

Meeting with MP Joanne Thompson, Lead NL Liberal Caucus
January 19, 2022 @ 2:00 PM NT

Topics for Discussion:

Introductions.

Mandate of the NL Seniors & Pensioners Coalition.

Presentation:

On December 16, 2021, the Office of the Prime Minister released the MANDATE Letters for the Ministers.

The Mandate Letter for the Minister of Seniors has identified the following key directions the Government has set Minister Khera. These are:

- Building on our commitment to old age security, increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement by \$500 for single seniors and \$750 for couples starting at age 65.
- Ensure seniors' eligibility for the Guaranteed Income Supplement is not negatively impacted by receipt of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB).
- Establish an expert panel to provide recommendations for establishing an Aging at Home Benefit. You will be supported by the Minister of Health in this work.
- Assist community-based organizations in providing practical support that helps low-income and otherwise vulnerable seniors age in place, and support regional and national projects that help expand services that have already demonstrated results in helping seniors stay in their homes.
- Work with the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to provide seniors with a single point of access to a wide range of government services and benefits. (Carried forward item)
- Continue to work with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to strengthen Canada's approach to elder abuse by finalizing the national definition of elder abuse, investing in better data collection and establishing new offences and penalties in the *Criminal Code* related to elder abuse. (Same as directed in predecessor's Mandate letter)

- Represent the Government of Canada at the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum. (Continuing inclusion)
- Continue leading work within Employment and Social Development Canada on seniors' programming including the New Horizons for Seniors Program. (ongoing)
- Support the Minister of Health in their work to improve the quality and availability of long-term care homes and beds. This includes working with provinces and territories to improve infection prevention and control measures, identify shared principles, and develop national standards to ensure seniors get the care they deserve.

It is also important to include reference to some aspects in the Mandate Letter for The Minister of Health as there is a huge intersection between the two:

- With the support of the Minister of Seniors, negotiate agreements with provinces and territories to support efforts to improve the quality and availability of long-term care homes and beds. This includes working with provinces and territories to improve infection prevention and control measures, identify shared principles, and develop national standards and a **Safe Long-Term Care Act** to ensure seniors get the care they deserve. In support of this work, you will work with the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion and provinces and territories to train up to 50,000 new personal support workers and raise wages.
- Continue engaging with willing provinces and territories towards national universal pharmacare, while proceeding with a national strategy on high-cost drugs for rare diseases and advancing the establishment of the Canada Drug Agency.
- In this, the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), promote seniors' physical and mental health to enable them to live longer at home, including by supporting the Minister of Seniors in their work to establish **an expert panel to provide recommendations for establishing an Aging at Home Benefit**.

We would like to address with you, the following:

- **National Seniors Strategy:** This Coalition believes strongly in the need for the establishment of a National Seniors Strategy and we have been raising this matter for a number of years. We continue to be disappointed that there is no commitment to such a Strategy. Such a Strategy is more important now than ever as we all have been shocked by the disaster in acute care hospitalization of the elderly and long-term care during the pandemic. The above directions for Minister Khra, while helpful, are not founded in any overall Government strategy that is guided by Principles and Values that guarantee aging persons a decent, respectful, and acceptable living as they journey through their senior years. The Government of Canada has many strategies in place currently and it seems unconscionable that there is not a National Seniors Strategy, given what we know about our aging demographic and the vulnerabilities of aging persons clearly demonstrated over the past three years. This Coalition remains a strong advocate for a National Seniors Strategy.

There was some suggestion a couple of years ago that the National Seniors Council, advisory to the Minister, would be conducting consultations across the country that could possibly inform a National Seniors Strategy. Are you able to advise any update on this? Also, should there be such engagement, we need your assurance that the consultation will come across the Gulf to our Province.

- **National Universal Pharmacare:** The Minister of Health has a direction in his Mandate Letter (2021) to “continue engaging with willing provinces and territories towards national universal pharmacare, while proceeding with a national strategy on high-cost drugs for rare diseases and advancing the establishment of the Canada Drug Agency”. This direction is slightly changed from that of the predecessor Minister of Health in that it is directed to those provinces and territories who are “willing”. How can anything be a universal program if there is an implication of non-inclusion, or opting out, for some? This seems a step backward and we are fearful all the advocacy for a universal pharmacare program will have been

for naught if it is not universal for all Canadians. National Pharmacare was absent from November's Throne Speech, and financing was not included in the Economic and Fiscal Update 2021, despite continuing pleas from health care advocates, such as this Coalition.

However, we are hopeful that this is a purposeful strategic move by the Federal Government to move ahead on Pharmacare, knowing full well that it is an almost difficult task to get all provinces and territories to unilaterally agree, possibly much similar to the approach with National Child Care. Your comments are welcome.

As an advisement, we have talked about this with our former NDP member, with the NL Liberal Caucus every time we have met, with the NL PC Member, and now with you but still the Government keeps dragging its feet (unless my above suggestion is a correct assumption). Having a universal pharmacare program that is either independent or imbedded into the medicare plan is critical to good health care outcomes in Canada. There is no need for more research and more delay. And there definitely needs to be action to ensure "universality" is inclusive of all, anywhere in Canada, without provincial/territorial conditions.

Should the Government be making a strategic move as I have suggested above, maybe some advisement of this to the Canadian public could be helpful and beneficial to citizen engagement for lobby to their MP's and provincial governments.

- Long Term Care Residential Facilities (what most people think of when talking about long-term care) have long been plagued by underlying systemic vulnerabilities—severe underfunding, chronic understaffing, out-dated facilities with multi-bed wards—these challenges existed before COVID-19, and continue to exist and threaten the lives of vulnerable residents without immediate action. The 2021 budget identified actions being taken by the **Health**

Standards Organization and Canadian Standards Association and the Mandate Letters for both Ministers Khera and Duclos direct the development of National Standards and a Safe Long-Term Care Act to ensure seniors get the care they deserve. These mandated directions are somewhat stronger than last year, which is positive. The Coalition is seeking assurance that the Federal Government will commit to and implement these Standards once they are written, hopefully through stakeholder consultation with groups such as this Coalition, and will actually pass the legislation, when it is developed. Are you able to advise the status of the development of these Standards and this legislation?

The above noted Standards need to be watched very carefully, as the previous Minister of Seniors had at one time indicated that the declaration of National Standards would not be as easy as it might appear. Her comments indicated that some jurisdictions have indicated they would already have higher standards in place and would be opposed to having “lesser level” standards imposed on them. Without having seen any draft of any such National Standards, this Coalition offers that if a P/T jurisdiction has higher standards then there should be nothing preventing them to deliver on higher quality care and the Act/Standards could, in fact, enshrine these higher provincial benchmarks.

- **Aging At Home.** This Coalition is concerned in what seems to be a weakening of Government’s previous commitment to the Age Well at Home Initiative. Direction is given to Minister Duclos to work with Minister Khera to “establish an expert panel to provide recommendations for establishing an Aging at Home Benefit” and to Minister Khera “to assist community-based organizations in providing practical support that helps low-income and otherwise vulnerable seniors age in place, and support regional and national projects that help expand services that have already demonstrated results in helping seniors stay in their homes’. This direction is less impactful than a direction that would see “aging at home” as a priority. Instead, this is a watering down of an expected direction to ensure

older persons have access to community supports to age well and with dignity in their own home or community for as long as possible.

Transforming health care from an acute care model (where some 80%-90% of all health care dollars are spent) to a community-based model that strives to improve on the social determinants of health will not be an easy task as we will soon see when the NL Health Accord is released. It will require a commitment from all levels of Government and community partners to a transformative strategy. The 2021 federal budget projected an expenditure of \$90M amongst all jurisdictions over a three-year period. If this is rolled out as groups, agencies, and governments applying for grant funding for short term projects, the funding will not reach those who need it and will not achieve on Aging Well at Home. The Coalition called for and is still calling for a full-on discussion and direction amongst all Governments working together cooperatively to transform the how, why, and what's of health care delivery in Canada.

- **Preventative Health Services.** This Coalition is not naïve enough to think that the Government's COVID recovery is going to be easy, but one thing we have all learned is that actions that prevent folks from becoming sick are paramount to a speedy recovery from any illness and create a society where illness cannot gain a foothold. Once again, this Coalition is asking that the Government act to enable the provision of vaccinations for all illnesses that would be beneficial to healthy living, not just aging. Vaccines such as the high dose flu shot, shingles vaccine, etc. must be a top priority. This comes full circle to a national universal pharmacare program. In addition, adult dental care, adult eye care, foot care and other allied health services such as chiropractic, massage, and physiotherapy are less costly than acute care admission and enable persons to age at home or in their community for as long as possible., if also supported by home maintenance services.

- **Elder Abuse.** The Mandate Letter for Minister Lametti directs the Minister to work with the Minister of Seniors to strengthen Canada's approach to elder abuse by:
 - a. Creating a national definition of elder abuse;
 - b. Investing in better data collection and law enforcement related to elder abuse; and
 - c. Establishing new offences and penalties in the *Criminal Code* related to elder abuse.

Our Province recently unanimously approved Bill 40, Adult Protection Act, 2021 and regulations to support this act are underway. If our provincial legislation is to be fully effective, the amendments to the Criminal Code are needed, sooner than later, to ensure the elimination of elder abuse and that the penalties for such criminal behavior will be dealt with severely.

- **Financial Security.** This Coalition acknowledges past directions:
 - a. Increasing OAS payments for recipients aged 75 and older;
 - b. Investments in Affordable Housing; and
 - c. Supports for Improved Mental Health Services; and in this term,
 - d. Applauds the direction to increase the GIS supplement and the direction to ensure that seniors' eligibility for GIS is not negatively impacted by receipt of CERB or CRB

HOWEVER,

The Coalition is still not seeing any directed effort to address the big picture issue of poverty amongst seniors. There have been small efforts to assist, such as the OAS increase for persons over 75 and the roll back of the OAS age to 65 from 67 (old news), but no significant effort to enable aging persons to live with dignity in their later years. Food prices and the cost of other goods are overwhelming and there is nothing more disheartening than being at a supermarket and seeing older persons put back food items because of the exorbitant cost. This Coalition will continue to press for

action that will reduce (if not eliminate) the rate of poverty amongst older persons.

We have already met with Minister John Abbott, CSSD, as he has a directed mandate to update the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy. We have asked that we be afforded a seat in such revision deliberations.

Thank you for your time this afternoon. Best wishes with the business of the people in the House of Commons over the next Sitting. We welcome more such opportunities as this into the future.