



# **AGING IN 2023**

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**A REPORT ON POLITICAL PRIORITIES  
IN AGING ACROSS CANADA**

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## ABOUT APPTA



The AGE-WELL National Innovation Hub Advancing Policies and Practices in Technology and Aging (APPTA) supports governments in generating opportunities to address the policy and practice challenges of an aging population. A joint initiative of AGE-WELL and the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation, APPTA aims to bridge the gap between research and implementation, create opportunities for knowledge exchange, and foster an environment of innovation and collaboration in aging across Canada.

APPTA's work in knowledge translation is centered on providing federal, provincial, and territorial governments across Canada with decision support in policy innovation for the aging population. Our policy option development process aims to bridge the knowledge translation gap by mobilizing aging and technology research to build relevant, appropriate, and evidence-informed options that can improve the lives of older Canadians.

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## *Aging in 2023*

# **A Report on Political Priorities in Aging across Canada**

## *Introduction*

This report is the 2022-23 update of APPTA's jurisdictional scan of federal, provincial, and territorial policy priorities for the aging population. Over the past two years, there have been several shifts from the priorities identified in our *Aging in 2019*<sup>1</sup> and *Aging in 2021*<sup>2</sup> scans. Policy priorities identified in the 2019 scan focused on the need for additional healthcare human resources, expanded infrastructure, services to provide care in the home or community, affordable housing and accessible transportation for older adults, and support for older adults with mental health conditions or addiction. The 2021 report identified an emphasis on emergency responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and how the threat amplified the multidimensional barriers to aging well in Canada. Specifically, governments recognized the need for longer-term policies, programs, and services to address the healthcare system variations, diversity in the older population, and geographical limitations. Since 2021, new priorities have emerged for federal, provincial, and territorial policies related to the aging population. These have been driven in part by the transition to a post-pandemic economy and by economic challenges compounded by destabilizing international events, such as the war in Ukraine. Concerns include the return to in-person workspaces, high fuel and energy prices, rising interest rates and inflation, and labour supplies. Priorities related to aging include provision of dental coverage, expansion of the older adult care staffing, initiatives to retain older adults in the workforce, and tax rebates or credits to reduce the cost of living. Additionally, priorities identified in our 2021 report in areas like aging-at-home benefits, income supports, and housing support have been re-examined.

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<sup>1</sup> Aging in 2019: <https://agewell-nih-appta.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2021/07/J-Aging-in-2019.pdf>

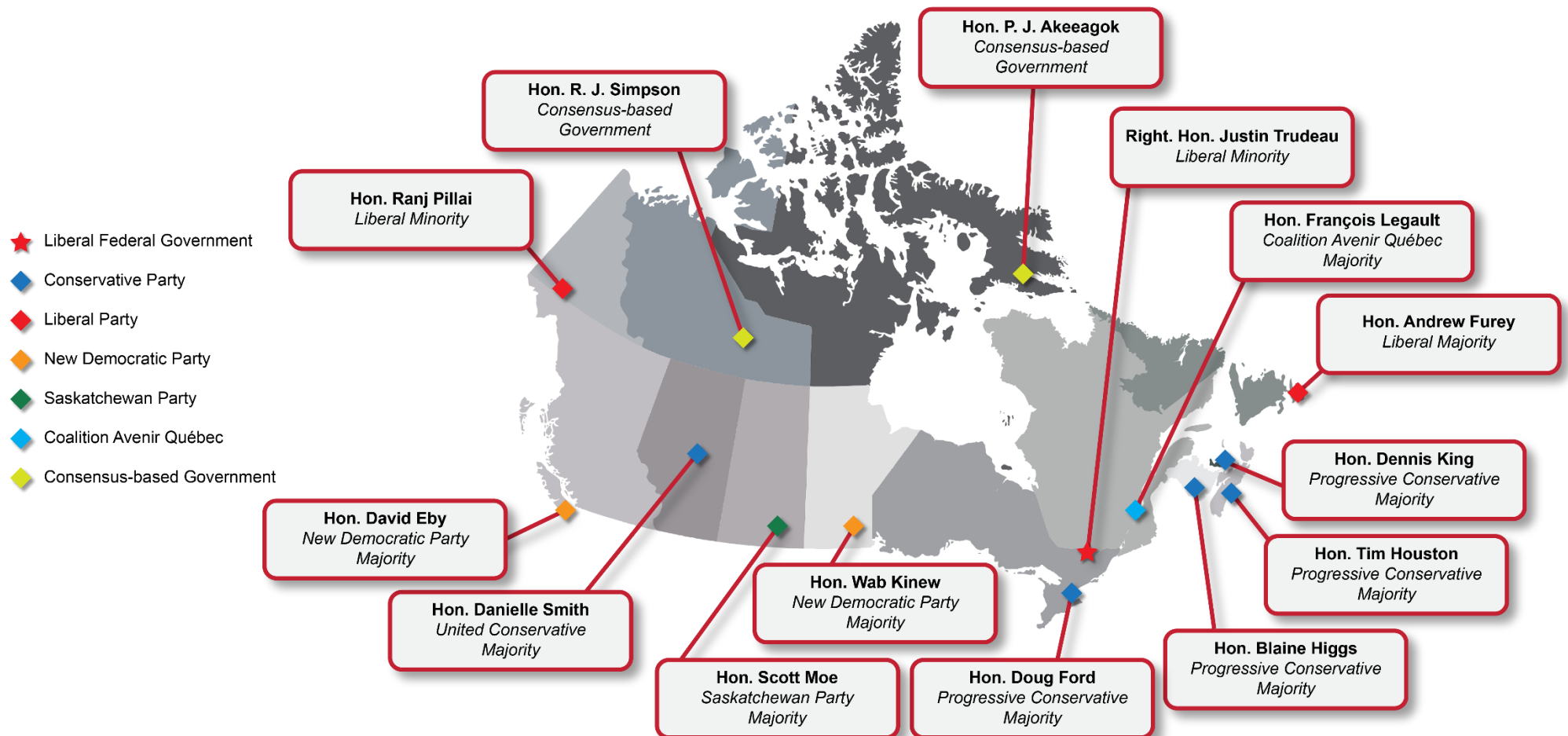
<sup>2</sup> Aging in 2021: [https://agewell-nih-appta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/JSCAN2021\\_Final-1.pdf](https://agewell-nih-appta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/JSCAN2021_Final-1.pdf)

As with the previous editions, the purpose of this jurisdictional scan is to update our understanding of changes in federal, provincial, and territorial policies related to the care and support for older adults. A review was conducted to capture these developments, examining budgets, throne speeches, mandate letters, and party platforms. A full list of documents screened since the 2020-21 scan is provided in APPENDIX A. To facilitate comparisons between priorities at different times, this analysis follows the overall framework used in the earlier reports.

## Overview: Political Landscape in Canada

Several changes have occurred in Canada's political context since 2021. Primarily, six jurisdictions held elections (Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta). For the most part, the elections maintained the political landscape, with conservatively-oriented parties returning to power<sup>3</sup>. Manitoba was an exception, where the New Democratic Party won a majority government in October 2023 over the incumbent Progressive Conservative Party. The Manitoba New Democratic Party's policies are still in development and the initiatives described below were developed and implemented by the Progressive Conservative government prior to the election. Figure 1 below provides an overview of provincial, territorial, and federal leadership.

Figure 1 – Current Government Leadership & Structure Across Canada



<sup>3</sup> The Coalition Avenir de Québec (CAQ), United Conservative Party, and Saskatchewan Party are not affiliated with the Progressive Conservative Party; however, their political platforms are classified as conservative.

In 2022 and 2023, policy priorities differed somewhat from those identified in previous scans, as political leaders focused on economic and social concerns stemming from recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and from high inflation and economic disruptions fed by a volatile international context. The theme of “moving forward” was common in party platforms from across the political spectrum. The priority on economic concerns was reflected in widespread increases in social benefit payments to older adults, including the federal Old Age Security program and provincial and territorial programs in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Yukon. Several jurisdictions implemented one-time or short-term payments to provide older adults with money to help meet higher costs of living. Some provinces also increased tax rebates for older adults.

While the cost of living for older adults received attention from policymakers across the country, several priorities identified in previous scans remained prominent. Policies to address systemic vulnerabilities and the need for additional personnel in the long-term care sector were less prominent, but were still highlighted as priorities in some jurisdictions. Canada's aging population and the need for supports and medical services remained a key priority, with most provinces announcing new programs or increased funding for existing programs to support the provision of home support or home care services. The federal government also announced the development of an *Aging in Place Plan* and is considering introducing an Aging in Place Benefit. Other supports for older adults' health and well-being, including expansions in health benefit coverage and housing programs, were mentioned in some jurisdictions. The distribution of policy priorities is outlined in Table 1 and details on specific areas are provided below.



**Table 1: Overview of Policy Priority Areas**

Jurisdiction	Priority Areas								
	New Seniors' Strategies and Framework	Financial Support for Older Adults	Tax Rebates	Housing	Home and Community Care	Long-term Care Infrastructure	Healthcare Human Resources	Health Coverage Expansion	Aging Research
Federal	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Alberta	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
British Columbia		✓	✓						
Manitoba	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
New Brunswick					✓				
Newfoundland & Labrador	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Northwest Territories		✓		✓					
Nova Scotia	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nunavut									
Ontario		✓	✓		✓	✓			
Prince Edward Island	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Québec			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Saskatchewan		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Yukon		✓		✓					

## *Highlights: Political Priorities Across Canada*

### *Federal Policy Priorities*

In 2022 and 2023, the policy focus of Canada's federal government shifted toward mitigating impacts of high inflation and economic disruptions on the general population, and on older adults. In 2023, the government provided a one-time grocery rebate for low and middle-income households, which would provide older adults an additional \$225 through the Goods and Services Tax Credit. The federal government also announced that it was considering measures to adjust to the mass retirement of baby-boomers and workers who are aged 55 years and older, which had started prior to the pandemic and was accelerated during the crisis. The government announced in December 2021 the development of a Career Extension Tax Credit of up to \$1650 per year, intended to promote longer retention of older adults in the job market. The 2019 scan noted that at that time similar tax initiatives for older adult workers were being considered in the provinces of Québec and Nova Scotia. As of this report's completion, the federal Career Extension Tax Credit had not been enacted in legislation or allocated budgetary funding.

Longstanding pressures on the Canadian healthcare system, and those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as aging infrastructure, healthcare staff shortages, and the need for mental health and addiction services, were concerns through 2022 and 2023 and were important priorities for federal policy development. The importance of supporting the health system was shown in the February 2023 announcement of a \$196 billion allocation for the *Working Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians Plan*, a 10-year bilateral health system funding agreement with the provinces and territories. The agreement primarily increased Canadian Health Transfer funding to provide general support for provincial and territorial health systems, but it also included \$1.7 billion over five years specifically to increase wages of

personal support workers and related professions, who often work in home and community care, or long-term care.

The federal government also has expressed support for aging in place. In December 2021, the federal Minister of Seniors was directed to set up an expert panel to identify approaches for implementing an Aging at Home Benefit to help enable older adults to live independently for as long as they choose. The expert panel was convened in 2022, but the Aging at Home Benefit has not yet been enacted in legislation. Also, a Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit was proposed in 2022 and introduced in 2023. It is projected to cost \$44 million and allows individuals to claim up to 15 percent (\$7500) of up to \$50,000 spent on renovations to add a secondary suite for an older adult or an adult with a disability. In 2022, the government provided an additional \$20 million for two years to expand the New Horizon for Seniors Program, which funds projects across Canada that seek to improve older adults' quality of life and community participation.

Because of the older adult care staff shortage highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis, in late 2021 the federal government announced that it intended to collaborate with provinces and territories to train and hire personal support workers, and raise wages for the long-term care workforce. The funding for personal support worker wage increases in the 2023 bilateral funding agreement was the result of that collaboration.

Finally, the federal government allocated \$5.3 billion to implement dental care for some Canadians, including older adults, with an annual family income of less than \$90,000. The 2023 budget proposed spending \$13 billion over five years, including previous funding from the 2022 budget, on the *Canadian Dental Care Plan*, with \$4.4 billion in ongoing funding through Health Canada. The federal government also allocated an additional \$20 million to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research over a five-year period to expand dementia and brain health research.

**Table 2: Areas of federal programming and budget costs**

Program / Priority Areas	Budget Cost
Canadian Dental Care Plan	\$13 billion implementation; \$4.4 billion ongoing
One-time Grocery Rebate	\$2.5 billion
Working Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians Plan funding for personal support workers	\$1.7 billion
Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit	\$44 million
New Horizons for Seniors Program expansion	\$20 million

## ***Provincial and Territorial priorities***

A number of themes in the provincial and territorial political priorities related to aging were continuations from previous years, while others were responses to emerging concerns. The following sections examine each theme, identify jurisdictions where they were prominent, and describe examples.

### ***New older adult support strategies and frameworks***

In 2022-23, Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, released new strategies or frameworks intended to strengthen systems to support older adults. Examples include:

- The Manitoba government received the final report of the *Stevenson Review* into the deadly COVID-19 outbreak at the Maples Long Term Care home in Winnipeg. The government responded by allocating \$54 million in the 2022 budget to fund the newly created Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care

to implement recommendations of the *Stevenson Review*. Also, \$20 million was budgeted for developing a *Seniors Strategy*, and \$32 million provided to implement the initiatives recommended by the *Stevenson Review*. In the 2023 budget, the Manitoba government provided \$15.9 million in additional funding to implement initiatives in the *Seniors Strategy* to promote aging at home and in the community.

- In 2022, the *Health Accord NL* report was released, which included extensive discussion about integrating the continuum of care and supporting aging in place. Subsequently, Newfoundland and Labrador committed in 2022 to establish a committee to consider implementation of recommendations on age-friendly communities, ageism, the continuum of care for older adults, and other medical issues. Newfoundland and Labrador made an investment of more than \$31 million in the 2023 budget to improve workforce capacity and implement the province's *Dementia Care Action Plan*.

As the examples illustrate, the strategies have provided guidance for development and implementation of multiple policies to support older adults in their respective provinces.

### **Financial support for older adults**

Policies making changes in several types of financial programs for older adults were announced by provinces and territories in 2022-23. As in the 2021 scan, where policies intended to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic often overlapped with policies in other themes, in 2022-23 policies designed to improve affordability were also often targeted at aspects of healthcare, such as extending drug coverage or dental coverage to more older adults. Those initiatives are detailed in their respective health or social policy sections.

### **Income supports**

Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Yukon, announced increased payments, extensions of financial assistance programs timelines, or expansion of eligibility criteria, for income support programs for older adults. Also, a new program was developed in the Northwest Territories. Examples of income supports include:



- The Alberta government announced a 6 percent increase in the Alberta Seniors' Benefit and that future payments would be indexed to keep pace with inflation rates. The Alberta government also announced in late 2023 that it is considering withdrawing from the federal Canada Pension Plan and establishing an Alberta Pension Plan. A public consultation process to assess support for the proposal was launched in Fall of 2023.
- In Ontario, the Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS) payment was temporarily doubled until the end of 2023, and an amendment has been proposed that will expand eligibility in 2024 to cover 100,000 more older adults.
- In 2022, Newfoundland and Labrador allocated \$61 million to increase the provincial Seniors' Benefit by 10 percent, which amounts to an additional \$1444 annually per recipient. This same benefit was increased by an additional 5 percent in 2023.
- The Northwest Territories 2023 budget announced funding for the creation of a new Income Assistance program focused on older adults and people with disabilities.

Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, and Alberta introduced programs aimed at improving affordability for older adults.

- The government of Prince Edward Island launched a new Seniors Food Security Program Pilot and committed \$250,000 for the first year.
- Alberta provided six monthly \$100 tax-free payments to older adults with household incomes below \$180,00 household earnings.

### **Tax rebates**

A variety of tax rebates for older adults were mentioned in policy statements. Also, some provinces provided tax rebates for caregivers supporting older adults. Tax rebate programs were announced or increased in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories. Examples include:

- In Prince Edward Island, the Seniors Tax Credit was increased in 2023 to help older adults keep more of their income. The government also provided rebates of up to \$500 per year to support use of Home-based Medical Alert Systems.
- The Ontario government introduced a new Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit to support the medical expenses of older adults. It was projected to

provide \$110 million in 2022 to 200,000 low-moderate-income older adult households.

Some provinces continued or expanded previously established tax rebates.

- British Columbia continued the Home Renovation Tax Credit, which provides older adults a rebate of up to 10 percent on eligible expenses (maximum \$10,000) on house renovations to promote accessibility.
- In Québec, starting in 2022, the government increased the refundable tax credit for home-support services for older adults living in apartment buildings from \$600 to \$1200. The government also continued the refundable tax credit for caregivers, which was projected to provide up to \$2598 per individual to up to 30,000 more eligible applicants.

### ***Housing Initiatives***

A priority area linked with affordability concerns in 2022-23 was addressing the housing needs of older adults. In addition to the emphasis in some announcements on increasing the housing supply, some policies focused on mitigating housing-related costs, such as heating or repairs. Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon made housing-related commitments. Examples include:

- Prince Edward Island allocated in the 2022 budget an additional \$500,000 to the Homeowner Assistance Program to operate the Home Renovation program, the Seniors Home Repair program, the Seniors Safe @ Home program, and the Renovation Program for Persons with Disabilities. The 2023 budget provided \$2.2 million to expand older adult focused areas, including safety and home repairs. The Seniors' Home Repair grant in Prince Edward Island provides older adults with up to \$4000 for eligible repairs, and the Seniors Safe @ Home Program provides up to \$10,000 for eligible renovations to improve accessibility.
- Newfoundland and Labrador provided \$70 million for the Affordable Housing Program, with a focus on spaces for older adults.

Some jurisdictions continued or expanded established housing support programs. For example:

- In Northwest Territories, the 2022 and 2023 budgets continued the Senior Home Heating Subsidy for low-income older adults to offset the cost of heating, and the Seniors Aging in Place Retrofits and Repairs Program, and Emergency Repair Program to help older adults in the territory make upgrades or repairs so they can live independently.

### ***Expanded Health Services***

Canada's provinces and territories implemented a range of policies related to care or medical services for older adults. The policies focused around several areas: support for home and community care, expansion of long-term care beds and other health care infrastructure, increasing health human resources, and expanding some types of publicly funded health care coverage.

### ***Home and Community Care***

Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia emphasized support older adults aging in the home or community in their announcements and made strategic investments to expand access to community-based care and home care services. Examples of some home and community care initiatives are:

- New Brunswick expand the Nursing Home Without Walls model to 16 more locations by October 2023. The 2023 budget also allocated an additional \$2 million to provide the resources needed to help older adults remain in their homes longer.
- The Ontario government invested an additional \$1 billion over three years to support home care services. This was separate from the \$5.5 million in the Community Support Program. The Ontario government also committed more than \$60 million over two years to expanding the Community Paramedicine for Long-term Care program across Ontario's 38 regions.
- In 2022, Québec assigned \$2.6 billion in funding over five years for a multi-faceted initiative that includes strengthening home support services for older adults, improving services for informal and family caregivers, prevention of abuse of older adults, and ensuring optimal medication use for older adults in residential care. Québec also allocated in the 2023-24 budget \$963.5 million over five years to increase the supply of home-support services.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure**

Several provinces made commitments over the last two years to constructing and upgrading long-term care and other healthcare infrastructure that older adults rely on. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Québec, and Nova Scotia all announced construction or upgrades for long-term care. Some examples include:

- In 2022, Nova Scotia's government allocated \$11 million to upgrade long-term care spaces and expand capacity. In scaling up the 2022 investment, in 2023 the Nova Scotia government allocated \$25 million to one-time capital funding to improve existing long-term care facilities, and \$13.5 million for opening 240 more spaces as part of plan to add 1200 by 2027. Additionally, \$44 million was provided to fund the expansion of permanent and temporary long-term care spaces for people waiting to transition from acute care to long-term care.
- In Québec, as part of its initiative to strengthen care and services for older adults, the government is investing almost \$1.5 billion starting over five years, starting in 2022, in the construction of seniors' and alternative housing designed to replace residential and long-term care centres. Québec's investment is intended to improve quality of care by covering operating costs, core staff hiring, and resources and support. It is also working toward harmonizing private seniors' residences with public residential and long-term care centres.

### **Healthcare Human Resources**

To address healthcare workforce shortages, several provinces announced approaches that include strategic hiring, legislative amendments, and financial incentives. Saskatchewan, Québec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador all emphasized in policy announcements plans for hiring care staff to work with older adults. Some examples include:

- The announcement in Nova Scotia government in late 2021 of plans to amend the *Homes for Special Care Act* by raising the recommended care in long-term care to 4.1 hours/day of care per resident. Those changes would require hiring an additional 600 nurses and 1400 CCAs in the province. Although the regulatory amendments have not yet been introduced in the Nova Scotia legislature, the province announced in the 2022-23 budget \$66.3 million to provide continuing care assistants with higher wages, \$17.2 million for additional recruitment and retention initiatives in continuing care, and \$25.1

million to increase staffing to the 4.1 hours per resident per day target. This was followed in the 2023-24 budget with the allocation of \$98.5 million for to the newly established Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care for staff retention incentives, and \$26.4 million for additional long-term care assistants. Also, \$55.2 million has been provided for travel nurse expenses for long-term care facilities.

- The allocation by the Saskatchewan government in 2022 of \$6.5 million for hiring 117 continuing care aides, and in 2023 of \$5.5 million to fund 75 continuing care aide positions, as part of its 3-year, \$18.4 million commitment to recruit 300 new care aids by 2024.

### ***Expansions of Health Coverage for Older Adults***

One of the prominent policy areas in the 2021 scan was initiatives to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to older adults. In 2022-23, COVID-19 vaccinations had been integrated within endemic seasonal disease control and were no longer highlighted in policy announcements. Announcements were made related to expanded coverage of drugs for other conditions, and non-drug benefits such as dental work and hearing aids, however; possibly linked with concerns about inflation and affordability of those services or devices for older adults. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island all introduced policies that expand health benefit coverage. Some examples include:

- Nova Scotia allocating in 2022 an additional \$10.4 million for medications divided between the older adult, family and community services pharmacare programs, and in 2023, provided additional funding for the Seniors Pharmacare program, which also deferred fee increases.
- Prince Edward Island in 2022 and Québec in 2023 committing funding to provide the shingles vaccine to older adults in those provinces.
- Prince Edward Island also allocated an additional \$1.4 million to the Provincial Dental Program which started in 2021.
- In the 2023 budget Manitoba announced the creation of a new Hearing Aid Program to help pay for the costs of hearing aids.



### ***Declining Priorities***

Some topics that were priorities in 2021 dropped in prominence, such as introduction of new transportation supports for older adults. Overall, there was little emphasis on older adults' mental health in provincial and territorial policy announcements. There was also little emphasis on new research initiatives focused on older adults, aside from the funding mentioned above which was allocated by the federal government to the CIHR for dementia research.

## **Conclusion**

Policy priorities in Canada related to older adults have changed since 2021, despite most jurisdictions experiencing relatively few changes in political leadership. COVID-19 had transitioned away from being a pandemic emergency into being an endemic respiratory disease, and captured less attention than it did two years before. At the same time, high costs of living and a changing employment landscape encouraged an emphasis across the political spectrum on “moving forward” and economic policies.

Responses from federal, provincial and territorial leaders to the changing conditions varied, and the outcomes of policies can be interlinked in ways that impact their effectiveness. For example, expanding home care and home support featured prominently in 2022-23 policy priorities. Once implemented, those expansions have the potential to alleviate pressure on long-term care infrastructure and the acute care system, by reducing the need for admissions. However, the impacts of home care and home support policies rely on the home care and support organizations in each province having adequate staffing to meet demand. They also depend on older adults having secure and safe housing, which, in turn, requires having an adequate housing supply, and older adults having enough income to afford housing that is available. Home care and home support expansion policies, then, impact or are impacted by decisions and actions in at least five other policy areas.

While complex interactions between different aspects of older adult policy can create challenges for policymakers, there are grounds for optimism. The interconnections between policy areas imply that it is possible to benefit from synergies when governments work effectively across departments to implement packages of initiatives that generate complementary outcomes. Some Canadian jurisdictions already apply these cross-departmental approaches. Even when policies to support older adults are implemented by single departments, down-stream impacts

of the policies may result in beneficial knock-on effects for other departments. Sharing data about policy and program outcomes, and proactively collaborating across government departments, with diverse stakeholders, and with older adults themselves, when forming policies can help capture the beneficial aspects of interconnection within the older adult policy environment.

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