



A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR AGING IN MANITOBA

Manitobans will head to the polls by October 3. During this election, Federal Retirees is calling on the province's next government to act now to improve older adult care - by fixing the cracks we saw worsen during the COVID-19 pandemic, and addressing the consequences of the pandemic - and create a healthier future for aging in Manitoba.

This work is more important now than ever before. In Manitoba, over 17 per cent of the population, or more than 229,000 Manitobans, are already over age 65. Population trends through 2036 project a larger and older population of Manitobans than ever before.

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 Manitoba's next provincial government to:

- Appoint an independent and effective seniors advocate for the province of Manitoba.
- Implement – and evaluate progress of – the recently announced Manitoba seniors strategy.
- Improve access to care, by ensuring funding and services to enable aging in place – including access to publicly-funded home care, access to local care providers, and improved wait times for care.
- Ensure Manitobans' incomes keep up with cost-of-living increases by protecting and encouraging more defined benefit pension plans.

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 7,500 in Manitoba, Federal Retirees has advocated for improvements to the financial security, health and well-being of our members and all Canadians since 1963.

THE ISSUES

Implement Manitoba's seniors strategy

Manitoba, A Great Place to Age: Provincial Seniors Strategy was released in February 2023. Developed in consultation and collaboration with various stakeholders, the seniors strategy presents a vision for aging well in Manitoba. It prioritizes several initiatives to improve the aging experience, with goals to deliver results on seven areas of focus, including safe, inclusive, accessible communities, high quality services, financial security, reducing ageism and ableism, and others.

With a growing aging population, a seniors strategy will future-proof policies and focus investments, resources and programs to enable aging with dignity in Manitoba.

A continued commitment to the seniors strategy and its implementation with adequate investment, performance measurement and accountability are needed to achieve results.

In collaboration with partners, the next government must implement the 2023 provincial seniors strategy. This includes measuring outcomes and publicly reporting on performance to fully realize the goal of making Manitoba a great place to age.



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Time for a seniors advocate

Appointing an independent seniors advocate who reports 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 Manitoba's government.

Plus, an independent seniors advocate can lead implementation and evaluation of the Manitoba seniors strategy.

Seniors strategies identify initiatives to tackle ageism and social isolation, as well as ensuring older adults are autonomous, financially secure, and have affordable housing and transportation, high-quality health care services and meaningful community connections.

Manitoba's next government must appoint an effective, independent seniors advocate.

Invest in public health care — and improve access to care

Manitoba's health care system is dealing with increasing pressures since the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant challenge to a system that was already under stress. It is time to fix it.

Primary care is the foundation of the health care system, yet it is strained. Access to primary care is a challenge for many Manitobans. Manitoba has the lowest number of family physicians per capita in Canada, and the third lowest number of specialists per capita (Doctors Manitoba, 2022,). Access to a physician in Manitoba's rural and Northern regions is very challenging (Doctors Manitoba, October 2022). Without intervention, the physician shortage in Manitoba is expected to worsen as 43 per cent of physicians are planning to retire, leave the province or reduce clinical hours in the next three years (Doctors Manitoba, October 2022).

Burnout among health care professionals is also a growing concern. A report commissioned by the government on health worker

burnout revealed two-thirds of Manitoba's health care workers are experiencing burnout. Over half have considered a new job, including 67 per cent of nurses. (CBC News, 23 April 2023).

Consistent primary care is essential to manage health, and without it, Manitobans are increasingly forced to make costly emergency department visits with severe or more complex conditions that are harder to treat.

Wait times for surgical and diagnostic procedures grew during the pandemic. In 2022, Manitoba had among the longest waits in the country for certain procedures (Doctors Manitoba, 2022). In 2022, Doctors Manitoba estimated the backlog of accumulated procedures to be 102,139 to 128,477 procedures.

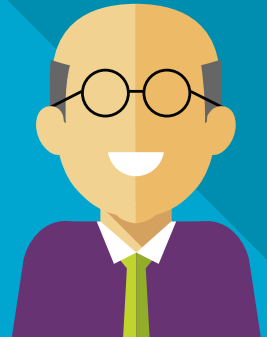
Effort has been made to reduce the backlog in some areas, but wait volumes existed pre-pandemic and these numbers will not decline until resources are invested effectively in public health.

Personal care homes

Most seniors want to age in place, at home, in their communities. Community and home care enable people to live at home, remain safe and independent and improve or maintain their health and quality of life through supports ranging from nursing to personal care to homemaking. Unpaid caregivers play an essential role in enabling aging in place; caregivers deserve financial and other support such as respite to fulfill this role.

The provincial seniors strategy includes several strategies to strengthen and reform home care in Manitoba with the goal of enhancing choice, quality, accountability, workforce capacity and reducing burnout. Investment is needed to achieve these objectives and to improve Manitobans' access to publicly available home and community care, with more health professionals and nurses to deliver high quality, safe and effective care where people live.

Manitobans living in personal care homes experienced devastating conditions and tragic outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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The outbreak and loss of life at the Maples Long-Term Care Home prompted an external review, commissioned by the government, with 167 recommendations for action, including a review of funding and licencing standards for personal care homes, among others.

Federal Retirees joined the call for national long-term care standards. It is imperative that provincial governments act quickly to ensure not only that long-term care settings are regulated and inspected, but also that standards meet or exceed the national standards and are enforced.

Manitoba's next government must invest in the continuum of care, from primary to home to long-term care, address surgical wait times in the public health care system and ensure Manitoba's personal care home standards are reviewed and enforced.

Ensure Manitobans' incomes keep up with cost-of-living increases

In recent polling, Manitobans have said the increased cost-of-living is their top concern this election. As both interest rates and inflation have grown substantially since the pandemic, Manitobans are having a hard time paying for everyday needs.

A federal parliamentary committee found that grocery prices were up 11.4 per cent in January 2023 compared to the same month in 2022. In July, the Bank of Canada increased its policy interest rate to 5 per cent, the highest it's been in 20 years, making the cost of borrowing higher and increasing housing costs for many. Fuel prices have increased substantially since 2021, from \$1.092 per litre in Winnipeg in February 2021, to \$1.532 per litre in February 2023.

Life is becoming unaffordable. The next government must take on measures that will make it easier for Manitobans to make ends meet.

One of the best tools to ensure that retirees have some protection against the rise of cost-of-living is defined benefit pension plans, most

of which have indexation which increases pension benefits as the cost-of-living increases.

The next government must ensure that defined benefit plans are protected. In 2020, the Manitoba government allowed businesses to have contribution holidays (making them exempt from having to put money into their pension plans) under the guise that it would mean businesses would not lay off staff. Kevin Rebeck, the President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour correctly pointed out that there was nothing in this plan that ensured employers used their savings to keep people working.

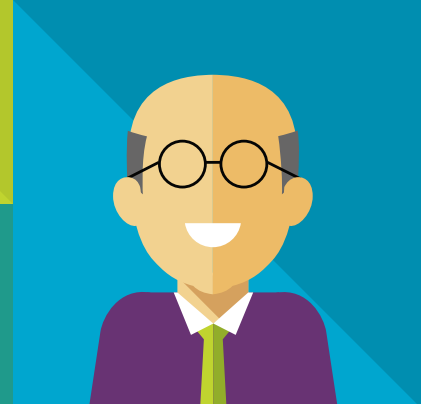
This government also passed legislation that would allow Manitobans to take out 100 per cent of the balance of their locked-in retirement account (LIRA) or life income fund (LIF). This was done to "allow flexibility" but is simply another measure the Manitoba government has used to avoid helping average Manitobans now, by having them mortgage their future.

Jeff Sommers, the former president of the Canadian Bar Association's pension and benefits section said, "[...] as a pension lawyer, my whole life I've understood that the purpose of a pension plan is to provide a lifetime stream of income through retirement, increasing the standard of living and reducing reliance on government safety nets, I think these rules are moving us further away from that." (McKiernan, 2021) While most jurisdictions in Canada recognize there are situations of hardship that require access to some of these funds and exceptions permit withdrawals for certain expenses), pushing Manitobans to mortgage their future is irresponsible.

Pension plan solvency and the future of Manitobans' retirement security shouldn't be sacrificed to pay for corporate profits.

The next government must ensure Manitobans' incomes keep up with cost-of-living increases by protecting and encouraging more defined benefit pension plans.





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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 Manitoba.

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!

- 1 Seniors are a fast-growing demographic in Manitoba. What is your party's strategy to meet seniors' needs?
- 2 When will your party commit to appointing an independent, effective seniors advocate that reports to the legislature?
- 3 How will your party ensure the Manitoba seniors strategy is implemented and evaluated?
- 4 What is your party's plan to ensure Manitobans have access to a family doctor through our public health care system?
- 5 How will your party invest in public health care and improve the continuum of health care services for Manitobans?
- 6 How will your party ensure Manitoba's personal care homes are held to a high standard of care, and how will you ensure they are regulated and enforced?
- 7 How will party ensure that defined benefit plans, the best way to make sure retirees have a secure long-term income in retirement, are protected and encouraged in Manitoba?
- 8 How will your party make life more affordable for Manitobans?

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