



Today, Canada has more senior citizens than one year ago. Next year, there will be even more. Along with demographics, our knowledge and understanding have also evolved. We have come to recognize that health depends as much on income, housing, and safety as on medical interventions. Health care is no longer primarily acute and episodic; many conditions that once caused early death are now treated as chronic and manageable even in the community. Home care is less expensive than institutional care, and when seniors can remain in their homes and communities, they are happier, healthier, and more productive. Overall health care costs are lower, and the system makes better use of its more expensive institutional resources.

The system created for previous generations no longer serves this one. The needs of today's (and tomorrow's) seniors are larger than any neighbourhood, any community, or any province. The solutions must also be larger.

**Care Watch calls for Canada to work with provincial and territorial governments and with stakeholders to develop, adopt, and act on a national seniors' strategy.**

### What is a strategy?

A vision gives us something to aspire to. Plans describe how to get there. A strategy occupies the space in between. It brings together vision, analysis, action, and commitment.

Strategies come in many forms, but there are common features. Typically, a strategy announces its central theme or overarching purpose. It then outlines elements of that theme along with issues, proposed solutions, a commitment to those solutions, and a pledge to provide the necessary resources. It may also add time lines and ways to assess results. It thus sets the stage and serves as a springboard for what will follow.

### What could a national seniors' strategy look like?

Care Watch believes a national seniors' strategy must be grounded in the principles of the *Canada Health Act* – public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility. All seniors must have equitable access, without financial hardship, to the services that protect, promote, and restore well-being.

The strategy's central purpose is to promote the health and well-being of Canadians as they age. Categories might cover specific settings or health conditions. Initiatives would address, for example:

- Preventing and managing chronic disease
- Improving access to medications
- Making service accessible, flexible, and consistent
- Supporting seniors and caregivers in the home and community
- Providing end-of-life and palliative care

Canada's federal government has demonstrated leadership in key areas such as the enforcement of human rights. We need it now to develop and act on a strategy for serving seniors.

### What can you do about a national seniors' strategy?

1. **Talk to people – your family, friends, neighbours, colleagues – about the need for a seniors strategy.**

2. **Ask questions, lots of questions. Whenever possible, ask candidates:**

- **What do you see as the role of your government in meeting the needs of seniors?**
- **How will you work with other levels of government to meet the needs of seniors?**
- **Do you support the idea of a national seniors' strategy? If so, exactly what will you do to make it happen?**
- **What can seniors expect from you?**

3. **Think about what you have heard, and then vote!**