

AGING REIMAGINED

A VIRTUAL NURSES WEEK EVENT – SUMMARY

Canada During COVID-19

Laura Tamblyn Watts – President and CEO, CanAge

- 250% increase in elder abuse – but a significant decrease in reporting to police.
- Government has introduced significant new supports to prop up the economy, including CERB. These new supports have been accompanied by a massive increase in “benefits”, frauds and scams.
- We can likely expect austerity ahead, forcing community-based organizations to do more with less.
- Life expectancy today is lower than when *Canada Health Care Act* was enacted, in 1984.
- Most long-term care homes are decades old and don’t meet the latest standards.
- For-profit facilities subsidized by public funds are technically not supposed to make profits. We need to question how that is working.
- CanAge Roadmap: <https://www.canage.ca/work/advocacy/>
- Canada performs poorly on vaccine distribution and infection prevention and control, and is at the bottom of the list of OECD countries for vaccinations. Between 3 percent and 10 percent of seniors in Canada have basic vaccines.
- Housing:
 - CanAge is currently working on CSA standards for long-term care housing.
- Economic security is vital for seniors.
- Successes: B.C.’s approach included cohorting, sufficient PPE, and staff working at single sites.
- There’s broad agreement about what we need to do. We just need to put it into action.
- The conditions of work are conditions of care.
- 92 percent of Canadians are not going to enter long-term care, so we should focus on building environments that are not just ‘home-like’ – they should be a home.

Aging Reimagined

Peggy Edwards – Author, researcher and advocate for the rights of older people

- Census data shows that Canadians are living longer and form a higher proportion of the population.
- These statistics fail to show the diversity of our aging population (Indigenous, LGBTQ, racialized) or inequities, including among long-term care workers. The population aged 65 and over is not homogeneous.
- We need changing narratives about aging – ageism is the last acceptable “ism”, with jokes and other remarks showing our discomfort with aging.
- Ageism is behind the tragedy in long-term care during the pandemic. Seniors have not been a priority.
- Need to shift the narrative from seniors’ needs to seniors’ rights. The *UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons* is backed by many countries but not Canada.
- Seniors are not just dependents; they are contributors.
- Access to aids to help with seniors’ independence is unequal and costly (e.g., MedicAlert, wheelchairs, smart homes, robots, e-health, visual aids). We need affordable and equitable access.

- Encourage longer working lives that allow for reduced hours. Introduce flexible workplace policies.
- Intergenerational initiatives: young people meeting older individuals is healthy for both.
- Age-friendly housing and communities – there should exist a continuum from independent living to assisted living to long-term care.
- The goal is to allow people to age in supportive community where resources can potentially be shared and continuity of care can be ensured.
- Gender equity is important. One third of older women who live alone live below poverty line.
- Prioritize the needs of both informal and formal caregivers.
- Shared housing is an important alternative that should be explored.
- Innovative alternatives for long-term care in Holland and Denmark, while Ontario continues to follow the same dated model of huge facilities.
- It's possible to age in a healthy way. How do you imagine your old age to be?

Decade of Healthy Aging

Dr. Roger Wong – Vice Dean (Education), University of British Columbia

- The WHO has designated 2020-2030 the decade of healthy aging.
 - The social determinants of health and the ways in which they intersect are critical, including geography, race, gender and sexual orientation.
- 4 pillars – strategies for healthy living:
 - Geroscience is a new interprofessional approach to aging, that can include physiotherapists, nurses, doctors, lawyers, and social and community services.
 - Building age-friendly environments: both physical infrastructure and technology are key components.
 - Continuity of care requires us to transition away from an acute care model, with the goal of allowing Canadians to age in place.
 - Culturally sensitive health care is good seniors' care. Barriers can include language, cultural beliefs and practices, affordability, availability of practitioner, and wait times.
- A cross-sectoral approach is necessary. We must transcend boundaries between education, non-governmental organizations, community groups, etc.
 - Actions we can take include eliminating ageism, addressing the social determinants of health, and building person-centred care and national health human resources standards.
 - We need disaggregated data to see what's happening to our vulnerable seniors.
- Canada's Task Force on Aging recommended approaching aging with greater compassion, increasing staffing levels and offering more training for workers; data collection; ensuring the availability of PPE, and building cross-sectoral support for aging initiatives.
 - The Task Force's second report is looking at health system factors.
 - Governments don't need to study more: let's focus on reform now.
 - Canadians in long-term care are often the most frail and vulnerable, and they need advocates.
 - Continuity of care is fragmented in Canada, and our long-term care resources and built environments are inadequate.
- The pandemic is a wake-up call. All of us want to age in healthy ways. How can we support older people and their families? Action is needed now.

Key Takeaways

- We have long known the problems in Canadian long-term care. Now is the time to reform the system.
- Canada must move from a disease-centred model of aging care to a health-based model.
- Robust national standards for long-term care are long overdue, and they must be implemented through an enforceable process like federal legislation.
- Healthy aging in community is within Canada's reach if we make significant future investments in home care, long-term care, community care and palliative care. We must adopt an integrated approach that views care as a continuum of services responding to seniors' diverse needs and capabilities.
- Health care staffing is at a crisis point. Canada needs health care workforce planning and coordination to be able to meet our population's needs today and into the future. The conditions of work are the conditions of care.
- Culturally sensitive health care is good seniors' care.
- Seniors and health care workers must be involved in creating policy and programs that support healthy aging in community. Seniors are contributors.

Resources

- Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU): *Before It's Too Late: A National Plan for Safe Seniors' Care* – <https://nursesunions.ca/research/before-its-too-late-a-national-plan-for-safe-seniors-care/>
- Library of Parliament report: *Long-Term Care Homes in Canada: How are they funded and regulated?* – <https://hillnotes.ca/2020/10/22/long-term-care-homes-in-canada-how-are-they-funded-and-regulated/>
- CanAge: *VOICES of Canada's Seniors: A Roadmap to an Age-Inclusive Canada* – <https://www.canage.ca/work/advocacy/>
- World Health Organization (WHO): *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide* – https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf
- *Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment From Evidence to Action* – https://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2006/Healthy_Aging_A_Vital_latest_copy_October_2006.pdf
- World Health Organization (WHO): resources on the United Nations' Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) – <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>
- "A New Strategic Approach to Successful Aging and Healthy Aging" by Roger Y. Wong. *Geriatrics* 2018, 3, 86; doi:10.3390/geriatrics3040086 – <https://www.mdpi.com/2308-3417/3/4/86/htm>
- *Long-Term Care and COVID-19: Report of a special task force prepared for the Chief Science Advisor of Canada* – [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/063.nsf/vwapj/Long-Term-Care-and-Covid19_2020.pdf/\\$file/Long-Term-Care-and-Covid19_2020.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/063.nsf/vwapj/Long-Term-Care-and-Covid19_2020.pdf/$file/Long-Term-Care-and-Covid19_2020.pdf)
- OECD: *Spending on Long-Term Care* brief – <https://www.oecd.org/health/health-systems/Spending-on-long-term-care-Brief-November-2020.pdf>