older persons’ lives.
- Organize community events for the elderly or that include older persons. Seek out older people who need help attending or participating.
- Organize programs that bear witness to older adults who may be alone, need help and can’t speak for themselves.
- Help set improved standards of community care for the older people living in your area.
- Start petitions and persist.

TIPS

- Research how to submit valid petitions to government.
- Get older people involved in the plans. Let their voices anchor the plans.
- Create community task forces to share the work and the rewards.

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Please also refer to Vibrant Voices' brief, *Geriatric Health Care* –
designed as a companion brief to *Seniors Strategy*.