

For immediate release

Health ministers meeting a golden opportunity for Canada's seniors, CMA says

Ottawa (Sept. 29, 2014) — This week's meetings of Canada's health ministers represents a prime opportunity to lay the groundwork for a national seniors strategy and it's an opportunity that shouldn't be wasted, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) says.

"Canada's rapidly aging population means the clock is ticking to transform our health care system," CMA President Dr. Chris Simpson said today. "We have some catching up to do on something we should have started years ago — a national seniors strategy involving all levels of government."

The 5.2 million Canadians who are over age 65 represent 14 per cent of the population but account for almost half of all health spending. The seniors population is projected to almost double in the next 20 years and the first wave of the baby boom generation turns 75 in 2021.

These demographic challenges threaten to overwhelm the Canada's health care system unless seniors care is fundamentally redesigned. Ottawa must take a lead role in working with provinces and territories, Dr. Simpson added. "Long wait times for surgery, diagnosis or emergency room care are not the price we must pay for a public health system," he said. "They are the price all of us are paying because there is no national seniors strategy."

For example, the health system is currently warehousing seniors in hospital beds across the country because long-term or home care services are not available. About three million hospital beds a year are occupied this way at a cost of \$1,000 a day. A third of those beds are occupied by dementia patients. The CMA has calculated this is costing \$2.3 billion a year that could be better spent on health care.

Last week a public opinion poll conducted by Nanos Research showed eight out of 10 Canadians believe Ottawa should play a leading role in reducing medical wait times across the country. Dr. Simpson said it is not possible to eliminate wait times without dealing with seniors care.

In addition, Statistics Canada reported last week that 27 per cent of Canadians aged between 15 and 29 reported caring for someone sick or elderly. This is further evidence seniors care affects all Canadians, Dr. Simpson said.

Provincial and territorial health ministers meet Sept. 30 in Banff. They are to be joined the following day by Federal Health Minister Rona Ambrose.

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is the national voice of Canadian physicians. Founded in 1867, the CMA is a voluntary professional organization representing more than 80,000 of Canada's physicians and comprising 12 provincial and territorial medical associations and 60 national medical organizations. CMA's mission is to serve and unite the physicians of Canada and be the national advocate, in partnership with the people of Canada, for the highest standards of health and health care.

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