House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Check against delivery
Thank you Mr. Chair. My name is Dr. Laurent Marcoux, and I’m pleased to be here as president of the Canadian Medical Association.

As the national organization representing over 85,000 doctors, the CMA has been advocating for improved seniors care for quite some time. We’ve been joined by over 50,000 Canadians at DemandaPlan.ca, our patient engagement website.

We all know that Canadians are living longer, healthier lives than ever before. While we celebrate our good health as a nation, we also recognize the pressures that our health care system will face. The number of seniors expected to need help in the next 30 years will double, and our system is not prepared.

I’d like to recognize the good work done by MP Marc Serré whose motion on the need for a national seniors strategy has led to this study before us today.

In our submission, you’ll find 15 recommendations for how seniors can remain active, engaged citizens of our communities. This afternoon, I’ll be focussing my comments on the three themes being considered by your committee.

First, I’d like to speak about how the government can improve access to housing for seniors.

We know that the demand for residential care will increase as more Canadians are getting older.

A recent report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicated that residential care capacity must double over the next 20 years to support our senior population.

Not only do we need to build new facilities, we need to upgrade our existing ones as well to ensure they’re safe and can meet our patients’ needs.

Right now, we rely too heavily on our hospitals to provide this type of care. It isn’t effective and it isn’t sustainable. It also contributes to overcrowding, increased wait times, cancelled surgeries, and more. It could even put our health system at risk.

We were very pleased to see a new National Housing Strategy announced in the 2017 budget that would see more than $11.2 billion go toward adequate and affordable housing for Canadians.
We encourage the government to continue to invest in residential and continuing care infrastructure so that we can improve care for seniors while easing the pressure on our acute care system.

To this end, the CMA has asked the Conference Board of Canada for a cost-benefit analysis of meeting the demand for long-term care beds in Canada – this report will be made public in the coming weeks.

Secondly, I’d like to address how the government can improve income security for vulnerable seniors.

During retirement, many older Canadians rely on various government programs, such as Old Age Security, the Canada Pension Plan, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. This is in addition to personal pensions or investments.

We all know that the better your income, the healthier you tend to be. So it’s concerning that poverty among seniors is on the rise.

Measures must continue and evolve to support aging Canadians so they can afford to live at home or in age-friendly communities as they get older. The government’s actions to ensure adequate income support will also assist aging Canadians to take care of their health, maintain independence, and continue living safely without the need for institutional care.

On the topic of income security, we must also protect our seniors by promoting public awareness initiatives that bring attention to financial elder abuse.

Thirdly, I’d like to share how the government can improve the overall quality of life and well-being for seniors.

The CMA believes that our country can meet the health and social needs of its seniors. What’s required is a strategic approach – a national strategy for seniors care, to be precise.

As part of this, we need to ensure access to home care is consistent across the country and that clear operating principles are in place.

We need better support for informal caregivers including education, respite care and financial assistance.
We need to invest in programs that promote healthy aging, such as physical activity, nutrition and mental health.

We need all health care stakeholders to work together to ensure seniors can easily access the care they need – ideally at home. This includes access to a family doctor with a multidisciplinary team, coverage for essential medications, and smooth transitions between levels of care.

We need to create age-friendly environments that allow seniors to remain independent for as long as possible. Whether this means promoting positive messaging around aging, offering employment to those who desire it, or ensuring our buildings, walkways and transportation systems are safe and accessible.

Simply put, improving quality of life for Canadian seniors is not just about health care. It’s about creating an environment for Canadians to thrive in as they grow older.

Our 15 recommendations are a roadmap for the health care system of the future. The time is now to build an efficient, effective and equitable health care system for our seniors and for all Canadians.

Thank you and I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have.