



Provincial Candidates Brief on Older Adult Opportunities and Priority Issues

All of us have a stake in ensuring Ontario is responsive to the needs of everyone as we age. The volunteer-led and not-for-profit Ontario Association of Councils on Aging (OACA) has prepared this brief to help engage Ontario election 2022 candidates in issues affecting everyone. The OACA represents older adults involved with local Councils on Aging from across Ontario and strives to represent the collective voice of older adults in its quest for an age-friendly society.

Opportunities:

Older adults continue to make valuable contributions to the community, ranging from countless hours of volunteer work to their economic impact as consumers.

- People 65 and older make up 2.6 million or 18% of Ontario's population.¹
- Most of today's older adults are well and active, healthier and living longer to unprecedented levels, all of which provides great opportunities.
- Older adults make up the bulk of the volunteer corps in many community organizations also about one quarter of seniors 65 and older are caregivers.²
- Baby boomers control the bulk of wealth and spending; they spend 66% more on goods and services than millennial households.³

Ontario is among the global leaders in the Age-friendly Communities (AFC) movement launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2007. The goal is to promote the health and well-being of all ages, especially the aging population.

1 Stats Canada Older Adults and Population Aging

2 150.statsCan.gc.ca Canada's population estimates July 1. 2020

3 Environics Analytics

- Continued government support is vital. AFC's recognize the diversity of older people ensuring their voices are an integral part of the process of improving the social and physical environments.
- The Age-friendly movement combats Ageism. This stereotyping and discrimination based on age can be more pervasive than sexism or racism. It can have serious consequences for older people and society. Ageism can be a major barrier to developing good policies because it steers policy options in limited directions.⁴

Priority Issues:

Health care remains a major issue for older adults and for those who contribute, both informally and formally, to their care and services. A thoughtful and nuanced approach is needed to ensure the continuation and improvement of Canada's health care system for all Canadians, consistent with the Canada Health Act principles of universality, comprehensiveness, portability, accessibility, and public administration of insurance.

- Collaboration between the federal and provincial/territorial governments, and corresponding bipartisan cooperation must be fostered to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Addressing the socioeconomic determinants of health is critical for effective health care system outcomes, for which affordable housing and income security weigh heavily for many older adults.
- Accordingly, universal access to prescription medications (e.g., via a pharmacare-type insurance program) is critical to complement universal access to physicians and hospital care.

Long-Term Care must be top priority for immediate and sustained government action to provide safe, adequate, and dignified care for impacted older adults, and their informal and formal caregivers. As well as Long Term Care, Home and Community Care are critical components that can provide high quality of life at lower costs for many older adults.

4 World Health Organization. World Report on Aging and Health. 2015

- COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on older adults living in long-term care homes across Ontario, and has exposed the longstanding systemic weaknesses of the Ontario long-term care system.
- Urgent immediate government action must be taken, in collaboration with provincial/territorial governments and corresponding bipartisan cooperation, until the long-term care systems are finally fixed across Canada to ensure that similar tragic circumstances never happen again.
- Accordingly, the government must foster the implementation of a bold, integrated, and comprehensive package of systemic solutions, including increased care staff with appropriate compensation, specific corresponding fiscal allocations, improvements to home and community care and clear milestones to ensure public accountability for follow-up by the respective governments.

Social Participation is a priority issue because older adults experience loneliness and social isolation at a disproportionately high rate. Opportunities for social participation and connecting with others are critical for our physical, mental and emotional well-being. The pandemic has highlighted the negative and measurable impacts of social isolation and loneliness on the health and well-being of older adults who have spent months of being apart from family and friends and absent from their social and recreational activities.

- Increase awareness about available programs with both older adults and service providers.
- Ensure social engagement opportunities are welcoming and reflect the diverse interest and preferences of older adults in the community, are available in a variety of formats.
- Opportunities for social and recreational programs must be accessible and affordable and welcoming for all.

Housing must be a priority issues because the vast majority of older adults wish to age in place. For housing to serve the growing number of people in later life, it needs to be both affordable and accessible. It also needs to support good physical and mental health, and help us to stay connected. Building new homes to a decent standard and

future-proofing housing stock means that more of us will be able to remain independent, safe and well in our homes for longer. To make this happen we need:

- Supportive housing with wrap around services, to reduce the need for long term care and to ensure aging in place. (Community Housing Ontario, June, 2022)
- To support older adults from being evicted from their housing because rents increase beyond their capability to pay. Policy frameworks must consider age, life stage and be trauma informed. (CMHC, April 5, 2022)
- More Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCS) to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) are apartment, co-op, and condo buildings that were not originally built for seniors, but have become home to a high density of older adults. (UHN, openlab 06.2022)

TRANSPORTATION is a priority issue because access to transportation has been identified as an important determinant of health and is one of the eight dimensions of an age-friendly community. Active transportation includes public transportation such as the bus as well as walking, automobiles, bicycles and private driving services such as taxis and Uber.

- Accessible and affordable transportation is critical for older adults to maintain independence, dignity and a perspective of self reliance.
- Transportation is a critical service for older adults to combat social Isolation, to access medical services, social activities, grocery shopping and volunteer opportunities.
- Typically, only urban areas have public transportation systems. Outside these urban areas, older adults must rely on family, friends, neighbours and a fragmented transportation structure provided by different private/public services for medical, social and shopping needs. These private and public services are all tailored to people with specific needs and are not well advertised as to what service they provide for whom. These services need to be coordinated and advertised in a convenient, understandable manner for Older Adults to access.
- Ensuring pedestrian safety measures is crucial because older adults are more likely to die or be seriously injured from traffic accidents.

For more information about the Ontario Association of Councils on Aging please visit:
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