



Independence, Activity and Good Health

Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors

ontario.ca/seniors

Independence, Activity and Good Health

Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors

“Older people are a wonderful resource for their families, communities and in the formal or informal workforce. They are a repository of knowledge. They can help us avoid making the same mistakes again ... The societies that adapt to this changing demographic can reap a sizeable ‘longevity dividend’, and will have a competitive advantage over those that don’t.”

— World Health Organization – “About Aging and Life-Course”

Prepared by The Ontario Seniors' Secretariat

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2013

ISBN 978-1-4606-0730-5 (Print)

ISBN 978-1-4606-0731-2 (PDF)

By 2017, for the first time, Ontario will be home to more people over 65 than children under 15.

Independence, Activity and Good Health

We are living longer. Children born today have the prospect of living a longer life than any generation before them. Every year, the percentage of people in our province who are 65 or older increases slightly.

Provinces, states and countries everywhere are coming to terms with the challenges, and opportunities, posed by an aging population. What can, and will, set Ontario apart is the quality of life that our seniors and their families lead. The provincial government has a mission to make Ontario the best place to grow up and grow old. We know that a longer life is really only a good life if it is lived the way we want, and Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors is about creating the kind of province where seniors are able to do just that – make choices to live the way they want. It is also about harnessing the wisdom and experience of seniors for the benefit of all, and laying the groundwork for a healthy, vibrant and active senior population.

In shaping a plan for our seniors, it is critical to be very clear about what we want to achieve. What kind of life do seniors want? What kind of life do we want for our parents and grandparents, for ourselves as we get older, and for our children many years from now? It was these questions that led to the creation of this action plan, and it was the answers that informed its content.

Seniors have contributed to our growth and prosperity and continue to help build our communities and drive our economy. We have heard from seniors that they want to be recognized for these contributions, and treated as important members of society. They want it understood that they are a diverse group, with different socio-economic backgrounds, different skills and abilities, different levels of health and education, and different interests. They want to be able to choose to live at home if they can, and have attractive alternatives if they cannot. We want Ontario seniors to feel safe and supported, and to remain healthy and independent for as long as possible. We want them to remain active and engaged wherever possible, so they are able to continue to achieve excellence as they grow older. With the right plan in place, one that includes supports for caregivers and families, seniors can have all of these things.

Independence, Activity and Good Health is the name of this action plan. It is also its main objective. The plan identifies three main goals, and outlines a significant number of programs and initiatives by which we intend to realize them. The goals are:

Healthy Seniors

We will help seniors find and access the health care services they need to be healthier and stay at home longer to improve their quality of life.

Senior-Friendly Communities

We will harness the potential and maximize the contributions of our seniors by promoting the development of age-friendly communities that weave together services and policies to enhance seniors' well-being and participation.

Safety and Security

We will ensure that Ontario seniors are provided with the programs, services and supports that help them live safely, independently, and with dignity.

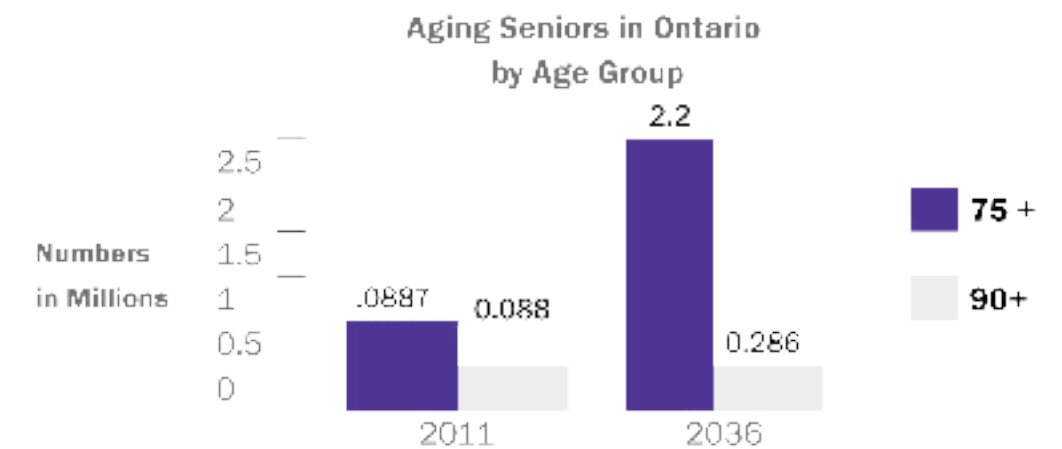
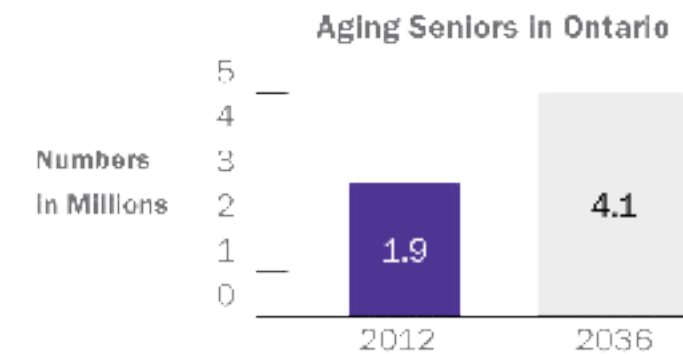
Our goals are supported by a wide variety of programs and initiatives that assist Ontario seniors. Many of these are already in place, but they are run by various ministries, organizations and other levels of government. As a result, seniors, their families and their caregivers may not be aware of them. If they are aware of them, they may not know how to access them. Other initiatives are either in the process of being launched or will soon be undertaken. Going forward, they will all be brought together by a single plan, and guided by a clear vision of the kind of life we want for people whose contributions helped build this province.

Ontario will be a province where seniors are valued and respected as integral members of their community. Ontario seniors will be supported so they can remain active and engaged, leading independent, productive lives in comfort, dignity and good health.

The Imperative of an Aging Society

Several imperatives drove the creation of this action plan. First and foremost, one of the assumptions upon which we have designed our society is that all citizens are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. We must never lose sight of that, nor must we forget what we owe the people who helped build this province.

Furthermore, the combination of demographics and fiscal reality strongly suggests that it is a necessary thing to do. As mentioned at the outset, our population is aging. Over the next two decades, Ontario is going to experience a huge demographic shift. The numbers of seniors in Ontario will more than double by 2036. The oldest age groups in Ontario are increasing in number faster than any others. The 75+ group is projected to increase by approximately 144 per cent by 2036. The 90+ group will triple in size.



The effect of aging on our society will be profound. The collaboration of numerous agencies, stakeholders, regions, and municipalities will be required in creating supportive communities. Consideration will have to be given to everything from how neighborhoods are designed to how transportation and housing are delivered to the way other programs and services are provided. Seniors choosing to live at home have different needs than those requiring long-term care.

Anticipating and responding to the changing health care needs and lifestyle choices of an aging population is already forcing us to acknowledge that aging is an expensive process. The top 10 per cent of Ontario's older population, characterized as having the most complex issues, accounts for 60 per cent of the total annual health care spending for this population. The older we get, the more likely we are to develop chronic conditions. Most of these can be managed, but often at significant cost to the health care system. Today, seniors account for nearly half of Ontario's health care spending. By 2030, if we don't make changes to the way we deliver health care services, the increased number of seniors in the province is projected to cost \$24 billion more annually – that is 50 per cent more than today.

In addition to the demographic and fiscal imperatives, we know that there are several areas in which we can do better, as a province, in supporting seniors to help ensure they can enjoy a good quality of life. For example, the financial security and physical safety of seniors are ongoing concerns. Many seniors in Ontario face a day-to-day struggle making ends meet.

We have both an opportunity and a duty to transform our health care system to meet the needs and respect the choices of an increasingly aged population.

The proportion of Ontario seniors living below Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure line was 8.1 per cent in 2010, up from 1.9 per cent in 1995. In 2006, there were 164,115 senior-led households unable to afford adequate, suitable and affordable shelter. That is 17.1 per cent of all senior households in the province.

With regard to safety, there are several issues that face the seniors' population in Ontario:

- There have been a number of deaths resulting from fires in residences such as retirement homes and long-term care homes since 1980.
- Between four and 10 per cent of older adults in Ontario may experience some form of abuse or neglect at some point in their later years at the hands of someone they trust or rely on.
- Falls among seniors resulted in more than 108,000 emergency department visits in 2011, with a quarter being admitted to hospital.

The provincial government has done a great deal of good work in the past decade to encourage healthy aging and enhance and improve the lives of seniors in this province.

A number of successful programs and services are already in place. However, the challenge remains that Ontario's network of programs and services for seniors is highly complex, with a different set of services organized, delivered and communicated by different ministries and providers. This can make it difficult for seniors and their caregivers to access the support and services they need.

Clearly what is needed in Ontario is one overarching plan that provides a framework for addressing the needs of vulnerable seniors, while supporting active, healthy aging for the broader senior population. The Ontario Seniors Framework for Action encompasses and builds on existing government initiatives, while introducing many new ones – all designed to enable seniors to live healthier, happier and safer lives in their homes and communities. It also provides a framework for future measures the government may need to take as demographics keep shifting and the needs and requirements of an aging population evolve.

Building on a Solid Foundation

There is a clear advantage to devising an action plan for seniors in a province such as Ontario, where so much is already being done. This plan builds on a decade's worth of work on behalf of Ontario seniors. It leverages a culture of commitment to doing what is best for older Ontarians while respecting the choices they make about where and how to live, as well as a widespread understanding that what is best for Ontario seniors is best for Ontario.

Highlighted below are several programs and services that have served Ontario's seniors well, and can be regarded as foundational elements of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors. They are clear indications that the provincial government is committed to building a positive, supportive environment in which seniors can live healthy, active lives.

Improved Access to Community Care

Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care, introduced by the provincial government at the beginning of 2012, represents a significant shift in direction for health care in the province, with an unprecedented focus on providing better community care and specifically home care. Over the next three years, funding for three million additional personal support worker hours will provide care at home for 90,000 more seniors.

Ontario Drug Benefit Program

People 65 years of age and older are eligible for the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program. Through ODB, the provincial government covers most of the cost of over 3,800 prescription drug products, in addition to nutrition and diabetic testing products.

Aging at Home Strategy

The provincial government's Aging at Home Strategy was announced in 2007. The strategy delivers a wide range of community-based services so seniors can stay healthy and live more independently in their homes, avoiding premature admission to long-term care homes or hospitals.

Long-Term Care Transformation

In 2003, the provincial government undertook to transform long-term care, promising to improve conditions in the province's long-term care facilities. Today, what were once facilities can now be called homes. Conditions have improved. Thousands of new nurses and front-line staff have been hired. Nearly 10,000 new beds have been added, and the government has committed to redeveloping 35,000 previously existing beds.

The Long-Term Care Homes Act was proclaimed in 2010. It replaced older legislation, and is now the single legislative authority for safeguarding residents' rights, improving quality of care, and improving the accountability of long-term care homes for the care, treatment and well-being of more than 100,000 residents.

The Long-Term Care Homes Act has resulted in:

- » *Improved waiting list management for admissions to long-term care homes*
- » *Strengthened care standards*
- » *Clear definitions of abuse and neglect and strengthened accountability for investigating and addressing all alleged, suspected or witnessed incidents of abuse or neglect of residents*
- » *Increased requirements to minimize restraining of residents and ensure maximum comfort and safety for residents who have to be restrained*
- » *New infection prevention and control programs that focus on monitoring, outbreak management, training and hand hygiene.*

Retirement Homes Regulation

More than 40,000 Ontarians choose to live in retirement homes. Until the provincial government passed the *Retirement Homes Act* in 2010, the care provided in retirement homes was unregulated. This legislation changed that.

The Retirement Homes Act has resulted in:

- » Mandated care and safety standards for retirement homes including emergency plans, infection control and prevention programs, assessment of care needs and care planning, police background checks and training for staff
- » The creation of a Residents' Bill of Rights that includes the right to know the true cost of care and accommodation and the right to live in an environment that promotes zero tolerance of abuse or neglect
- » The establishment of the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority – an arm's-length organization that educates, licenses and inspects retirement homes to ensure they meet prescribed standards.

Tax and Financial Aid for Seniors

Ontario has several tax credits and other forms of financial assistance intended to help seniors remain independent. These include:

Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit

This is a permanent, refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 per year to help seniors with the cost of making their homes safer and more accessible. It can be claimed by senior homeowners and tenants, and people who share a home with a senior relative.

Ontario Trillium Benefit

This program ensures that low-to-moderate income Ontarians, including seniors, can get money every month to help as the bills come in. The Ontario Trillium Benefit combines the payments of the Ontario Sales Tax Credit, the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit and the Northern Ontario Energy Credit into one timely monthly payment.

Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant

This is a payment of up to \$500 to help low-to-moderate income seniors with the cost of their property taxes.

Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS)

This program helps guarantee a minimum annual income to qualifying seniors by providing a monthly payment up to \$83 per recipient.

Non-Refundable Tax Credits

The provincial government also provides a number of non-refundable tax credits that eligible seniors may claim to reduce their Ontario income taxes. Credits are based on factors such as age, dependent spouse or common-law partner, pension income, disability and medical expenses.

Pension Income Splitting

Ontario pensioners can allocate up to 50 per cent of their eligible pension income to spouses or common-law partners. This can reduce the amount of personal income tax that older couples pay.

In 2004, Ontario became the first international jurisdiction to designate a day as Elder Abuse Awareness Day. In 2006 international communities followed suit. Today, Ontario joins with communities around the world in observing June 15th as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Elder Abuse Strategy

The provincial government's Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse was the first of its kind in Canada. It has three key priorities:

- Coordination of community services
- Training for front-line staff
- Public education to raise awareness

Elder Abuse Regional Consultants employed by the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse are in place across the province to help promote and support efforts in addressing and preventing elder abuse. The consultants act as a key resource to justice and community service providers and local elder abuse networks working to address elder abuse throughout Ontario.

Ending Mandatory Retirement

In 2006, the provincial government's legislation ending mandatory retirement came into effect, thus providing greater fairness and choice for workers aged 65 and older. The move reflected the government's awareness that while older people are often happy to retire, not all want to, and nobody should be forced to retire from a job that he or she is still able to do. From the ending of mandatory retirement to 2011, the labour market participation of older Ontarians increased from 8.6 per cent to 12.6 per cent.

Ontario Trillium Foundation

Since 2003, the Ontario Trillium Foundation has invested close to \$69 million in programs to help seniors across the province remain active, healthy and engaged in their communities. Some examples include:

- » The Killaloe area Day Away program that offers activities to 250 frail seniors
- » A new piano to support the music program at the seniors' club in Beamsville
- » A new woodworking shop at the seniors' centre in the Kakabeka that is hosting programs for 300 seniors
- » An activity program in Toronto that is improving the quality of life for 280 seniors of Iranian heritage
- » A renovated multi-purpose room in a Markham centre that can now offer regular physical programming to 180 seniors
- » A newly developed model of respite care services for seniors with memory impairments in Halton-Peel that is helping 221 seniors
- » A civic engagement program in Toronto that helps 300 older women get involved in issues that affect their lives
- » A community bus that allows 185 seniors in parts of Ancaster and Flamborough access to the greater public transportation system
- » A full-size accessible van that is enabling 205 seniors in Haldimand-Norfolk to travel to a variety of health care appointments
- » A strategic planning process that is creating more culturally relevant programs and services for 290 seniors and elders at the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation.

Housing

There are currently more than 5,000 seniors living in supportive housing units in Ontario. Investment in Affordable Housing is a four-year program, launched in 2011, that provides almost \$481 million in federal and provincial funding to create and repair approximately 7,000 affordable housing units over four years across Ontario. Seniors are among the targeted client groups in the program. During its first year the program helped more seniors and people with disabilities continue to live independently.

The Provincial Rent Bank Program was created in 2004 to provide greater support to lower income older Ontarians, particularly those who might be facing eviction due to not being able to pay their rent or bills on time. The program is delivered and administered by 47 service managers across Ontario. Since its inception, almost \$45 million has helped prevent more than 32,100 low-income households from being evicted due to a missed rent payment. Effective January 1, 2013, the Provincial Rent Bank is one of the programs being consolidated into the new Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative.

Ontario 55+ Games

The Ontario 55+ Games is a provincially-funded event where adults age 55 years and older compete in a variety of disciplines that test their physical and mental skills. The focus is on friendly competition, socialization and fun, and the games provide older adults in Ontario with an opportunity to expand and develop their social interaction in an environment that encourages a healthy and active lifestyle. In even-numbered years, the games are held in summer. In odd-numbered years, they are held in winter.

Sinha Report: *Living Longer, Living Well*

This action plan is built on a solid foundation of commitment and achievements in supporting Ontario seniors. It is also informed by a recent report on how to promote better care and health outcomes for older Ontarians. In the spring of 2012, the provincial government asked Dr. Samir Sinha to lead the development and implementation of a Seniors Strategy. Dr. Sinha, who is Director of Geriatrics at Mount Sinai and University Health Network hospitals, spent several months researching and consulting with the health care sector, municipal officials, and the public on how best to support seniors to live healthy and productive lives and stay at home, improving their quality of life while reducing hospital readmissions and pressure on long-term care homes. He delivered his report, *Living Longer, Living Well*, to the government in January 2013.

As Dr. Sinha notes in his report, any comprehensive strategy for improving quality of life for seniors must address issues beyond health care – it needs to encompass issues like housing, transportation and safety, as well as those broader community support services that contribute directly to health care. His report contains many recommendations that address these issues.

Some of Dr. Sinha's recommendations are featured in this action plan (long-term care improvements, page 17 and 18). The government is studying the report, and will be implementing other recommendations in the months to come.

“A Seniors Strategy should prioritize healthy aging by supporting more older Ontarians in living healthy and productive lives.”

Dr. Samir Sinha – Living Longer, Living Well

Sinha Report: *Living Longer, Living Well*

In the course of preparing his report, Dr. Sinha and his team sought input from as many sources as possible, from health experts to seniors to caregivers. In total more than 5,000 older Ontarians, 2,500 health, social and community care providers and municipal officials and 1,000 caregivers contributed their opinions and impressions. Dr. Sinha used that feedback to identify a number of core issues and themes that serve as a starting point to his report. Many of these also informed the creation of this action plan. They include:

- » Our communities need to be the foundation of a Seniors Strategy
- » Older Ontarians want access to information and services that can allow them to stay healthy and stay at home longer
- » Strengthening primary care will be essential to secure the health of older Ontarians
- » Providing the right care, at the right time and in the right place means we have to strengthen and invest more in our home and community care sector
- » We need to do more to help our long-term care homes evolve to meet the changing needs of Ontarians
- » We need to do more to support older Ontarians in managing their medication needs
- » We need to do more to fight ageism and elder abuse in the province
- » Older Aboriginal people have unique needs that need to be addressed
- » Ontario's health, social and community human resources need to be better prepared and supported to meet the needs of our aging population
- » The provincial government and its ministries can play a greater leadership role in advancing the needs of older Ontarians and Canadians.

Taking Action for Ontario’s Seniors

Ontario’s Action Plan for Seniors identifies three overarching goals, and includes initiatives to achieve these goals. The goals conform to what were identified as the areas of greatest need when it comes to supporting Ontario seniors.

Valuing and respecting Ontario’s seniors as integral members of our communities, and supporting them so they can remain active and engaged, leading independent, productive lives in comfort, dignity and good health.

Healthy Seniors	Senior-Friendly Communities	Safety and Security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved exercise and falls prevention programs • Improved access to short-stay long-term care “assess and restore” services • Enhanced long-term care • Improved access to primary and community care • Hospital at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-friendly communities • Elderly Persons Centres and Active Living Fairs • Life leases • Better access to government programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elder abuse prevention • Elder abuse training for Police • Fire safety • Wandering prevention program • Education about Power of Attorney

Healthy Seniors

Nowhere is the need for an action plan for seniors more evident than in health care.

As we grow older, we become vulnerable to an increasing number of chronic diseases. We also become more frail, and are at risk of falls and injuries. Simply put, seniors require, and consume, more health care than other segments of the population. The provincial government is working to ensure that all seniors have access to the care they need, where and when they need it.

This action plan contains a number of new initiatives designed to promote better health for Ontario’s seniors.

Improved Exercise and Falls Prevention Programs

As we age, we become more prone to falling and are more easily injured as a result. In Ontario, falls constitute one of the leading causes of preventable injury in seniors. They often result in avoidable emergency department visits, hospitalizations and premature long-term care home placement. Physically active older adults are less likely to experience illness and they are also less likely to fall. A number of organizations around the province currently provide exercise and falls prevention activities, but we need more.

As part of Ontario’s Action Plan for Seniors, we will increase the number of exercise and falls prevention programs throughout the province, ensuring that Local Health Integration Networks and public health units are able to provide a range of programs for seniors.

Expanding Short-Stay Long-Term Care Services

Seniors who are recovering from illness or injury sometimes need the short-stay services and atmosphere offered by long-term care homes, without needing to be admitted to one of these homes permanently. There are currently some long-term care homes in Ontario that offer “assess and restore” services through the Convalescent Care Program and these have been very successful in helping recovering seniors quickly return to full health and then home.

As part of Ontario’s Action Plan for Seniors, we will expand these “assess and restore” services across Ontario. Two hundred and fifty more short-stay convalescent care beds will be designated in Ontario’s long-term care homes and we will continue to look for ways of expanding the program in the long-term care, community and hospital sectors.

Enhanced Long-Term Care

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will propose to amend the *Long-Term Care Homes Act* to ensure that these homes are reporting to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care all critical incidents involving injuries where a resident is admitted to hospital, and all environmental hazards that affect the care, safety or well-being of residents for a period greater than six hours. This greater level of oversight will help the ministry ensure that residents are receiving the care they need, as well as proper support and protection.

Also to be included in this proposed amendment will be other improvements, such as staff training and developmental opportunities that focus on improving resident safety, preventing abuse and neglect, and advancing quality of care for residents with responsive behaviours or other specialized care needs, including residents with palliative or end-of-life care needs. In addition, we will provide an additional \$20 million in funding, over the next two years, for safety improvements in long-term care homes, specifically fire safety and equipment to improve resident care and safety.

Improved Access to Community Care

Increased access to care will make a significant difference in the lives of an additional 90,000 seniors, allowing them to live at home longer. The question, then, is how best to deliver those additional hours. At present in Ontario, only community care access centres provide personal support services, and access to these services could be enhanced if other organizations were allowed to do so as well.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will improve access to home care by expanding personal support worker services through community support agencies for low-needs patients.

Health Links

The Ontario government is improving co-ordination of care for high-needs patients such as seniors and people with complex conditions by creating as many as 75 Health Links across the province. Health Links will improve access to family care for seniors and patients with complex conditions and encourage greater collaboration and co-ordination between a patient's different health care providers and the development of personalized care plans. These networks of linked health care providers will work as a team to collectively manage the needs of those patients with the greatest needs, in partnership with family and community, so they move smoothly through the system.

Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care committed to "more access to home care through an additional three million hours of Personal Support Worker hours for seniors in need."

The Province has recently announced an investment of \$10 million to increase house calls.

Our proposed Family Caregiver Leave would allow working Ontarians to spend more time with family members – frequently seniors – who cannot care for themselves because of serious injury or illness.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, Health Links will identify high-need seniors with complex conditions and effectively wrap care around them – developing personalized care plans and ensuring that they and their care coordinators are properly connected to their primary care providers.

Expanded House Calls

House calls benefit many homebound Ontarians including the elderly, people requiring palliative care and those with mental or physical challenges that make it difficult for them to travel to and from appointments. Patients who have recently been discharged from the hospital also benefit from follow-up home visits, which help them stay healthy and avoid hospital readmission.

In 2013, as part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, primary care physicians will be encouraged to provide about 30,000 more house calls than the 228,000 currently provided. We will also be expanding house call services to include other health providers, such as nurse practitioners and other health care professionals.

Hospital at Home

The "Hospital at Home" model of care is one that is becoming increasingly popular in other jurisdictions. It avoids the need for hospitalization by moving the care into the patient's home. This promotes increased patient satisfaction, reduces treatment complications, increases provider work satisfaction, and reduces pressure on the acute sector as a result of fewer patients waiting for hospital admission from Emergency Departments.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will provide more care at home across the province through innovative models such as the Hospital at Home program and help our hospitals and Emergency Departments become more senior friendly.

Family Caregiver Leave

We know that one of the real difficulties encountered by the families of seniors who fall ill or are seriously injured is getting time off work so they can be there for their loved ones.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will be re-introducing legislation that will, if passed, give employees up to eight weeks of unpaid, job-protected time away from work to care for a family member with a serious medical condition.

Senior-Friendly Communities

When we talk about building senior-friendly communities, we are talking about wrapping an environment of supports and good health around all of Ontario's seniors. We are talking about putting in place programs and services that, in a very real sense, make it easier for seniors, regardless of language or background, to lead healthy and active lives.

Age-Friendly Communities

Support for what the World Health Organization (WHO) calls Age-Friendly Communities is becoming increasingly widespread. As defined by WHO, age-friendly communities adapt their "structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities."

Age-Friendly Communities

According to the World Health Organization, age-friendly cities and communities must address the needs of seniors across eight dimensions:

- » outdoor spaces and buildings (walkways, roads, parks, etc.)
- » transportation
- » housing
- » social participation
- » respect and social inclusion
- » civic participation and employment
- » communication
- » community support and health services.

A number of jurisdictions have begun investing in age-friendly communities initiatives that support the development of local social and physical environments that enable older people to live active, safe and meaningful lives.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will provide communities with a guide that contains step-by-step processes and tools to develop age-friendly communities. These will, by their very nature and purpose, take into account the diversity of needs of all the seniors in their individual communities. We will further support these initiatives by showcasing best practices around the province, and introducing a recognition program that promotes and salutes those cities and towns that have developed age-friendly communities initiatives. Finally, we will offer one-time seed grants to prompt start-up of innovative local initiatives.

Elderly Persons Centres and Active Living Fairs

These centres provide a range of services that include social and recreational programs as well as preventative, health education and support services. In recent years, the government has funded many seniors' information fairs often hosted by Elderly Persons Centres across the province. These fairs are intended to increase seniors' knowledge of healthy aging and active lifestyles, and their awareness about the programs and services to which they are entitled. They also recognize the contributions seniors make to the life of this province.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will increase the number of Active Living Fairs around the province and explore ways of expanding the network of Elderly Persons Centres, ensuring that our seniors have ready access to places in their community that promote healthy, active aging and wellness.

Life Leases

In life lease housing, you do not own a property; you hold an "interest" in that property. The life lease interest gives you the right to occupy, or live in a unit, rather than owning the unit itself.

This type of arrangement can have many advantages. Units are often less expensive than similarly sized condominiums in the area. And because life lease communities are restricted to people of a certain age, residents can count on being surrounded by people who are closer in age and more likely to share their lifestyle, interests and needs.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will distribute a Life Lease Resource Guide around the province. The guide will provide information on opportunities and promote awareness of consumer protection issues related to this type of tenure.

Ontario currently has more than 270 Elderly Persons Centres that serve approximately 250,000 older adults.

Life lease housing is an increasingly popular housing choice for older adults who are able to live independently.

Better Access to Government Programs

If we are to create truly senior-friendly communities, we must not only put programs and services in place that support and help seniors, but also ensure those programs and services are easily understood and accessed.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will provide a "one-stop" information source for seniors that will be accessible online and by phone. This resource will provide seniors and their caregivers with explanations of the various programs and services that are available, and easy-to-understand instructions on how to access them.

Call 1-888-910-1999
Visit ontario.ca/seniors

Safety and Security

As we age, we develop vulnerabilities – to physical mishap, financial misstep, and deliberate abuse. A truly senior-friendly society must find a way of keeping older people safe and protected, while still allowing them the dignity and independence they deserve.

Elder Abuse Prevention

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will partner with the National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly to gather new data on the prevalence of elder abuse in Ontario to improve understanding of the risk factors and causes of abuse. We will use this data to improve knowledge among seniors and service providers on how to prevent abuse and find help, and inform continued progress on elder abuse prevention initiatives across the province.

Elder Abuse Training for Police

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Seniors Assistance Team provides strategic crime analysis and research with respect to the impact of seniors' abuse, and develops solutions and operational strategies to lessen the impact of this abuse.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, the OPP will develop provincial e-learning training on elder abuse for other police services and community agencies. For the OPP uniform members, this training will be mandatory through annual required training.

Ontario's Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse was the first of its kind in Canada.

As part of the Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will implement a wandering prevention program to help people with Alzheimer disease and related dementias, as well as their families and caregivers from our diverse communities, to recognize and mitigate the risk of a person going missing.

Fire Safety

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, we will work with the Office of the Fire Marshal to develop information and resources to enable home support workers to address basic fire safety issues in their clients' homes, such as smoke alarms and home escape planning. This work will build on existing resources already in place to help seniors prevent fires from starting and to be better prepared if there is a fire.

For seniors who live in retirement homes and long-term care homes, the government is considering the advice of an expert technical advisory committee on how to make fire safety improvements, such as automatic sprinklers and improved staff training, in residences housing seniors, people with disabilities and other vulnerable Ontarians.

Wandering Prevention

One of the real concerns faced by the families of people with Alzheimer Disease or related dementias is the risk of a patient going missing. Due to changes in the brain, once-familiar surroundings may no longer be recognized, and people with dementia can often become lost without warning.

This program was announced by the Premier and the Minister Responsible for Seniors in May 2011, and is being developed in partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario and Ontario Police College. This province-wide initiative will be rolled out in phases beginning in 2013.

Education about Power of Attorney

It sometimes happens that seniors reach a point where they are no longer fully able to make certain decisions on their own. It is important that before that point is reached, they make arrangements for someone trusted and capable to make those decisions for them. In the same way, it is important that seniors make arrangements for the distribution of their property when they die.

As part of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors we will distribute information brochures about powers of attorney to elderly persons centres, retirement homes and long-term care homes across the province. In this way, we will help ensure that seniors have more control over who makes decisions for them if they become mentally incapable, and can be more confident that their property will be distributed in accordance with their wishes when they die.

Conclusion

The province we live in today was shaped by our oldest citizens. The province our children and grandchildren live in will have been shaped by this generation. We must make it a province that values the contributions that seniors have made and values the contributions they have yet to make.

Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors looks to the future while respecting the past. It is a plan rooted in respect – one that encourages the active participation of seniors in the life of this province. It is a plan that recognizes that supporting seniors means supporting their families and caregivers. It is a plan that focuses on helping them be healthier, provides them with friendly, supportive communities, and keeps them protected and safe.

Societies can and should be judged, at least in part, by how they treat their senior citizens. Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors helps create a province that is the best place to grow up and grow old.