

What Is This Coalition I Am Hearing So Much About?

By Sharron Callahan, Chair

New Vision, More Unity, Stronger Voice: The Newfoundland and Labrador Coalition of Pensioners, Retirees, and Seniors Organizations was officially launched at a press conference on April 7, 2014. Known as the “Coalition”, fourteen organizations, representing seniors, retired persons, pensioners and those who support them, have united to highlight and seek solutions on the issues that affect older persons and in some cases are applicable to younger persons.

This renewed and re-energized Coalition was born out of the original Pensioners’ Coalition of 2008 when eight organizations came together to speak out on issues that affected mainly public sector pensioners. Realizing that public sector pension issues were particular to only some of the organizations in this Coalition, the Coalition reorganized itself and after a period of consultations with other seniors organizations, a broadened mandate evolved due to the realization that the groups had more issues in common that should unite them and thus evolved an expression that everyone should, and would, work together to address these issues.

So what are these issues that are so critical to the organizations representing aging persons in Newfoundland and Labrador? Understandably, health care is at the top of the list, and ranges from availability of medicines and a person’s ability to pay for them; dispensing fees charged by pharmacies; wait times to see a doctor, especially if there is a referral to a specialist; distance to travel for hospital care; costs associated with such travel; home care; long term care; dental care, including dentures; vision and hearing care and personal aids to help mitigate sight and hearing loss; issues that impact mobility, independence, and healthy and productive living, and much more. In addition, the Coalition has expressed concern with the rising inability of older persons to maintain their own homes due to the escalating costs of home maintenance and such needed utilities as heat, light, and water, and of course, taxes; all giving rise to an invisible and very disturbing rise in seniors homelessness. And not to be forgotten is financial security, whether that comes from Old Age Security, Canada Pension, private pension, public sector pension, or other source. One thing that is known is that people living on fixed incomes are seeing their purchasing power dwindle and as costs go higher on such commodities as fuel, food production, and transportation delivery costs, those with no hope of any increases will sink further into poverty or will have severely diminished ability to purchase and live comfortably

While the individual organizations participating in the Coalition will maintain the integrity of their own purpose and continue with their own activities for their members, this collaborative approach to speaking out and speaking up on the issues of collective concern to all older persons, whether retired or not, whether receiving a pension or not, whether living at home or elsewhere, represents real power when it comes to public awareness and influence on social policy. The collective influence of the Coalition will be used wisely, with broad consensus, and will not be used for partisan purposes. The member organizations see the benefit of using their individual expertise to work together

for positive change and is very optimistic that this collaboration will prove beneficial for all citizens. The intent is to create change for the better and to do that the Coalition organizations are confirming they will work together and with Government to ensure that the issues impacting all seniors are heard and addressed.

So what will be happening in the short term? First, as health related issues are the primary concern of all participating organizations, a meeting is being sought with the Minister of Health and Community Services to seek clarification of the measures articulated in Budget 2014 under Investments to Increase and Enhance Long-Term Care, Cancer Treatment and Seniors Programming, to highlight for the Minister some of the basic issues that are paramount to the Coalition member organizations and to explore ways to work with the Department to advance the issues that are top of mind for all aging persons. Second, messaging through the newsletters and other communication platforms of the Coalition organizations will continue, including updates on various initiatives and programs that are offered for older persons; and third, plans are being made for a province-wide outreach during 2014, like town hall meetings, to hear from seniors and what will be heard will be used to support the approach to all governments on the issues of concern to everyone. The voice of seniors is rising and needs to be respected and taken seriously by government, at all levels municipally, provincially, and federally.

To clarify some misunderstandings there may be about the Coalition, a set of *Frequently Asked Questions* is attached and these will be updated periodically as other questions arise for which public responses are needed.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ's)

1. Q: WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO FORM THIS COALITION?

A: Most organizations act on an individual basis on the various issues that are important to them. This Coalition is about a means of coordinating all the various efforts and speaking as a collective voice on issues that are common to all. The adage that there is strength in numbers is definitely a motivation behind this Coalition.

2. Q: WHO ARE THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT MAKE UP THE COALITION?

A: The member and other organizations affiliated with the Coalition are: Newfoundland and Labrador Public Sector Pensioners Association; St. John's Fire Fighters Retirees Association; NAPE Retirees Local 7002; Retired Teachers Association of Newfoundland and Labrador; Retired Correctional Officers (Represented by NAPE); Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Veterans' Association; Memorial University of Newfoundland Pensioners Association; FSNA (National Association of Federal Retirees); Seniors Resource Centre (Community Outreach); CARP (Canadian Association of Retired Persons), Avalon Chapter; CN Pensioners' Association; Marine Atlantic Pensioners Association; Silver Lights Retirees (NL Power & NALCOR); Pius X Church (Community Outreach).

3. Q: HOW IS THIS COALITION DIFFERENT FROM THE PENSIONERS' COALITION OF 2008?

A: It is a much larger coalition with more member organizations, and is representative of a much broader cross-section of society. It now is inclusive of ALL older persons in Newfoundland and Labrador and other organizations are welcome to participate, for a longer time or for a shorter period as their members' needs might advise.

4. Q. WHAT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS ARE SEEKING TO JOIN THE COALITION?

A. Talks are ongoing with other groups who have signaled an interest. These organizations are from many different locations throughout the Province. Some have contacted the Coalition because they recognize the value of unity in approach. Some have issues that are pertinent to their membership but in general, the basis behind their concerns are of concern to everyone, such as rising municipal taxes or the difference in dispensing fees based on geography.

5. WHAT PLANS ARE THERE FOR CONTACTING GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE PROBLEMS THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED?

A. We have requested a meeting with Minister Davis to discuss issues relating to the Health & Community Services portfolio. Requests of other ministers will follow thereafter to discuss issues that pertain to other departments. Likewise, other meetings will be set up with municipal or federal officials as the issue dictates.

6. Q. HOW IS THE COALITION FUNDED

A. The member organizations that make up the Coalition are funding the work being undertaken.

7. Q. WILL THE POLITICAL PARTIES SEE THE COALITION AS A FORCE TO BE LISTENED TO AND DEALT WITH?

A. The persons whom the Coalition represents are the largest percentage of voters in this province and indeed in this country. Those persons have the political power to shape governments not only in this province but in the country by their voting power in order to get their issues dealt with. The Coalition membership can be a very powerful voting force.

8. Q. HOW DOES ONE CONTACT THE COALITION FOR MORE INFORMATION?

A. Sharron Callahan is the Chair. She can be contacted through the NLPSPA Office (709-754-5730, email callahans@nl.rogers.com or cell 709-690-1238.