Preparing for Canada’s aging society

Issue
The first wave of the baby boom generation is turning 67 this year. By 2031, seniors will account for roughly one-quarter of the population, nearly double the 14% of 2009. Are we ready? Canada badly needs a strategy to ensure the care needs of this fast-growing demographic will be met.

Fast facts
In 2007–2008, alternate-level-of-care patients accounted for 1.7 million hospital bed days. Based on the cost of a hospital bed ($842 a day) versus a long-term care bed ($126 a day), moving these patients from hospital to long-term care would save about $1.4 billion a year.

The Alzheimer Society of Canada predicts that by 2031, 1.4 million Canadians will have dementia and that by 2040, the annual cost to the country will reach $293 billion. Many other countries have developed dementia strategies to the address the epidemic.

The Quality End-of-life Care Coalition reports that only a small proportion of the 260,000 Canadians who die each year receive high quality hospice palliative end-of-life care. In 2011, a Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care forwarded some excellent recommendations in this area.

According to the 2008–09 Canadian Community Health Survey, an estimated 3.8 million Canadians who were 45 or older were providing informal care to a senior.

In the 2011 Budget, the federal government introduced a new Family Caregiver Tax Credit. This investment by the federal government is a positive first step toward expanding the support needed for informal caregivers and the individuals they care for.

Canada’s health care system needs:
- An integrated, pan-Canadian strategy for continuing care focused on seniors that would integrate home care, facility-based long-term, respite and palliative care services within the health care system.
- Leadership from the federal government to bring together all levels of government to develop and execute a pan-Canadian strategy.
- The new Building Canada Plan to invest resources in the construction, renovation and retrofitting of long-term care facilities.
- A National Dementia Strategy, incorporating research, caregiver support and respite care and promoting uptake of best practices.

This would:
- Ensure seniors have the care they need, when and where they need it.
- Ensure better, more affordable care for seniors.
- Contribute to health care sustainability.

To learn more, please write to grassroots@cma.ca or call 800-663-7336 x2397