



Canadian Pensioners Concerned Incorporated
La Corporation des Retraités Canadiens Intéressés
National

The Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Seniors

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Presenters :
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We thank the Honourable Maria Minna for giving us this opportunity to meet with you. We must apologize for the fact that we have had no time to prepare a written brief as we only received notice of this invitation late Wednesday afternoon. We appeared this morning in the Pre-Budget hearings of the House of Commons Finance Committee.

Canadian Pensioners Concerned, founded in 1969 in Ontario, is a provincial and national membership based nonpartisan voluntary advocacy organization of mature Canadians committed to preserving and enhancing a human-centred vision of life. We are concerned not only about those matters which involve older citizens but also about all of the factors that make a just, caring, compassionate, civil society for all age groups.

We have brought with us some single copies of briefs we have made in the recent past that touch on some of the issues you are raising but many more. With your permission we will leave them with you today.

First, we will touch on some overarching issues, many of them reflecting the Ageism that permeates our whole society – except for the Aboriginal communities. If the current government was truly interested in Seniors' Issues then we are puzzled by the following:

The failure to follow up on any of the recommendations coming from the Madrid UN Conference on Aging where Canada took a lead role under Senator Carstairs.

The 50% cut to the Division of Aging's Budget

The practical elimination of the National Advisory Council on Aging's Budget

The almost complete elimination to the budget of the Congress of National Seniors Organization

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The elimination of the New Horizons Program that provided key support to seniors own projects and helped their organizations administratively. This cut helped to kill many voluntary Senior's Organizations. Now, you have a different type of senior who wants to travel, to enjoy life and volunteering has fallen below the radar screen. No, tax breaks are not the way to go! Your government is also killing the support for NVO, the Voluntary Sector Umbrella Organization that looked at issues of NGOs across the country.

The removal of CMHC from the Social/Cooperative housing field – a cruel blow to all low income citizens across this country – including seniors. Supportive housing in its many different forms is also greatly needed. CMHC should be there to provide, or guarantee, funding for home renovations to permit aging in place.

The claw back in OAS and the failure to fully index OAS/GIS, let alone increase them, so that those totally dependent on them will be above the Low Income Cut Off. Unattached older persons need to have special attention paid to them here.

Only 40% of paid workers have registered pension plans

The failure to tackle the cost of prescription drugs:

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same recognition of their work as is now given to parents of young children. The government is currently ensuring that many of these people will be poor in their old age.

Public Health and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention are on the bottom of the list for funding. Let us remember that the majority of those killed by SARS were older people. Seniors have been major recipients of these activities in the past as have youth.

Now let us quickly touch on some other issues.

The gender gap in wages remains pretty constant in Canada (Women at a little over 70% of men's wages) and this guarantees that older women, especially single unattached women will be among the very poor. We must ensure that opportunities for life long learning/training are in place for all workers but especially the older worker and the disabled.

The rising poverty rate among new immigrants and thus the rising poverty rate among seniors in that population. Failure to recognize their professional skills and their exploitation in the labour force is dooming them to lives of great hardship.

People with disabilities are, in large measure, guaranteed to live lives on the margins in this country. Their employment rates are desperately low, the public transportation system for many is none existent and their disability allowances are pathetic. Seniors who become disabled become members of this community of those who are excluded from full participation and respect in our society.

Home Care and Long Term Care must be included in the Canada Health Act and governed by the same five principles. Seniors want to age in place; they do not want to be institutionalized. They need well paid, well trained, culturally sensitive workers who are not rotated through their homes. This service must include help with the needs of daily living, cleaning, shopping or meal preparation to name a few. We need funding of Community Agencies that really serve people.

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We need people available who are trained and educated to deal with issues of abuse and family issues.

Finally, we need a Coordinated “System” of Health Care (24/7) which includes the full range of skills and that would be available to visit people in their homes.

Federal funding and engagement in all these areas is absolutely essential

We thank you for the opportunity to join you today.

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