



A BETTER WAY FORWARD FOR AGING IN ALBERTA

Albertans will be heading to the polls on May 29. During this provincial election, Federal Retirees is calling on the province's next government to act now to secure, healthy and dignified retirements for Albertans.

This work is more important now than ever before. The population of Albertans over age 65 is the fastest-growing population segment in the province. Over 15 per cent, or more than 725,000 Albertans, are already over age 65. By 2040, that number is expected to be over 1.1 million or nearly double. By the mid-2040s, one in five Albertans will be over age 65.

Alberta is forecasting a \$2.4 billion surplus for 2023-2024 and a \$12.3 billion surplus for 2022-2023. As a result, investment in services that make a difference to older adults and their families is possible.

The past three years have been difficult and too often tragic for Alberta seniors and their families. Alberta needs a plan for its health-care system, including urgent investment and restructuring so that health care and social services are accessible, equitable and high quality. These investments must be prioritized, along with good decisions made in Albertans' best interests regarding public safety and the long-term retirement security of Albertans.

Older adults deserve dignity and to be involved in policy decisions that affect their well-being and care — and it's time to change our perspective on aging.

This provincial election is our chance to do that.

KEY MESSAGES

During this election, Federal Retirees is calling for Alberta's next provincial government to:

- Reinstatement of an effective, independent seniors advocate.
- Develop and implement a provincial seniors strategy.
- Invest in public health care — including home care and long-term care, access to primary and specialist care, and shorter surgical wait times.
- Keep Albertans' retirements secure and their pensions safe with the Canada Pension Plan.
- Uphold the role of the RCMP in preserving public safety for Albertans, a strong tradition for over a century.

ABOUT FEDERAL RETIREES

The National Association of Federal Retirees (Federal Retirees) is the largest national advocacy organization representing active and retired members of the federal public service, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their partners and survivors. With nearly 170,000 members from coast to coast to coast, including 12,000 in Alberta, Federal Retirees has advocated for improvements to the financial security, health and well-being of our members and all Canadians since 1963.





THE ISSUES

Time (again) for a seniors advocate and a seniors strategy

Alberta once led the country by having a seniors advocate who offered support, information and guidance to older Albertans and their families as well as policy advice and recommendations to the provincial government. But the role was eliminated by former premier Jason Kenney — amalgamated with the health advocate to save half a million dollars. In fact, less than 30 percent of the issues the former seniors advocate dealt with related to health, and any mention of “senior” or “seniors” is absent on the provincial health advocate website. It’s as though the subject matter and the role have disappeared, making it apparent that seniors’ interests, needs and rights are not being served.

Reinstating an independent seniors advocate reporting to the legislature will ensure crucial support to seniors and their families. This role would be responsible for investigating complaints and concerns, monitoring older adults’ well-being and rights and providing non-partisan policy advice to Alberta’s government.

Plus, an independent seniors advocate can lead consultation, development, implementation and evaluation of a provincial seniors strategy. [Seniors strategies](#) can help fight ageism and social isolation, while also ensuring older adults have autonomy, financial security, affordable housing and transportation, high-quality health-care services and meaningful community connections.

Alberta’s next government must commit to bringing back an effective, independent seniors advocate and developing and implementing a provincial seniors strategy.

Invest in public health care — from primary care through to long-term care

Alberta’s health-care system has been neglected for years, and it’s time to fix it. Over the last two years, the number of Alberta doctors accepting new patients has dropped by half (Lee, 2022). Tens of thousands of Albertans do not have access to a family doctor (Toy & Black, 2022). In 2019, about one in five Albertans didn’t have a regular doctor (Edwardson, 2019). By 2022, the situation had worsened, with one in four Albertans going without a primary care provider.

Consistent primary care is essential to manage health, and without it, Albertans are increasingly winding up in emergency rooms, with severe or more complex conditions that are harder to treat. Albertans’ well-being, quality of life and health outcomes are suffering, and informal caregivers are stretched to the limit.

In addition, 70,000 Albertans are waiting on surgeries, and the

numbers won’t go down until resources are invested effectively in public health care.

Most seniors want to age in place, at home. Community and home care help people live at home, remain independent and improve or maintain their health and quality of life through supports ranging from nursing to personal care to homemaking. It’s also essential to provide respite services to support Alberta’s estimated 400,000 informal caregivers (Tougas, 2020). While the province’s last budget committed to a 15 per cent increase in continuing care, more investment is needed so that Albertans have publicly available and accessible home care and community care, with more nurses and health professionals dedicated to delivering high-quality, safe and effective care where people live.

Finally, in response to the devastating conditions and tragic outcomes across long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, Federal Retirees joined the call for national long-term care standards. While the standards have been published, it’s now imperative that provincial governments act quickly to ensure not only that long-term care facilities are regulated and inspected but also that long-term care standards meet or exceed the national standards and that those standards are enforced.

Alberta’s next government must commit to investing in health care, from primary care to home care to long-term care, addressing surgical wait times in the public health-care system and ensuring Alberta’s long-term care standards are implemented and enforced.

Keeping retirements secure with the Canada Pension Plan

Since 1966, Canadians have confidently invested their retirement savings in the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). More than 650,000 Albertans are CPP beneficiaries, and Canada’s chief actuary reports that the CPP is sustainable for at least the next 75 years. CPP invests sustainably and is protected from political interference. The pension plan has helped lower poverty rates among seniors from 30 percent in 1977 to two percent in 2020.

But the Alberta government has proposed withdrawing from the Canada Pension Plan and setting up an Alberta Pension Plan (APP). Proponents say it would enable investment in Alberta and would be cheaper for Albertans because the province’s population is relatively young.

Danielle Smith, during the leadership campaign of the United Conservative Party (UCP) said of the CPP: “When you look at that program alone, that is clearly going to pay for whatever additional powers we take on board, whether it’s a new Alberta provincial police, which they say is another \$170 million, or collecting our own personal





income tax, which is \$200 million.”

These estimates bely a fundamental misunderstanding of how the CPP works and the costs that would be associated with a new Alberta pension plan. It would take \$525 million to administer each year. Alberta’s population is young because younger workers have migrated for oil and gas jobs, but that number has been shrinking over the past 10 years, which means the cost of an Alberta-only plan would increase over time. Finally, an Alberta pension plan could be susceptible to political pressure when it comes to investing. Large investments in projects with poor long-term prospects and returns would negatively impact the pension plans’ sustainability.

Pension plans are not a political bargaining chip. Albertans’ retirement savings should pay for one thing and one thing only: their retirement pensions.

The proposed APP is especially risk-laden for those nearing retirement who have spent their careers contributing to the CPP and depend on it for a significant portion of their retirement income.

An Alberta-only pension plan will mean high administration costs to set up and run as well as increasing costs for Albertans as the population ages, political interference in investments and uncertainty and risk for those who can least afford it.

Alberta’s next government must commit to ensuring the long-term sustainability of Albertans’ pensions by remaining with the Canada Pension Plan.

Continuing Alberta’s century-old tradition of public safety with the RCMP

Alberta’s public safety has been protected for over a century thanks to their partnership with the RCMP. Today, more than 4,200 RCMP members assist 1.5 million Albertans through 113 detachments. But some in Alberta want to scrap the RCMP and set up a new provincial police force. Proponents point to a lack of coverage in rural areas and the need to have a greater say in Alberta policing.

A government report has said policing with the RCMP costs Alberta about \$500 million a year. Alberta is in the middle of a 20-year agreement for RCMP policing, and in the agreement, Alberta sets the objectives, priorities and goals of the RCMP in the province. The contract also ensures Alberta receives 30 percent or \$170 million in federal funds to cover the cost of RCMP policing in the province. By contrast, a provincial police force would cost about \$735 million annually, plus \$366 million in startup costs (Amato, 2022). Startup could

take four to six years.

Alberta’s municipalities have voted against the idea. At a time when Albertans urgently need investment in areas like health care, scrapping the RCMP and creating a new police force is wrong. If Alberta has gaps in public safety, it’s time for the province to address them with the RCMP to ensure crime prevention and pursue alternative policing approaches that address local needs.

Alberta’s next government must commit to public safety delivery in continued partnership with the RCMP.

Talking to candidates

You never know when you’ll get a chance to ask candidates or their campaigners about their positions on the issues most important to older adults in Alberta. Keep this sheet handy. These questions are friendly conversation starters, and you can use the information shared here as quick speaking points when you connect with candidates and their campaigners. And remember, you can always ask follow-up questions if the answer is unclear or you want to know more!

- Seniors are the fastest-growing demographic in Alberta. What is your party’s strategy to meet seniors’ needs?
- When will your party commit to bring back an independent, effective seniors advocate that reports to the legislature?
- How will your party ensure Alberta has a provincial seniors strategy?
- What is your party’s plan to ensure Albertans have access to a family doctor through our public health-care system?
- How will your party invest in home care and long-term care and improve the continuum of health-care services for Albertans?
- How will your party ensure Alberta’s long-term care facilities are held to a high standard of care, and how will you ensure they are regulated and enforced?
- What is your party’s plan to ensure Albertans continue to receive the retirement security they have paid for, and deserve, with the Canada Pension Plan?
- How will your party ensure public safety is delivered through Alberta’s current contract with the RCMP?

