



AGING IN 2019

A REPORT ON POLITICAL PRIORITIES
IN AGING ACROSS CANADA

JUNE 2019



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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This publication is intended to provide an overview of the current political priorities and trends in aging in the Canadian context and is based on information available as of the date of publication or as otherwise noted. None of the information in this document is intended to provide legal, accounting, or other professional advice.

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INTRODUCTION

Population aging has given rise to a confluence of complex social, economic, cultural, and political challenges. Canadian governments are seeking policies, programs, and services that support older adults in remaining healthy, aging at home, staying connected to their communities, and enjoying a high quality of life throughout their later years. Addressing all of these challenges across a multiplicity of healthcare systems, a diversity of older adults, and a range of geographic settings makes for a level of complexity that is only increasing all while each jurisdiction's financial resources are becoming more and more constrained. In this climate, governments are focusing their energies on identifying priority areas for the development of policy solutions, taking into account factors such as scientific evidence, public opinion, cultural values, party politics, and more.

In our efforts to inform public policy development and affect meaningful change, APPTA has conducted a scan of political priorities for the aging population across the federal, provincial, and territorial governments of Canada. The objective of this jurisdictional scan was to obtain a better understanding of the political landscape in each jurisdiction, identify policy priorities of national importance, and align our work in knowledge translation with initiatives that are reflected in federal, provincial, and territorial budget commitments. To conduct this analysis, APPTA reviewed party platforms, throne speeches, annual budget speeches and overview documents, as well as existing and current aging strategies, where available. A full list of sources by jurisdiction can be found in **APPENDIX A**.

OVERVIEW: POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN CANADA

Over the course of the last year, the Canadian political landscape has shifted from an overwhelmingly Liberal majority to several new provincial Conservative governments. Recent elections in Ontario, Québec, Alberta, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick have all resulted in wins by right-leaning parties typically characterized as conservative in their politics¹, while Newfoundland & Labrador maintained a Liberal government, albeit a minority, in 2019. Upcoming elections in 2019 include the federal government as well as the government in the Northwest Territories, with Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Yukon all headed for elections in 2020. A full overview of political parties and provincial, territorial and federal leadership can be found in Figures 1 and 2 below.

¹ The Coalition Avenir de Québec (CAQ) are not members of the Progressive Conservative Party, however, their politics are classified as right-wing.

Figure 1. Political Parties in Canada



Figure 2. Current Government Leadership & Structure Across Canada

<p>Federal Right. Hon. Justin Trudeau Liberal Majority</p>	<p>Yukon Hon. Sandy Silver Liberal Majority</p>	<p>Northwest Territories Hon. Bob McLeod Consensus-Based Government</p>
<p>Nunavut Hon. Joe Savikataaq Consensus-Based Government</p>	<p>British Columbia Hon. John Horgan New Democratic Party Minority</p>	<p>Alberta Hon. Jason Kenney Conservative Majority</p>
<p>Saskatchewan Hon. Scott Moe Saskatchewan Party Majority</p>	<p>Manitoba Hon. Brian Pallister Conservative Majority</p>	<p>Ontario Hon. Doug Ford Conservative Majority</p>
<p>Québec Hon. François Legault Coalition Avenir Québec Majority</p>	<p>New Brunswick Hon. Blaine Higgs Conservative Minority</p>	<p>Nova Scotia Hon. Stephen McNeil Liberal Majority</p>
<p>Prince Edward Island Hon. Dennis King Conservative Minority</p>	<p>Newfoundland & Labrador Hon. Dwight Ball Liberal Minority</p>	

While political ideologies tend to play a large role in priority-setting around topics such as the environment, economy, and social justice, most political parties lean toward high expenditures on universal healthcare. Additionally, all parties acknowledged a need to address the policy challenges that are particular to an aging population whether it was through their platforms, budgets, strategies, or throne speeches. Several governments like Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Québec published platforms or budget overviews that were specific to seniors, while others included their commitments toward the aging population as sections of larger documents. In summary, there were clear trends that emerged from the scan as political priorities for older adults across the country, which will be outlined in more detail below.

HIGHLIGHTS: POLITICAL PRIORITIES ACROSS CANADA

When it comes to the aging population, Canada's current federal government has focused their energies on poverty reduction, housing, home care, and mental health. Priorities in poverty reduction included commitments to restore the eligibility age for Old Age Security (OAS) benefits to 65 years old and increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for single low-income seniors by 10%, as well as the introduction of proactive enrolment into the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) for Canadians over the age of 70 and new measures to protect workplace pension plans from insolvency.¹ The federal government has also committed to making the Compassionate Care Benefit more flexible and accessible for caregivers of seriously ill family members so as to provide them with the financial support needed to care for their loved ones.²

In housing, the federal government will invest \$40 billion over ten years to implement the National Housing Strategy, which includes a priority for affordable housing for low-income seniors that is accessible and meets their needs.³ The 2019 budget also includes commitments to hold the federal government in power accountable for maintaining a Housing Strategy by requiring annual reporting to Parliament.

CPP & OAS Benefits	\$1.76 billion
National Housing Strategy	\$40 billion
Mental Health & Home Care	\$11.5 billion
National Dementia Strategy	\$50 million
New Horizons for Seniors	\$100 million

Lastly, the 2016 Health Accord was signed with the provinces and territories provides for federal transfer payments in home care and mental health, Canada's Shared Health Priorities, of approximately \$11.5 billion over the next five years. These transfers are in addition to the \$50 million committed over the next five years to support the implementation of the National Dementia Strategy. Along with the transfer payments, the federal government requested the support of the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) in developing consensus-based accountability indicators that can be used to measure performance across jurisdictions in relation to the Shared Health Priorities. The 12 indicators will track increased access to mental health and home care services and be released in sets of three over the following four years².

² Canadian Institute for Health Information (2019) Shared Health Priorities. Retrieved from: <https://www.cihi.ca/en/shared-health-priorities-0>

In analysing the political priorities of the provinces and territories, several themes emerged across the country. The following sections will describe these themes in more detail, identify the jurisdictions that have made platform or throne speech promises to address the issue, and highlight examples of budget commitments made.

[1] Healthcare Human Resources

Possibly the top-rated political priority across the country, many jurisdictions have platform or budget commitments aimed at addressing a healthcare labour force shortage. Provinces and territories are experiencing significant challenges with recruitment and retention of personal support workers and residential care facility staff, as well as shortages of doctors and other healthcare professionals who can diagnose and prescribe. Concerns regarding the number of physicians and nurses were especially high among Atlantic provinces, leading jurisdictions like Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to make specific budget commitments such as:

- Nova Scotia: Funding residency spaces at Dalhousie University for doctors and enhancing physician immigration by developing a particular stream within the Practice Ready Assessment Program for physicians.⁴
- New Brunswick: Investing \$2.4 million to implement a Nursing Human Resources Strategy, hiring additional nurse practitioners throughout the province, and investing \$16.1 million to increase wages for home support workers.⁵

Other jurisdictions that identified healthcare human resources as a priority in 2019 include British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Québec, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and Manitoba.

[2] Healthcare Infrastructure

Also a highly-rated concern among provinces and territories, healthcare infrastructure reflects commitments to the development or modernization of new hospitals, clinics, healthcare centers, and long-term care beds. Jurisdictions such as Nova Scotia, Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Québec, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut have all included budget commitments for hospital construction or upgrades, while the following jurisdictions have made specific commitments to build more long-term care beds:

- Ontario: Investing \$1.75 billion over the next five years for the creation of additional long-term care beds.⁶
- Québec: Adding 900 more beds and spaces in residential and long-term care facilities through a commitment of \$70 million per year for the next four years.⁷

- Newfoundland & Labrador: Construction of a 145-bed facility in Cornerbrook is currently underway, with two new 60-bed long-term care facilities in Grand-Falls-Windsor and Gander at tender in 2019.⁸

The new Government in Alberta has also made a commitment to build additional long-term care beds⁹, however, the 2019 provincial budget had not been released as of the date of this report.

[3] Mental Health & Addictions

As noted above, the new federal Health Accord identified mental health as one of the two Shared Health Priorities for Canadian jurisdictions. While the focus of the Accord is on access to services, many jurisdictions have highlighted particular aspects of mental health that they are prioritizing. Alberta and British Columbia noted special concern for the opioid crisis, while Manitoba, Yukon, Newfoundland & Labrador, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories have all made funding commitments to mental health & addictions more broadly within their platforms, throne speeches, or budget documents. The table in Figure 3 provides a breakdown of total federal funding committed to provinces and territories under the new Health Accord for mental health³. Some interesting funded initiatives to highlight here include:

Table 2.

Fiscal Year	Amount
2018-2019	\$250 million
2019-2020	\$450 million
2020-2021	\$600 million
2021-2022	\$600 million

- Newfoundland & Labrador: Investment of \$1.7 million for the Home Dementia Program that supports individuals living with moderate or advanced dementia and their caregivers to receive services at home from a physician or nurse practitioner through remote monitoring technology.¹⁰
- Northwest Territories: Investments of \$3.6 million to continue the implementation of the *Mental Health Act* with targeted funding for mobile addictions and substance abuse treatment, as well as construction of a day shelter and sobering program.¹¹
- Alberta: Investment of \$40 million over 4 years for the development of an Opioid Response Strategy that includes appointing an Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions.¹²

³ Government of Canada (2017). Shared Health Priorities – Bilateral Agreements. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/transparency/health-agreements/shared-health-priorities.html>

[4] Home Care

The second Shared Health Priority for Canadian jurisdictions was home and community care, emphasizing the importance of providing healthcare services outside of traditional settings like physicians' offices and hospitals in the context of an aging population with increasing chronic disease rates. Figure 4 illustrates the total federal funding allocated to increasing home and community care by fiscal year for the next four years. Nearly every jurisdiction made reference to home care or the federal transfer funding in 2019 however, the governments of Alberta, Québec, and Saskatchewan

Table 3.

Fiscal Year	Amount
2018-2019	\$600 million
2019-2020	\$650 million
2020-2021	\$650 million
2021-2022	\$900 million

have identified actionable innovations that they intend to pilot or undertake in home care over the coming years.

- Alberta: Home care funding will be used for the creation of innovative community options, such as new personal care homes that provide services for older adults who require a level of care that cannot be obtained alone at home, but do not require placement in supportive living facilities. These homes will house a maximum of 15 older adults and will be located in community.¹³
- Québec: Piloting the concept of Seniors Homes, a project that aims to replace residential care facilities with environments that resemble a private home. The government has identified an investment of \$245 million over the next four years for piloting and implementing 30 Seniors Homes.¹⁴
- Saskatchewan: Introducing the Home First/ Quick Response program, which aims to increase access for seniors to supports within their communities, in several areas of the province.¹⁵

[5] Affordable and Accessible Housing & Transportation

With rising costs of living and increasing urbanization, affordable housing has become a challenge for many Canadians. When it comes to older adults, provinces and territories are facing the additional barrier of accessibility. The 10-year National Housing Strategy has begun to drive change, with investments totaling over \$40 billion by the federal government alone, but provinces and territories have also been allocating resources to housing improvements. In 2019, Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon, Ontario, Newfoundland & Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Québec, and Saskatchewan all identified housing as a priority, either in relation to seniors or the general population more broadly. Some of the housing initiatives identified include:

- Alberta: The government will prioritize expanding the use of mixed-income housing that enables seniors to continue to reside in their communities and ensuring that local municipal bylaws and rules provide flexible and affordable housing options for seniors, including unrelated seniors who want to live together and support each other in a single dwelling, similar to Ontario's *Golden Girls Act*.¹⁶

- Prince Edward Island: Develop a means-tested property tax credit for seniors aged 60 and over to support them in being able to afford to remain in their own homes.¹⁷

Affordable and accessible transportation was also identified as a political priority in British Columbia, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories. These jurisdictions stated concerns about older adults' abilities to actively participate in their communities, access essential services, and stay connected to their loved ones, especially for those living in rural or remote regions. In British Columbia and Nova Scotia, innovative public transit fare reduction approaches are being explored^{18,19}, whereas in Prince Edward Island, the government is considering the development of a public transit plan for the entire province²⁰. In Nunavut, \$14 million in investments are being made to expand their Medical Travel Program, which assists Nunavummiut peoples with the costs of travel associated with receiving medical care²¹.

RISING PRIORITIES: CONCERNS IN AGING ON THE HORIZON

Most jurisdictions have identified home care, mental health, housing, transportation, healthcare infrastructure and healthcare human resources as existing political priorities. Additional priorities raised by some governments that are expected to take center stage in public policy over the next decade included:



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Labour Force Participation: With the impending retirements of the baby boomer population and the decline in birth rates over the last few decades, many jurisdictions are expecting to face large labour shortages that will not be remedied by technology and economic forces on their own. The Government of Québec and the Government of Nova Scotia are both exploring policy initiatives to

incentivize and support older adults to remain in the workforce longer. In fact, Québec has recently introduced two new tax credits to encourage experienced workers to remain in the workforce, which include an enhanced tax credit for experienced workers over the age of 60, and a reduction in payroll expenses for wages paid to workers aged 60 and over²². As our society nears the crux of baby boomer retirement, other governments will be seeking innovative ways of overcoming or mitigating the impacts of labour shortages as well.

Pharmacare: Canadians experience inequitable access to prescription drugs, making Canada unique among countries with universal healthcare systems⁴. With the announcement of the establishment of the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare and the upcoming presentation of the Hoskins Report to the House of Commons, a National Pharmacare Strategy appears to be somewhere on the horizon. In the meantime, provinces such as British Columbia and Manitoba have committed extra funding in their healthcare budgets to render certain prescription drugs more affordable, with investments in the amounts of \$42 million²³ and \$270 million²⁴ respectively. As the country moves toward a more equitable and affordable approach to pharmacare, it is expected that this priority will rise in prominence for several years.



Icon made by Freepik from www.flaticon.com

⁴ Government of Canada (2018) Towards Implementation of National Pharmacare: Discussion Paper. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/public-engagement/external-advisory-bodies/implementation-national-pharmacare/discussion-paper.html>

Caregivers: One in four Canadians will provide informal care to a friend or family member over the course of their lifetime, and it is estimated that they contribute between \$23.2 – \$44.8 billion in unpaid labour to our health system annually⁵. Research on caregiving is increasingly highlighting not only the cost savings to the healthcare system, but also the economic impacts on employers and caregivers. Jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, and Québec have all highlighted caregiving as a policy priority, with the Government of Québec being the first to announce the development of a Caregiver Policy²⁵, and Manitoba being the first to legislate the *Caregiver Recognition Act*. With public policy focus being on supporting aging at home and in community, identifying how best to support caregivers in providing care to their loved ones is expected to move to the forefront of the conversation.



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In conclusion, Canada’s key political priorities in aging for 2019 are primarily focused on improvements in healthcare. From infrastructure to staffing to programs and services, the provincial and territorial governments are racing to catch up to the growing demand being placed on their healthcare systems. The secondary priority has been around built environments, and ensuring that housing, transportation, and communities more broadly are supportive of older adults’ evolving needs. To achieve these aims and build a more age-friendly society, the federal, provincial and territorial governments of Canada will need to work collaboratively with older adults, caregivers, healthcare professionals, researchers, and other stakeholder groups to ensure evidence-informed policy decisions are made that truly affect change.

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