

# BACKGROUND

## Access to Seniors Care

A key measure of any government's compassion should be based on how it respects and supports its seniors – those who have given so much to the current generation. On PEI, our senior population is growing significantly, and plans must be undertaken so that we provide them with the best possible services and supports in areas ranging from housing, nursing care, home care and access to independent living.

There is much to be done. Between 2020 and 2030, the growth rate of the population of seniors aged 80-plus is projected to be much higher in PEI than for the rest of Canada. For example, the number of Islanders aged 80-plus is projected to rise over the next ten years by 66.2 percent, compared with a national average of 53 percent, according to Statistics Canada population data.

Previous Liberal Governments provided new investments in palliative care and the construction of multiple public nursing homes, investments that have had a positive impact on our senior population, but there is much more to be done.

## Expanded Homecare: *Our HomeFirst Program*

The Liberal Party is proposing a new program called *HomeFirst* in which family caregivers can be compensated for up to \$1,500 per month to care for an immediate relative in their own homes. This program will also include a one-time capital contribution of up to \$10,000 to cover 50 percent of the cost of renovations to support caring for a senior in the home.

This initiative represents a substantive recognition of the role that informal caregivers have and continue to play in providing care for our seniors. It is intended to change the trajectory of demand for the construction of institutional long-term care facilities by enabling families and communities to be partially compensated for the critically important role they play when caring for Island seniors in their homes. For over a decade, PEI's palliative care program has had a home care component allowing seniors to spend their final days in the comfort of their homes with their families. More recently, mobile-integrated health services have seen Island EMS paramedics providing home care services to residents in their homes, significantly reducing the need for ER visits.

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This approach will allow future provincial government investments in long-term care to focus on key unmet needs, such as dementia care, where caring for seniors in the home is not an option.

The Liberal Party's *Healthcare First* platform will improve access to home care with our plan to:

1. **Expand the home care budget** to allow for more Islanders to remain living in their own homes;
2. **Create a *HomeFirst* home care program** as a pilot project to provide financial compensation for Islanders who stay at home to care for a loved one;
3. **Ensure the *HomeFirst* home care program is focused** on supporting the caregiver with system-wide health supports, including:
  - Provincial needs assessment to determine level of care requirements;
  - Inclusion in the provincial home care program for monitoring and follow-up;
  - Access to 911 and Island EMS paramedics mobile-integrated health services for in-home care under the guise of an expanded Senior's Check-In Program;
  - Access to advanced first-aid training for caregivers;
  - Access to mental health supports and training for caregivers;
4. Provide seniors and their families with **tools and technologies** that allow them to live longer in their homes.

### Long-Term Care and Seniors' Housing

For many Islanders, seniors care can take the form of entering a long-term care facility either run by the province or a private facility that is provincially subsidized. In addition to facilities that provide nursing care, government subsidies support community long-term care facilities that provide meals, lodging, and assisted living. Such facilities play a key role in support of seniors' accommodations and housing needs. Going forward, PEI's need for new long-term care spaces will be second-highest in the country, given our comparatively older population base.

Despite the importance of both types of these facilities, both nursing care and community care facilities have gone multiple years with expired government contracts and no funding stability. Indeed, during the enormous challenges they had to contend with during COVID-19, the government failed to support them with adequate funding at a time when they were doing their very best to protect our seniors. The national discussion on the future of long-term care in Canada in light of COVID-19 has brought into focus a critical assessment of current institutional approaches.

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It has also caused us to appreciate the evolving demographic reality of caring for an increasingly older population. As our population continues to age, we need new approaches to long-term care and housing that better focus on the needs of our seniors.

The Liberal Party's *Healthcare First* platform will improve access to long-term care and senior's housing with our plan to:

- 1. Engage with the associations serving the long-term care sector** to develop a strategic approach to planning for and addressing long-term care needs on PEI;
- 2. Expand nursing care aimed at treating the unique needs of dementia patients** in both public and private facilities;
- 3. Adopt the new national long-term care standards** as mandatory on PEI in collaboration with the sector;
- 4. Develop and support new and expanded training programs** for the long-term care sector;
- 5. Develop and implement subsidies and contractual payments** that reflect the actual inflation and cost of living increases experienced by the sector;
- 6. Treat community care facilities and nursing care facilities equally** in terms of payment for non-health services;
- 7. Develop a supply and demand planning model that provides 10-year projections** on long-term care, community care, and senior's housing needs; and
- 8. Expand investments in new, affordable seniors housing** that provide seniors with assisted living options.

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