



HEALTH IS WHERE THE HOME IS

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) reminds parliamentarians that healthy aging and the proper care of our seniors is a top priority for Canadians. A new national poll confirms dramatic demographic information and the expertise of Canada's registered nurses (RNs): that Canadians are right to be worried about the quality of care available to them as they grow older. The public wants immediate action to improve healthy aging and seniors care, particularly from the federal government. To do so, CNA says, home care is essential.

Why are nurses vital to the success of healthy aging?

CNA and the RN profession are ideal partners for moving this healthy aging agenda forward. According to a recent national Nanos Research poll, public support is incredibly strong for giving nurses a greater role in health-care delivery to seniors in a home setting. No doubt that's because RNs already play such a pivotal role with Canada's seniors. They connect them with key health and social supports and they're an invaluable resource to family caregivers. Nurses' unique and direct interactions with patients and families mean they have valuable insights and innovative solutions about how to improve the health of our nation and the performance of the system.

Why is home care so essential today?

Data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicate that Canadians 65 and older make up only 14 per cent of our population but use 40 per cent of our hospitals' capacities. With the number of seniors expected to double by 2036, Canada must re-think its approach to healthy aging and seniors care to meet the growing demand for health-care services.

Chronic disease is the main reason seniors use our health system — not their age. In 2011, between 74 and 90 per cent of Canada's seniors suffered from at least one chronic condition, while nearly one quarter had two or more. And these conditions can jeopardize a person's ability to live independently at home.

Chronic diseases cost the Canadian economy \$190 billion each year and consume 67 per cent of all direct health-care costs. Hospitals are not the most effective or efficient place to prevent or manage chronic disease. On any given day in Canada, "alternative level of care" patients — that is, patients approved for hospital discharge who cannot access appropriate post-hospital care — occupy about 7,500 beds.

Home health nursing would solve this problem while letting seniors remain in their homes to receive safe care with dignity. Evidence indicates that home health nurses:

- are effective in individualized health promotion and preventive care
- improve overall health and the ability to function
- reduce mortality and depression
- enhance a person's quality of life
- decrease the need for hospital and nursing home stays

What do Canadians think?

Almost all Canadians think it's important (**74.8%**) or somewhat important (**21.1%**) to be able to age at home with access to health care in a home setting.

Increased financial aid for family caregivers who are assisting aging relatives received the next highest level of approval (**67.0%** support and **26.8%** somewhat support), followed by publicly funding all of the community health care that a senior will need delivered at home (**51.0%** support and **31.5%** somewhat support).

Additional funding to the provinces for seniors home health care (**35.0%**) and for community nurses to help seniors and caregivers connect with the right services (**30.3%**) ranked as the highest preferred activities the federal government should undertake to meet the health-care goals of seniors.

WHAT ARE CNA'S SOLUTIONS?

CNA knows the federal government can dramatically improve the lives of Canada's seniors while working with other levels of government and with health-care providers. With this in mind, CNA offers the following recommendations which, if acted upon, would make a meaningful difference to seniors.

1) Establish standards across Canada for home health care to ensure all Canadians equitable access to care services that support them in healthy aging.

A comprehensive approach to home and community-based care — which includes giving all Canadians access to an equitable level of care, enhancing the use of technology, and supporting family and friend caregivers — is critical for ensuring that seniors can remain in their homes and communities. CNA would expect that these standards address:

- Governance
- Access, funding and delivery
- Accountability and reporting
- Technology
- Health human resources
- Innovation

2) Increase supports to Canadians who provide care for aging relatives by making the existing Family Caregiver Tax Credit refundable.

Canadians who provide care for aging family members are indispensable to the well-being of our seniors and to our overburdened health-care system. While the Family Caregiver Tax Credit is set at \$2,040, many recipients receive only a fraction of this amount — sometimes as little as \$300. Like other non-refundable credits, this benefit is less than it could be because it isn't paid directly. It simply reduces the taxes eligible caregivers owe, and what they owe determines the amount they receive. Making the credit refundable would ensure that all eligible households receive some money in return for their caregiving commitments. It would also help Canadians in the lower tax bracket who have modest or low incomes to balance their jobs with the care they provide to older relatives.

3) Expand the New Horizons for Seniors Program by incorporating a new objective to support healthy and active aging.

Since its launch in 2004, the New Horizons for Seniors Program has been a great example of federal innovation geared to seniors in the community, with the government providing funding to organizations that ensure seniors benefit from and contribute to the quality of life in their communities. Expanding this program with a healthy and active aging objective would help to manage chronic diseases and prevent falls, while defraying as well as avoiding tremendous costs to the health-care system. Governments must redirect health funding to preventive health-care services and programs based in our communities.

8.1 MILLION

Estimated number of Canadians who provided care to family or friends in 2011-2012.

\$5 BILLION

The estimated contribution to Canada's health-care system in **unpaid labour** by family caregivers.

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Research data were obtained through a Nanos Research omnibus poll conducted for CNA between October 18 and 21, 2014. Nanos asked Canadians for their views on home care and other supports for Canada's aging population. Results are accurate within plus or minus 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

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CNA is an active participant in the Canadian Home Care Collaborative, along with the Canadian Home Care Association, the Canadian Healthcare Association and the College of Family Physicians of Canada. Together, these pan-Canadian organizations collaborate on advancing the home care agenda. CNA is also a member of the Council of the Federation's health-care innovation working group with the Canadian Medical Association and the Health Action Lobby.