



CARP Submission on Challenges Faced by Older Women with a Focus on the Factors Contributing to Their Poverty and Vulnerability

Despite improvements that have been made to the welfare of older Canadians over the past decades, older women in Canada continue to experience poverty, isolation and marginalization. Many of the vulnerabilities of older women can be linked to cumulative disadvantages experienced over the life course, including: fewer educational and career opportunities, work interruptions due to childrearing and caregiving, and the gender pay-gap. These disadvantages can result in poverty and financial insecurity in later life, and 1 in 5 older women aged 75 and up are low-income.ⁱ Furthermore, due to their longer life expectancy, many women will experience the social and financial hardships of widowhood during their lifetime.

The recommendations we make in our briefing are based on CARP's national policy platform *The FACES of Canada's Seniors: Making Canada the Best Place to Age* (Financial Security, Abuse Prevention, Caregiving and Housing Support, Exceptional Healthcare and Social Inclusion see carp.ca/faces). We also strongly endorse two reports which address these critical issues:

1. The Older Women's Dialogue Project and the Centre for Elder Law, "[We Are Not All the Same](#)" and,
2. Common Wealth and Ryerson's National Institute on Ageing "[The Value of a Good Pension](#)."

Financial Security

Of the utmost concern is the need to support our poorest seniors, who are overwhelmingly women. Without the support of Government transfers (e.g., OAS, GIS, CPP), 76% of unattached older women would be living in poverty (compared to 34% with transfers).ⁱⁱ In particular, GIS is crucial for the wellbeing of senior women, and CARP makes the following recommendations:

- Strengthen GIS: a) Increase the GIS amount;
- Cut back GIS claw-backs on GIS as a whole and the top-up in particular – claw-backs on the top up are equal to a 75% rate of tax; and,
- Increase the exempt amount beyond \$3500 and expand it to cover not just earned income but all income (e.g., contract, pension, interest).

CARP also recommends the following steps to support older adults who have some resources:

- Remove mandatory RRIF withdrawals or consider eliminating RRIFs altogether – current mandatory withdrawal rates do not reflect safe returns and longevity.

- Support deferred annuities – these are a cost-effective form of longevity insurance which are not currently viable due to punitive, ill-considered tax treatment.
- Support group pensions and group TFSA pension-like arrangements for low income workers, as a retirement dollar invested in a typical individual approach yields \$1.70 while a dollar invested in a model pension yields \$5.32 (3 times that amount).
- Expand the CPP. The CPPIB is Canadian success story – build on this and allow for individual contributions to take advantage of strong returns and low costs

To protect the retirement resources of seniors CARP also recommends that Government:

- Protect corporate pensions – bring Canada in line with the U.S. and U.K. The high-profile cases of Nortel and Sears have highlighted the weaknesses in our current protections.
- Call for investor protections – Canada lags other OECD countries in this area.
- Create a single complaints body for all financial issues (as in the UK). Our fragmented system makes it difficult for seniors to obtain restitution when they are financially harmed.

For more information about our recommendations for financial security we refer you to [CARP's submission on retirement security](#) as a part of the pension consultation.

Abuse prevention

CARP recommends that Government:

- Amend PIPEDA (Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act) as banks are currently precluded from protecting women from financial abuse due to technical problems with legislative wording; and,
- Review OAS/GIS eligibility criteria in regards to access for older immigrant women, who otherwise have no financial support and may be at risk of abuse by family members due their financial dependency.

Caregivers and Housing

To strengthen access to housing for senior womens CARP recommends that Government:

- Address issues within the housing marketing that allow wide-spread empty units to co-exist with low rental vacancy rates and high rents; and
- Regulate AirBNB and other programs that take housing out of the market. CARP also recommends Government support innovative housing options for seniors that promote social connection such as cohousing and home sharing.

Senior women are the most likely to be financial disadvantage by caregiving, and CARP makes the following recommendations to ensure the financial security of caregivers:

- Make current non-refundable tax credits refundable to ensure seniors without taxable income can benefit;

- Remove the requirement for employment insurance benefits that the care recipient be at significant risk of death; and c) Provide a caregiver allowance, a benefit paid to caregivers providing significant hours of care. CARP also calls on Government to address the financial insecurity of low-income grandmothers caring for grandchildren, which is particular issue in Indigenous communities.

Exceptional Healthcare

While Canada has a universal health care system, there are many important health care services that do not currently fall under the official umbrella of Medicare which older women may struggle to access due to cost. CARP recommends that Government:

- Fund National Pharmacare, as 8% of older Canadians have reported not taking prescribed medicines because of the cost.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Provide dental care to older Canadians, as 38% of Canadian older adults without dental insurance reported having not visited a dentist in the past year.^{iv}
- Providing medical aids (e.g., wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc.) for low income Canadians.
- Increase investments in long-term care and home care, as current services are unable to meet demand.

Social Inclusion

Women are much more likely than men to stop driving as they age, yet only 5% of senior women use public transit as their primary form of transportation. Government must stop viewing transit as a subsidy, instead they need to view it as an investment. CARP recommends Government:

- Provide free transit passes for all older adults and
- Invest in transit systems both in urban and rural/remote areas to ensure transit is convenient and accessible for seniors.

It is not just transportation that is needed; older women also need welcoming spaces to enjoy and activities to attend. CARP recommends Government invest in community programs for seniors, and in particular innovative programs that pair youth with older adults.

ⁱStatistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016126.

ⁱⁱ Harding, A. (2018). The effect of government transfer programs on low-income rates: a gender-based analysis, 1995 to 2016. Retrieved from

https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2018003-eng.pdf?st=5Y_w0Fv7

ⁱⁱⁱ Morgan, S.G. & Lee, A., 2017. Cost-related non-adherence to prescribed medicines among older adults: a cross-sectional analysis of a survey in 11 developed countries. *BMJ Open*, 7(1), p.e014287.

^{iv} Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. (2014). *Improving Access to Oral Health Care: For Vulnerable People Living in Canada*. Retrieved from http://cahs-acss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Access_to_Oral_Care_FINAL_REPORT_EN.pdf