



CMA'S ELECTION TOOLKIT: 2015

**Canada needs a
National Seniors
Strategy — make
your voice heard**

GET INVOLVED: PHYSICIANS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) wants to make seniors care a ballot box issue in this federal election. The CMA is politically active but always non-partisan and sees itself as an honest broker of solutions to uphold patient welfare and represent the leadership of the medical profession. The federal election presents a unique opportunity to secure commitments from Canada's political leaders on health and seniors care.

Most politicians are not familiar with the issues that physicians face each day. A few may understand these challenges, but they are not equipped with the tools necessary to address them. By engaging in the political process, physicians can inform politicians about health care issues that matter most to them and their patients. As the recognized experts in the field, physicians are well positioned to lead the conversation and help make seniors care a ballot box issue. When physicians speak with one voice they cannot be ignored and their concerns will be taken seriously.



KEY MESSAGES

Below are key messages that may be helpful in your discussions with political candidates and patients to explain why seniors care must be a ballot box issue this election.

The CMA is calling for a national seniors care strategy

- We need the help of physicians and Canadians to carry the message forward and make seniors care a ballot box issue during the next federal election.
- DemandAPlan.ca is a public campaign to encourage the development of a national strategy on seniors care. So far thousands of Canadians have added their voice to our call for action.

Canada's population is rapidly aging

- Canada's older population is set to almost double over the next 20 years, while the 85 and older population is set to quadruple.
- Latest reports indicate that while seniors account for just less than 15% of the population, they consume approximately 45% of public health spending. Based on current trends and approaches, the CMA projects this will grow to almost 62% of provincial health budgets by 2036.
- As you can see, this is truly a national issue — one that will affect all Canadians in the decades to come.
- Canada desperately needs a strategy to meet the care needs of its rapidly growing population of seniors.

Public health care in Canada won't survive unless seniors care is intelligently redesigned

- When Canada's universal health care system was designed 50 years ago, the average Canadian was 27 years of age. Today the average age is 47. Our health care system was not designed to serve an aging population.
- Around 15% of the hospital beds in this country are taken up by people — primarily seniors — who no longer need hospital care but have nowhere else to go.
- Hospital beds cost about \$1,000 per day, whereas a long-term care bed costs \$130 and home care costs \$55. The congestion in our hospitals causes a ripple effect throughout the rest of the health care system.
- When you consider the issues we're grappling with for seniors care, you quickly realize that if we can fix seniors care we will have gone a long way toward fixing the whole health system. This is why our aging population represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

What is CMA doing to support a national seniors strategy?

- Our goal is to promote a strategy that is built around the needs of individuals and their families, to create a system that puts the patient at the centre.
- Over 55 patient and non-medical groups have joined an Alliance for a National Seniors Strategy to support our call for a national approach.
- We've heard from the CMA Physician Advisory Panel on a National Seniors Strategy that Canada must improve the way we provide care for seniors; we must focus more on community and home support and less on hospital care. This will ensure patients are in the right place receiving care tailored to their needs.
- It's for these reasons that the CMA is dedicated to making seniors care a priority issue, calling on the three major federal parties to develop and release a seniors strategy in advance of the federal election.

As the election campaign unfolds, the CMA will closely follow all developments related to health care, including seniors care, and will provide CMA members with updated questions to ask candidates throughout the campaign. These questions will be included in communications sent to members as well as on the CMA website cma.ca/election2015. Throughout the election, this page will be your go-to source for campaign updates and information on the electoral process. You may also contact the CMA for information, updates and assistance at grassroots@cma.ca or at 800-682-6367.

SIX WAYS TO GET INVOLVED IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

To ensure that seniors care becomes a major issue in the election campaign, physicians must be leaders in carrying the message forward.

Below are ways you can contribute to putting seniors care at the forefront of the election campaign. If you need any assistance, please contact us — we would be pleased to help.

1. Add your voice to DemandAPlan.ca

The Canadian Medical Association and an alliance of partner organizations have joined together and launched DemandAPlan.ca. Sign up and add your voice to the call for a national seniors strategy. By doing so, you will be able to stay engaged with conversations and campaign news and learn about any announcements we are endorsing. You can also post your personal stories and thoughts related to seniors care.

With your help, the alliance will be working until Election Day to accomplish the following goals:

- to make sure seniors care is a ballot box issue in the election campaign
- to persuade the major political parties to include a national seniors strategy in their campaign platforms

Join the conversation and demonstrate your support from a national seniors strategy now: <http://www.demandaplan.ca/>

2. Join CMA's MD–MP Contact Program

The MD–MP Contact Program is the CMA's volunteer grassroots advocacy initiative, which aims to facilitate physician engagement in the political process by strengthening communications and fostering close collaboration between CMA members and their local Members of Parliament (MPs). The involvement of physicians from across Canada is crucial in helping the CMA fulfill its advocacy role and influence federal government policy and decisions. Through this program, physicians are informed about the most important issues and are equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to effectively inform candidates, ask questions at all-candidate meetings and represent the medical profession.

You can have an impact by:

- meeting with your local MP at least twice a year;
- discussing with him/her matters that affect health care in your community;
- keeping the CMA informed about meetings held with parliamentarians and the outcomes of those meetings; and
- attending community events, town halls and fundraisers held by your MP.

If you have questions or wish to receive more information regarding the CMA's MD–MP Contact Program, please contact us at grassroots@cma.ca or 800-682-MDMP (6367). You may also visit the program's website at www.cma.ca/mdmp.

Here's what we can do for you:

- put you in contact with your local MP
- support communication initiatives between physicians and local MPs

3. Engage with social media

Use social media to share information about seniors care with your audience. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are all valuable ways to disseminate information, voice your concerns and collaborate with other Canadians.

For example, you can "Like" the Facebook page of one or more of your local political candidates, follow candidates on Twitter or share CMA videos on YouTube. We encourage you to spread CMA's messages throughout all your social media feeds.

Here are a few sample tweets:



View and share our videos on seniors care:

CMA Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/canadianmedicalassoc

Here's what we can do for you:

- provide you with facts and statistics to share
- help connect you with politicians and other physicians in your community
- grow your network

4. Raise seniors care with your local candidates

Among the ways that you can raise seniors care with all local candidates is to write a letter, send an email or make a phone call to local candidates.

When you make contact, introduce yourself as a constituent and provide some context for your contact. Here are some possible talking points:

- Ask the candidate for his/her stand on the three health care questions listed in the section Participate in local riding events (See page 8).
- If you are contacting the candidate in writing and you expect a reply, clearly indicate so in your email or letter.
- Offer to assist/support your preferred candidate by volunteering on his/her campaign.

The DemandAPlan website also provides you with a sample letter to write to your Member of Parliament and other local candidates in advance of the election.

Click on the link below to access the letter writing tool:

<http://www.demandaplan.ca/take-action>

5. Write a letter to the editor

Writing a letter to the editor of a news outlet is one of the most effective advocacy tools. The key to getting your letter published is ensuring that it is focused, concise and relevant.

Letters to the editor can be written for various purposes, such as responding to a previously published letter, editorial or article; sharing a point of view; advancing an organization's message (such as the CMA's message on a national seniors strategy); or attempting to influence politicians' perception of public opinion.

- Ensure that your letter is short, simple and focused (maximum 200 words).
- Put your full name and coordinates at the top of the letter (most media outlets will only publish a letter after contacting the author to verify its authenticity).
- If you are responding to a previously published letter or editorial, identify it by title and the date it appeared.

- The more timely the better. If you're responding to an event or a previously published story or letter, try to do so within two days.
- Please "c.c." your letter to the CMA for our election records.

Click on the link below to view New Brunswick physician Dr. Dharm Singh's letter to the editor published in The Telegraph-Journal (New Brunswick):

http://www.demandaplan.ca/commentary_action_needed

6. Participate in local riding events

Election campaigns provide many opportunities for physicians to become involved in a variety of political events, to ask candidates questions about their parties' positions and to prompt debate among the parties on key issues.

If you plan to attend a local riding event, such as an all-candidates' debate or a town hall meeting, here are some questions you can ask to ensure seniors care is a high-priority issue during this campaign:

1. What role do you believe each level of government should play in addressing the challenges of an aging population?
 - a. Should Ottawa take a leading role?
2. Are you currently caring for an aging family member?
 - a. If so, where do you see gaps in support and resources?
3. Our hospitals are congested because of an influx of elderly patients; how do you think the federal government can help to ensure that alternative care is available in the community? What will you do to ensure that this issue is being discussed at a political level?

If you'd like to organize your own town hall meeting, the CMA can help.

If you require assistance, please contact grassroots@cma.ca or call 800-682-6367.

Here's what we can do for you:

- provide candidates' contact information
- provide logistical support and draft meeting invitations and agendas, etc.
- help you promote the event

Q&A ON SENIORS CARE

Q. It's not the role of the federal government to dictate how provinces allocate their resources. Why should Ottawa be involved in a nationwide seniors care strategy?

- All levels of government, including the federal government, share the responsibility to work together to ensure that Canadians receive the best value for health care funding.
- The federal government is ranked as the fifth largest health care funder in Canada and is impacted by the lack of a coordinated, national seniors strategy.
- It is in Ottawa's own interest to lead seniors health care transformation in a fiscally sound manner to make the best use of taxpayer dollars and ensure Canadians have access to the care they need, no matter their postal code.
- Canadians continue to tell us that they expect the federal government to take a leadership position on health care. In fact, a recent Nanos poll showed that more than 80% of Canadians believe the federal government has a significant role to play in health care.
- What is missing from a seniors care framework are national goals and accountability measures to ensure that the \$446 billion in transfers over the next 12 years contribute to delivering better health and better health care for Canadians.

Q. Our hospitals are overcrowded with seniors who in many cases may be better treated elsewhere but have nowhere else to go. This congestion is trickling down through the rest of the health care system and creating long wait times for patients with acute care needs. How does the CMA propose to solve this?

- A patient in a hospital bed costs the system about \$1,000 a day. Long-term care costs about \$130 a day and home care about \$55 a day.
- Around 15% of the hospital beds in this country are taken up by people, primarily seniors, who no longer need hospital care but have nowhere else to go.
- By our calculation, the warehousing of seniors in hospital beds is costing \$2.3 billion a year in unnecessary spending on hospital care.

- A recent report by the Conference Board of Canada reveals critical shortages in seniors care. For instance, in 2012 it was reported that 461,000 Canadians were not getting the home care they thought they required; waiting for access to a long-term care facility in Canada ranged from 27 to over 230 days; and, as few as 16% of Canadians requiring palliative care actually received it.
- Our CMA Physician Advisory Panel, a network of health care experts, says we must alter the way we provide care for this population. We must establish more community-based support that focuses on home care programs and long-term care infrastructure.
- We believe it's the responsibility of all levels of governments to invest wisely in areas that are proven to be cost-effective and beneficial to the patient.

Q. Just less than 15 % of Canadians are 65 and older, yet account for nearly half of all health and social spending. How will we afford the growing needs of this population?

- We can't afford not to address seniors care, given that Canada's older population is set to double over the next 20 years, while the 85 and older group is set to quadruple. This means the strains on the health care system will become even more severe.
- Just as Canada was not prepared for the baby boom in 1947, we are not prepared for the influx of boomers entering their senior years.
- Given the importance of this issue and the impact it will have if we do not put a coherent system in place to address the needs of seniors, the CMA is calling on the federal government to become more invested, both politically and financially.
- This will require long-term support and leadership on their part.

Q. For many years we have heard, from various individuals, associations and coalitions, that a pharmacare program is needed in our country. Could you elaborate on your vision for such a program?

- Prescription drugs represent the third-largest category of health expenditure.
- From the CMA's perspective, the goal is comprehensive coverage for the whole population.
- Governments, in consultation with the life and health insurance industry and the public, should establish a program of comprehensive prescription drug coverage to be administered through reimbursement of provincial/territorial and private prescription drug plans to ensure that all Canadians have access to medically necessary drug therapies.
- No Canadians should be denied access to medically necessary prescription drugs because of inability to pay.

CONSIDERATIONS AS A POLITICALLY ACTIVE PHYSICIAN

Elections Canada supervises and manages the election process. They have very clear rules in regards to financial contributions and advertising before and after election periods.

Under elections law in Canada, individuals and organizations are subject to limits for contributions to political parties, riding associations, and candidates.

For most individuals and organizations, the 2015 contribution limit to each registered party is \$1,500; this includes the total contribution to all registered associations, nomination contestants and candidates.

Be careful with public commentary, and understand that anything you write on social media — even supposedly private channels — exists forever. If you intend to be politically active, do so on your own time and well outside any professional responsibilities you have to your patients, or any physical setting that could possibly be interpreted as part of your practice.

Be positive in the recommendations that you offer. Our focus is to be political but non-partisan; and to ensure that no matter who wins Election 2015, a working relationship exists right away.

SUMMARY

The upcoming election is an ideal opportunity for all health care professionals to take a stand on issues that are of importance to Canadians, like seniors care. The impact of Canada's aging population will affect us all, and we need physicians to offer their unique and valuable insights into how we can support this population.

As such, we hope that you educate yourselves, engage with your communities and become leaders in the discussion. By doing so, we will turn advocacy into action.





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