A NATIONAL SENIORS STRATEGY FOR CANADA

A GROWING SENIOR POPULATION
The population of seniors is growing exponentially, and Canada is not ready. The number of seniors expected to need help or care will double in the next 30 years. When publicly funded health care was created about 50 years ago, Canada’s population was just over 20 million and the average life expectancy was 71. Today, our population is over 36 million and the average life expectancy is 10 years longer. Our health care system has not kept pace with the advancements in medicine.

MEMBERS REPORT INCREASED CHALLENGES TREATING SENIORS
Physicians report they are challenged by the complex medical needs of their senior patients, as many seniors have multiple illnesses and health conditions requiring treatment.

THE CMA’S RESPONSE

ADVOCACY & GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION
In 2017, the CMA met with the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, who supported our recommendation for the Government of Canada to develop a national seniors strategy.
In addition to ongoing consultations with the federal health minister and other officials, we endorsed a motion by Nickel Belt MP Marc Serré, which called for a national seniors strategy. That motion was approved by the House of Commons.

In October 2017, CMA President Dr. Laurent Marcoux presented a series of recommendations to the House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The CMA’s submission to the committee, entitled Advancing Inclusion and Quality of Life for Seniors, outlines 15 recommendations for how seniors can remain active and engaged citizens of their communities.

Over 50,000 individual Canadians have signed onto Demand a Plan, an online public engagement platform designed to include patients and Canadians in the CMA’s advocacy on seniors care. Through this platform, over 100,000 emails and letters have been sent to parliamentarians calling for action to build a national seniors strategy for Canada. We also maintain active involvement in the Alliance for a National Seniors Strategy, which the CMA spearheaded and which is made up of over 70 organizations.

COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW
In 2016, the CMA released The State of Seniors Health Care in Canada, a comprehensive overview of the many challenges that need to be addressed in a national strategy on seniors care, including:

- gaps and inequities in the kinds of affordable care and drugs available
- different levels of, and access to, care throughout the country
- a different level of care for Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous people
- the inability of many to access and pay for services that support healthy aging
- a lack of home, long-term and palliative care and supports for family caregivers
THE CMA’S STANCE ON SENIORS CARE

Canada is not prepared for the challenges posed by its growing senior population. The country needs a pan-Canadian seniors care strategy that addresses all aspects of care from healthy aging and senior-friendly communities, to affordable medical treatments and drugs, to equitable long-term care. Studies show Canadians overwhelmingly support the development and implementation of such a strategy. Furthermore, improved care for seniors is key to a more efficient, effective and equitable health care system overall.

TALKING POINTS – SENIORS CARE

- The health care system needs to be redesigned so we can meet the health care needs of our growing senior population. The number of seniors expected to need help or care will double in the next 30 years, and Canada is not ready. Maintaining the status quo is a prescription for disaster.
- Seniors care should be a top public policy priority for all governments in Canada. We need a pan-Canadian strategy to address the health needs of seniors, and we call on all governments to take immediate steps towards its development.
- The strategy must be comprehensive. Seniors need improved funding for drugs, increased support for the family and friends caring for them, coordinated home care, communities that do a better job encouraging healthy aging and providing affordable housing, better access to and more investments in long-term care, and advances in palliative and end-of-life care.
- Care is not equitable across the country. There are provincial and territorial differences in the types and levels of seniors care. As is the case with other age groups, some seniors can’t get the care they need because they can’t afford it or they have unique cultural and language needs that aren’t being met.
- Improving how we care for seniors will benefit all Canadians. We will age more healthily, more services will be provided to family and friends who care for seniors, and there will be better overall access to medical, social and financial assistance services.