



AGING IN 2021

A REPORT ON POLITICAL PRIORITIES
IN AGING ACROSS CANADA



Prepared by: Candice Pollack

Updated by: Patrick Patterson and Heather Higgins

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EMAIL: info@appta.ca

DISCLAIMER

This publication is intended to provide an overview of the current political priorities and trends in aging in the Canadian context and is based on information available as of the date of publication or as otherwise noted. This scan is conducted annually, or bi-annually, and intended to be a living document that represents updates as Canadian jurisdictions change governance and priorities for the aging population. None of the information in this document is intended to provide legal, accounting, or other professional advice. forgiveness programs in Canada and is based on information available as of the date of publication or as otherwise noted. None of the information in this document should be construed as legal, accounting, or other professional advice.

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How to cite this document

Aging in 2021: A Report on Political Priorities in Aging Across Canada. 2021. Fredericton, NB: AGE-WELL National Innovation Hub, APPTA Inc

ABOUT APPTA



The AGE-WELL National Innovation Hub Advancing Policies and Practices in Technology and Aging (APPTA) supports governments in generating opportunities to address the policy and practice challenges of an aging population. A joint initiative of AGE-WELL and the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation, APPTA aims to bridge the gap between research and implementation, create opportunities for knowledge exchange, and foster an environment of innovation and collaboration in aging across Canada.

APPTA's work in knowledge translation is centered on providing federal, provincial, and territorial governments across Canada with decision support in policy innovation for the aging population. Our policy option development process aims to bridge the knowledge translation gap by mobilizing aging and technology research to build relevant, appropriate, and evidence-informed options that can improve the lives of older Canadians.

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Aging in 2021

A Report on Political Priorities in Aging across Canada

Introduction

APPTA conducted a scan in 2019 of political priorities for the aging population across Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments (<https://agewell-nih-appta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/J-Aging-in-2019.pdf>). Since that report was released, population aging in Canada has continued to give rise to complex social, economic, cultural, and political challenges. The global spread of the COVID-19 virus in early 2020 also presented a new threat to the health of older adults in Canada, and intensified many existing barriers to remaining healthy, aging at home, staying connected to communities, and enjoying a high quality of life. The pandemic forced the federal, provincial and territorial governments to respond quickly with emergency measures to contain the virus. At the same time, governments continued identifying priority areas for the development of longer-term policy solutions which take into account scientific evidence, public opinion, cultural values, party politics, and other factors. Governments across Canada are seeking policies, programs, and services to address these challenges across varied healthcare systems, diversity in the older adult population, and a range of geographic settings, while working with constrained human and financial resources.

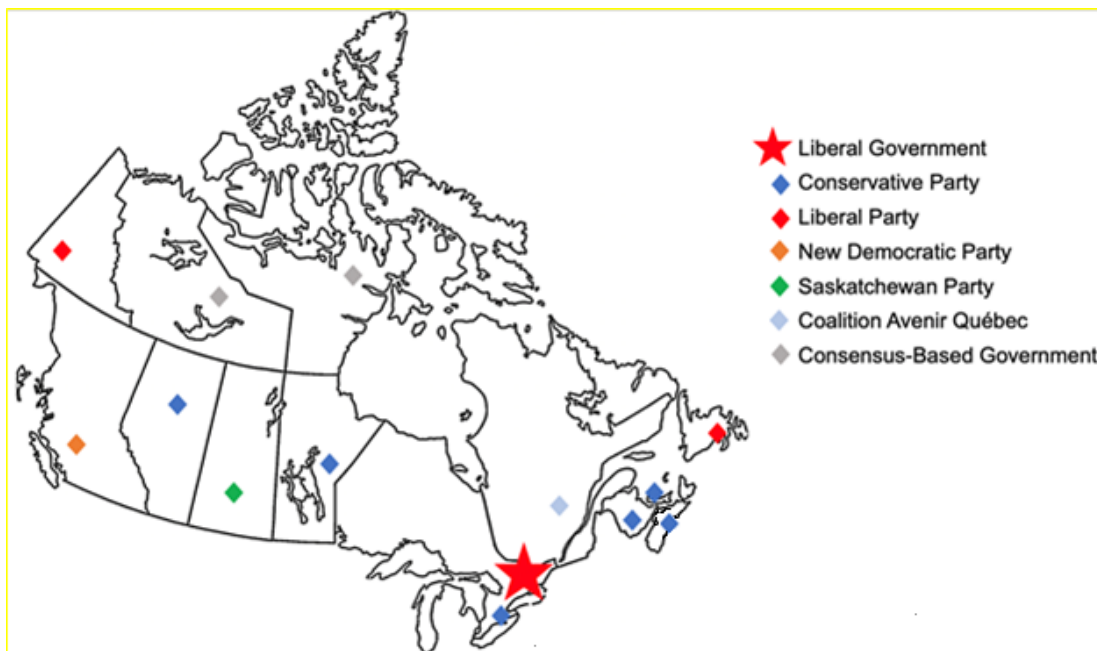
In 2021, APPTA has continued the jurisdictional scan, with the objective of updating our understanding of the political landscape in each jurisdiction, identifying areas of continuing national importance and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on policies, and aligning our knowledge translation work with governmental commitments. As in the earlier report, this analysis is based on a review of party platforms, throne speeches, annual budget speeches and overview documents, as well as existing and current aging strategies, where those are publicly available. A

full list, organized by jurisdiction, of sources added since the 2019 scan can be found in **APPENDIX A**. For earlier sources, please refer to the 2019 report.

Overview: Political Landscape in Canada

Since 2019, the Canadian political landscape in several regions has continued to move toward parties typically characterized as conservative in their politics¹, with such parties winning elections in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. British Columbia contradicted that trend, with the left-leaning New Democratic Party replacing their minority government with a majority, while Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon re-elected centrist Liberal governments. The 2021 federal election also kept the status quo, as the Liberal party won another minority government. An overview of political parties and provincial, territorial and federal leadership can be found in Figures 1 and 2 below.

- Figure 1. Political Parties in Canada



¹ The Coalition Avenir de Québec (CAQ), United Conservative Party and Saskatchewan Party are not members of the Progressive Conservative Party, however, their politics are classified as right-wing.

- **Figure 2. Current Government Leadership & Structure Across Canada**

<p>Federal Right. Hon. Justin Trudeau Liberal Minority</p>	<p>Yukon Hon. Sandy Silver Liberal Minority</p>	<p>Northwest Territories Hon. Caroline Cochrane Consensus-Based Government</p>
<p>Nunavut Hon. Joe Savikataaq Consensus-Based Government</p>	<p>British Columbia Hon. John Horgan New Democratic Party Majority</p>	<p>Alberta Hon. Jason Kenney Conservative Majority</p>
<p>Saskatchewan Hon. Scott Moe Saskatchewan Party Majority</p>	<p>Manitoba Hon. Brian Pallister Conservative Majority</p>	<p>Ontario Hon. Doug Ford Conservative Majority</p>
<p>Québec Hon. François Legault Coalition Avenir Québec Majority</p>	<p>New Brunswick Hon. Blaine Higgs Conservative Minority</p>	<p>Nova Scotia Hon. Tim Houston Conservative Majority</p>
<p>Prince Edward Island Hon. Dennis King Conservative Minority</p>	<p>Newfoundland & Labrador Hon. Andrew Furey Liberal Majority</p>	

As was noted in the 2019 jurisdictional scan, governments in Canada across party lines allocated large amounts of funding to the healthcare system and all parties acknowledged the needs of a growing population of older adults. The prominence of those policy areas was amplified with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which hit Canadian seniors with disproportionate rates of casualties, disparity, and isolation. It also highlighted pre-existing systemic issues affecting long-term care facilities, and health systems more generally, across Canada. In 2021, several governments, such as Newfoundland & Labrador and Québec devoted sections of their policy platforms or budget speeches to commitments focused on the older adult population. Details of the political priorities oriented toward older adults are outlined below.

Highlights: Political Priorities Across Canada

Federal Policy Priorities

With regards to the aging population, Canada's current federal government has focused much of their attention on impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's long-term care sector. A \$1 billion in Safe Long-term Care Fund to ensure seniors are well protected and supported throughout the pandemic and moving forward was announced in the *2020 Fall Economic Statement* and funded in the 2021 budget. The *2020 Fall Economic Statement* also announced plans to work with provincial and territorial governments, and the Health Standards Organization and Canadian Standards Association, to develop national standards for long-term care. These standards will help inform ongoing discussions with provinces and territories on improving the quality of life of residents in long-term care. The federal 2021 budget allocated \$3 billion over five years to Health Canada to support jurisdictions in ensuring standards for long-term care are applied and permanent changes to improve care are made. The government is also increasing funding for Statistics Canada by \$41.3 million over 6 years, and an additional \$7.7 million per year of ongoing funding, to collect data on supportive care, primary care and pharmaceutical availability and track progress on health system improvement.

The federal government's other responses to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on older adults have built on the Liberal Party's existing emphasis, noted in the 2019 jurisdictional scan, on mental health and addiction supports and on poverty reduction. The 2021 budget earmarked \$100 million over three years to the Public Health Agency of Canada to support innovative mental health interventions for populations disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including health care workers, seniors, Indigenous people and racialized and Black Canadians. An additional \$50 million over the next two years will have Health Canada start a trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stream of mental health programming for populations at risk brought about by COVID-19. The federal government also began providing financial support to

older adults to help them manage disruptions caused by the pandemic. These included one-time top-ups to Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement for Seniors payments announced in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement. This federal policy priority continued in 2021, with the budget providing an additional one-time Old Age Security top-up payment and a permanent 10% increase in Old Age Security payment rates for people aged 75 years and older, representing \$12 billion over five years in additional financial support and at least \$3 billion per year ongoing.

Finally, the federal government maintained some of its 2019 priorities related to older adults, and added new ones. One priority area was housing for older adults. The government carried through on its commitment to invest \$40 billion over ten years to implement the National Housing Strategy, which will provide 12,000 new accessible, affordable housing for low-income seniors. Budget 2021 provides \$90 million over three years to Employment and Social Development Canada to launch the Age Well at Home initiative to support low-income and otherwise vulnerable seniors age in place with the assistance of community-based organizations. The federal government has also added palliative care as a priority area. It committed \$29.8 million over six years to advance a palliative care strategy meant to better coordinate action on access to high quality palliative care.

Table 1. Federal funding commitments benefitting older adults	
National Housing Strategy	\$40 billion
OAS benefits	\$12 billion
Long-term care national standards	\$3 billion
Mental health interventions	\$100 million
Age well at Home Initiative	\$90 million
Palliative care strategy	\$29.8 million

Provincial and Territorial Policy Priorities

In analysing the political priorities of the provinces and territories, a number of themes identified in 2019 continued while others emerged or gained prominence across the country. The following sections will describe these themes in more detail, identify the jurisdictions where they are prominent, and highlight examples of programs and budget commitments.

Responses to COVID-19 and Pandemic Recovery

As with the federal government, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and plans for recovery figured prominently in budgets and policy announcements by provincial and territorial governments. Measures aimed at controlling COVID-19, such as increased funding for infection control supplies, or to support screening and testing in long-term care facilities, were highlighted in the 2021 budget speeches in Alberta, British Columbia and Québec. The pandemic was a consideration in other policies and budget allocations in other priority areas discussed below, such as financial supports for older adults, expansions to health and human resources for seniors services, and the expansion of digital delivery of health care services. Some planned policies were also postponed or deferred due to the pandemic, such as the Alberta government's decision in the 2021 budget not to implement changes announced in 2020 that would have narrowed eligibility for seniors benefits and introduced deductibles in drug coverage for higher income Alberta seniors.

Expanded Health Services

Provinces and Territories across Canada introduced a range of programs and initiatives which aimed to expand health services for older adults. These initiatives constituted five, often interlinked, policy areas: Home and Community Care; Virtual Care & Internet Services; Healthcare Infrastructure; Healthcare Human Resources; Mental Health and Addictions.

1. Home and Community Care

Home and community care emerged as a priority area in the 2019 jurisdictional scan, and that continued in 2021 across Canada. All provinces and two territories announced expansions to home or community care programs that provide healthcare services outside of physicians' offices and hospitals, with some highlights below:

- Alberta: \$200 million increase in funding for community care, continuing care and home care programs
- Québec \$1.5 billion for home-support services and improvements to home care – to preserve the autonomy of seniors and allow them to stay in their homes for as long as possible. Further, resources of \$750 million will allow for additional hours for home care and services to be offered
- Northwest Territories: \$290,000 for home care and community care under the Canada-Northwest Territories Home and Community Care and Mental Health and Addictions Services Funding Agreement

Expanding supports for seniors aging in place was a central feature of New Brunswick's Health Strategy, which was announced late in 2021. Newfoundland and Labrador extended their SeniorsNL program to include caregivers, which now provides information and referral services to people caring for older adults.

2. Virtual Care and Internet

Previously a rising priority, virtual care and internet connectivity has become a priority across Canadian jurisdictions in 2021. In part, this is due to virtual care's applicability in limiting transmission of COVID-19 by reducing face-to-face contact, and in the expansion of home care to support the aging population and reduce human resource shortages. Several provinces have specifically budgeted for targeted digital and virtual care initiatives or supporting the development

of fast reliable internet services, including Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, Québec, and Nova Scotia.

- Newfoundland and Labrador: Investing \$3.3 million to support virtual care service through 811.
- New Brunswick: \$2.6 million to manage the increased volume of calls to Tele-Care 811; and \$1.2 million to support access to services such as Virtual Care, MyHealthNB, and eHealthNB.
- Prince Edward Island: \$4.4 M to transform how primary care is delivered on the island with an emphasis on rural health, seniors care, virtual care and mental health as well as \$2.65 M in virtual care.

Planned health system reforms announced in 2021 in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island highlighted improving service delivery through expanded virtual services and greater use of electronic medical record systems.

3. Healthcare Infrastructure

Although expanding home and community care can reduce pressure on the health and long-term care systems, health care infrastructure remained a highly-rated concern among provinces and territories in 2021. Jurisdictions such Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Yukon, all made commitments for hospital or health facility construction, expansions, and upgrades. The following jurisdictions have made budget commitments specifically to build more long-term care beds:

- Manitoba: \$9.3 million for personal care home expansions in Steinbach and Carman, adding more than 120 beds.
- New Brunswick: As part of their nursing home renovation and replacement plan, \$10.3 million will be provided for the operation of three new nursing home facilities. This

funding will support the replacement of 214 nursing home beds in Miramichi, and the addition of 148 new beds in Fredericton, Miramichi, and Moncton.

- Nova Scotia: \$8.6 million for the first year of the multi-year Long Term Care Infrastructure Renewal Plan to replace or significantly renovate seven nursing homes and add more than 230 beds across the province by 2025
- Ontario: An additional \$933 million over four years, for a total of \$2.6 billion, to support building 30,000 new long-term care beds.

4. Healthcare Human Resources

Expanded home and community care, and new healthcare and long-term care infrastructure, require healthcare human resources to function. Health system staffing crises during the COVID-19 pandemic also focused attention across Canada on the state of the health workforce and it was among the top-rated political priorities in 2021. Many jurisdictions, including Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Québec, Saskatchewan and Yukon, made platform or budget commitments aimed at addressing healthcare labour force shortages. Concerns regarding the number of physicians and nurses were especially acute in the Atlantic provinces, with New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island both making specific budget commitments to address the issue:

- New Brunswick: Investing \$11.1 million in physician recruitment for 2021-2022 as well as \$30.0 million to support additional nurse practitioner positions for remote locations and initiatives to reduce volume of patients without a doctor.
- Prince Edward Island: \$1.5 M to establish a multi-year recruitment and retention program to develop attract and retain nursing professionals

Staffing shortages in long-term care facilities became severe in some provinces in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several provinces which introduced staff recruitment, retention and training

programs in 2020 to expand the long-term care workforce, including British Columbia, Ontario, Québec and Saskatchewan, have continued or expanded their efforts in 2021. Older adults in Ontario long-term care homes were especially hard hit during the pandemic and that province committed in the 2021 budget \$4.9 billion over 4 years to increase staffing levels in long-term care to four hours per day per resident, the level needed to provide quality care.

5. Mental Health and Addictions

As noted above, the federal government has identified mental health as one of the main priorities for Canadian jurisdictions given both the current and anticipated long-lasting impacts of COVID-19. All Canadian provinces and territories have highlighted aspects of mental health and or addictions that they are prioritizing within their respective platforms, throne speeches or budget documents. Some initiatives to highlight include:

- Manitoba: Establishing a new department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery with \$342 million for programming and services in addition to \$1.7 million for the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy
- Ontario: Providing additional funding of \$175 million in 2021–22 as part of an investment of \$3.8 billion over 10 years, to provide more and better mental health care for everyone who needs it.

The mental health initiatives in most provinces would benefit older adults, but were not focused specifically on that population. The exception was Newfoundland and Labrador, which introduced a social inclusion strategy for seniors.

Financial Supports for Older Adults

Provincial and territorial governments expanded financial support for older adults in 2020 as part of their efforts to help people manage challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and several extended those policies in 2021. For example, British Columbia increased that province's Seniors

Supplement by \$50 per month and expanded eligibility so that more older adults qualified to receive payments. British Columbia also increased by \$20 the monthly allowance for seniors living in publicly subsidized long-term care. Newfoundland and Labrador expanded eligibility for the Seniors' Benefit, while Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories increased income allowances or benefits for seniors. Manitoba provided seniors with the Seniors Economic Recovery Benefit, a one-time \$200 payment.

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Québec, and Nova Scotia provided tax credits or rebates specifically for older adults, such as the education tax rebate for seniors in Manitoba and the rebate on municipal residential property taxes paid by low-income seniors in Nova Scotia. In some cases, tax credits for seniors were part of housing improvement initiatives, such as Ontario's Home Safety Tax Credit to reduce the cost to seniors for improvements that make their homes safer and more accessible. That new tax credit would provide an estimated \$30 million in support and benefit about 27,000 people, including seniors and people who live with senior relatives.

Affordable and Accessible Housing and Transportation

Expanding home care and supporting aging in place is only a viable strategy if housing is affordable and transportation systems enable older adults to access necessary services.

Corresponding with the growing emphasis on home and community care, in 2021 nearly every jurisdiction identified either or both affordable and accessible housing and transportation as a priority, either in relation to seniors or the general population more broadly. Some of the housing and transportation initiatives identified include:

- Nova Scotia: \$29.1 million this year for the third year of initiatives to provide safe, suitable, and affordable housing under the Nova Scotia Action Plan for Affordable Housing as well as \$1.1 million increase for the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors program mentioned above.

- Saskatchewan: \$1.4 million new investment will add a new STARS helicopter to deliver emergency care faster to rural and remote sites. Total provincial funding for STARS is now \$11.88 million.

British Columbia and Manitoba both announced plans in 2021 to construct affordable housing for older adults, while Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador announced housing repair and renovation grant initiatives to help lower-income seniors improve their existing housing. Newfoundland and Labrador also funded its Community Transport Program for seniors to help improve access to services.

Rising Priorities

Several secondary priority areas that were identified in the 2019 scan were still receiving some attention in 2021.

- Pharmacare
 - The federal government continued working with provinces, territories and stakeholders toward the goal of a universal national program and announced plans to provide ongoing funding of \$500 million for the program for high-cost drugs recommended for treating rare diseases.
 - With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the federal government and provincial and territorial governments across Canada gave vaccination programs for seniors very high priority in late 2020 and throughout 2021.
 - Other pharmacare or drug coverage initiatives for older adults were less prominent. Nova Scotia expanded medication coverage for seniors, while Prince Edward Island provided coverage for Shingles vaccinations for all people aged 65 and over.
- Dental Care

- Prince Edward Island allocated \$2.5 million to extend dental coverage to seniors who are not covered by private dental insurance.
- Surgical Wait Times
 - Waiting lists can be long for some procedures that are in high demand among older adults. Manitoba and New Brunswick both introduced initiatives in 2021 aimed at reducing wait times for cataract and joint replacement surgeries.
- Palliative Care
 - As mentioned above, the federal government announced funding to improve access to palliative and end-of-life care. Some other jurisdictions also made palliative care a priority, with Yukon Territory including palliative care in its list of increased services, and Alberta committing \$20 million over 4 years to improve palliative care.
- Support for Caregivers
 - Policies aimed at increasing support for caregivers were typically included as components in initiatives to expand home and community care, such as extending Newfoundland and Labrador's SeniorsNL information and referral service to caregivers. More targeted advancements include the Government of Québec being the first to announce the development of a Caregiver Policy, and Manitoba being the first to legislate the *Caregiver Recognition Act*.

Some policy areas that were rising priorities in 2019 were not found in 2021 budgets and policy statements. For example, no new policies were announced that aimed to increase labour force participation by older adults, possibly because the COVID-19 pandemic put many younger people out of work and economic recovery efforts focused on that demographic.

Conclusion

Canada's key political priorities in aging for 2021 are primarily focused on improvements in healthcare while dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Expansions to home and community care, digital and virtual service delivery, and new infrastructure and staffing initiatives are driven by the need to keep pace with growing health care demands of the aging population. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted health systems and long-term care across the country and the need for emergency measures and population-wide vaccination has highlighted the importance of coordination across jurisdictions by federal, provincial and territorial governments. There are opportunities for policy-makers to build on those lessons and proactively collaborate with older adults, caregivers, healthcare professionals, researchers, and other stakeholder groups to develop and implement evidence-informed policy decisions that truly affect change.

APPENDIX A: References by Jurisdiction

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