



**Ontario Community
Support Association**
*Association ontarienne
de soutien communautaire*

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May 14, 2010

Chris Forbes
Federal-Provincial Relations and Social Policy Branch
Department of Finance
L'Esplanade Laurier
15th Floor, East Tower
140 O'Connor Street
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G5

Re: Ontario Community Support Association response to federal government consultations on Canada's retirement income system

Dear Mr. Forbes,

The Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) is pleased to provide you with our perspective as part of the federal government's consultation on Canada's retirement income system.

The Ontario Community Support Association represents over 500 home care and community support service providers employing 25,000 staff and 100,000 volunteers who deliver compassionate, high quality and cost-effective health care to 750,000 Ontarians per year. Our organization advocates for greater public access to home and community support services and we represent the interests of our not-for-profit member agencies. More information about the OCSA, the work of our members, and further evidence-based studies on the home and community care sector can be found at www.ocsa.on.ca.

The services our home and community support members provide allow individuals to stay in their homes, stabilize their health and improve their quality of life. Services range from daily home care support including medical attention and bathing to hot meals, transportation services and caregiver respite to community programming.

As the voice of home and community support in Canada's largest province, the OCSA has a particular interest in, and intimate knowledge of, the issues and challenges facing seniors in our community.

We also understand the country's difficult economic situation very well. Our health workers have seen firsthand in the homes of their clients the affects of a recession, market turmoil and pension cutbacks.

In short, the long-held belief in a correlation between economic circumstance and quality of health, and quality of life, has never been more visible.

It is for this reason we encourage the federal government to take a holistic view regarding how we protect and enhance the well-being of Canada's seniors. When considering the economic security of retired persons then, the OCSA urges the government to look at issues other than just income. The cost of living for seniors, non-financial measures of well-being and the public costs to governments should also be taken into account when considering policies to support elder Canadians.

Access to affordable, comprehensive home and community support programs and access to affordable housing can significantly improve the quality of life seniors, particularly seniors who are more economically vulnerable and unable to pay for private care or expensive nursing homes.

In fact, research shows that quality of life is improved when individuals can receive a range of personal and medical care services at home and in their community. According to one Ontario study (Lum, Simonne, & Williams, 2005) such services lead to:

- ✍ a reduction in Emergency Room visits
- ✍ a reduction in 911 calls
- ✍ a reduction in caregiver burden
- ✍ better mental well-being (peace of mind/stress scale)
- ✍ an increase in personal perception of health, and social connectedness.

In addition, home is where our seniors – where all of us – prefer to be. In a survey conducted by public opinion research firm Pollara, 88% of Ontarians indicated a preference to remain in their own homes and communities, not in hospitals or long term care facilities.

The OCSA therefore strongly recommends the federal government assume a leadership role in helping to develop a properly funded, pan-Canadian home and community support program and in insuring seniors in all parts of the country have access to affordable housing.

A more substantive national public policy commitment to home and community support programs will also assist governments with the looming political challenges created by demographic shifts and public health trends – namely an aging population struggling with more chronic conditions and disabilities and the increasing prevalence of diseases such as diabetes. Consider that Ontario's seniors' population is expected to double in the next 16 years and almost 80% of Ontarians over the age of 45 have a chronic condition, of those, about 70% suffer from two or more chronic conditions.

These factors risk straining government expenditures and draining public funds available for the income support side of the equation. Investing in home and community support services and affordable housing is a more cost effective means of health delivery than institutional care and it has the additional advantage of freeing up hospital beds and unclogging emergency waiting

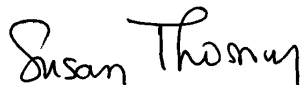
rooms. There are also decreases in long-term care home placements and long-stay hospitalizations, both at lower costs to the health care system.

Currently in the Province of Ontario the home and community support sector is responsible for just five percent of total health spending. But that small funding directly services hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. Imagine how many more seniors across the country could be assisted with significant new funding by federal and provincial governments for home and community support services.

In conclusion, the OCSA encourages the federal government to commit to supporting initiatives to increase the stock of affordable housing available to seniors and to commit to a strong home and community support sector – and back that support with appropriate levels of funding – in order to help address the challenges created by gaps in Canada’s retirement income system. Such commitments present opportunities to refocus health spending and create savings by investing in services that are more affordable and will also yield additional long term savings to the system.

We have provided you with a series of links to evidence based reports [on the cost effectiveness of the home and community support sector](#). We would be pleased to further discuss or clarify our perspective with you. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Susan Thorning
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[Examples of evidence-based reports on the cost effectiveness of the home and community support sector](#)

- ? Healthcare Quarterly, 12(1) 2009 – <http://www.longwoods.com/product.php?productid=20414%5D>.
Increasing Value for Money in the Canadian Healthcare System: New Findings and the Case for Integrated Care for Seniors

- ? The Canadian Research Network for Care in the Community (supported by Ryerson University) Fact Sheet –
<http://www.ryerson.ca/crncc/knowledge/factsheets/download/InFocus-communitySupportServicesfinal.pdf>.

“A growing body of international research suggests that when appropriately targeted, managed and integrated into the broader continuum of care, CSS can play an important role in maintaining the health, well-being and autonomy of individuals and families, while reducing demand for more costly emergency, hospital and residential care (e.g., nursing homes).”

- ? The Canadian Research Network for Care in the Community (supported by Ryerson University) Fact Sheet –
<http://www.ryerson.ca/crncc/knowledge/factsheets/documents/InFocusBoCNovember2009FINAL.pdf>
The Balance of Care