

Response – Ontario New Democratic Party

How will you work with Ontario municipalities to ensure communities are developed and evolve with an age-friendly focus?

For too long, the Ontario Municipal Board imposed top-down rules on municipalities that ignored local realities such as an aging population, allowing developments that catered mainly to narrow demographics, with no plan for the future, and often lacking the necessary infrastructure and services to support these new communities. The Ontario NDP believes that local communities and planners should determine how their local neighbourhoods grow and change, in response to the needs of new, existing and future residents. The provincial government needs to work with municipalities, applying evidence-based principles that reflect worldwide best practices, to ensure that local and provincial growth and transportation plans serve the public interest over the long term, creating affordable and sustainable “complete communities” that can respond to the needs of households of different sizes and ages and abilities.

How will you cooperate with other countries, provinces and municipalities who are leading the development of age-friendly communities and bring their successes to Ontario?

We will work to build age-friendly complete communities and to help seniors stay healthy in their own homes and in their own communities. Today, too many seniors are forced to move out of their homes to less expensive ones – often far from their community and the life they’ve built there, leaving behind their friends, family, religious and cultural communities. Seniors have worked hard and built our province. They deserve a government that respects their contributions, and will work to help them be able to live in their own homes and their own communities.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will make life easier and more affordable by allowing people over the age of 55 who own their home to defer property taxes until their house is sold. No senior should ever need to sell their home to pay their property taxes. The province will finance the deferral, so municipalities don’t see their tax bases reduced. Evidence from a similar program in British Columbia shows that seniors will maintain substantial equity in their homes, ensuring that they can pass something along to their kids and grandkids.

What will your party do to address the shortage in long-term care beds and to ensure stressed long-term care facilities and staff have the resources and training needed to provide dignified, safe care in a timely manner?

Ontario’s seniors deserve care that treats them with respect and dignity. But, today, the sad truth is that seniors in too many long-term care homes haven’t been getting the care they need or the attention they deserve. Families are worried about their loved ones, and seniors are worried that they won’t get the care they need. And, on top of that, over 32,000 seniors are stuck waiting for long-term care that they need now. Front-line staff in these homes are run off their feet – they are doing the best that they can, but with decades of Liberal cuts – and the promise of more cuts from the Conservative leader – they just can’t keep up.

It doesn’t have to be this way. It’s time to fix seniors care in Ontario.

As Premier, Andrea Horwath will build and fund 15,000 more long-term care beds over the next five years – rising to 40,000 new beds by 2028. Our investment will focus on expanding the not-for-profit and municipal sector, where funding goes to patient care instead of bigger profits for companies. This will include investment in culturally-appropriate care, offering seniors greater access to care in their primary language, eating food they are familiar with, and engaging in activities they know and love.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will also restore a legislated minimum standard of care for every long-term care resident in Ontario, and fund long-term care homes so they can meet it. The standard will require every long-term care home to give each resident a minimum of four hours of hands-on care every day on average. Long-term care residents, families, and frontline workers have been advocating for legislated minimum standards for many years, but the Liberals and Conservatives have refused to listen. Andrea Horwath and the NDP will get the job done.

In our first 100 days in government, Andrea Horwath will expand the mandate of the public inquiry into long-term care to find and fix the specific problems that have been stripping seniors of their dignity. We'll hear directly from families about their experiences, and address solutions concerning the safety of residents and staff; the quality of care; funding levels; staffing levels and practices; regulation, enforcement, and inspections; capacity, availability, and accessibility in every region; the impact of for-profit privatization on care; and the government's action – and inaction – on past recommendations to improve long-term care.

We will also update Ontario's Long-Term Care *Residents' Bill of Rights* to include the right of spouses to not be separated against their will. Couples who have spent their entire lives together should never be separated by a system that doesn't work for them.

And with our plan to publicly-fund dental care for all seniors who do not have retiree health benefits, we will work with long-term care providers to ensure that all residents of long-term care homes have access to publicly-funded dental services.

Together, with Andrea Horwath as Premier, we will change long-term care for the better – and ensure that every senior has the care, safety, and dignity that they need and deserve. Together, let's get it done.

How will your party improve timely access to comprehensive primary, home and community care and support people to stay healthy at home for as long as possible?

Andrea Horwath will take three steps to make it easier for seniors to stay healthy at home for as long as possible. We will increase investment in home care to eliminate the wait lists for services. We will extend publicly-funded dental coverage to all seniors without retiree health benefits. And we will help seniors afford to keep their homes by allowing seniors to defer property taxes until their house is sold.

Home Care: We can build the best home care system in Canada, with excellent quality of care no matter where in Ontario you live. Andrea Horwath and the NDP will immediately increase home care funding by \$300 million. This investment will allow us to eliminate wait lists for personal support services and increase service hours, so health care providers have more time to spend with each person who needs care. We will remove arbitrary caps on home care imposed by the Conservatives and left in place by the Liberals. We will offer more respite care for family caregivers, and ensure consistent, reliable care throughout Ontario – no matter where you live.

Dental Care for Seniors: Today, two-thirds of seniors have no retiree health benefits and struggle to pay for the cost of dental care on fixed incomes. It doesn't have to be this way. New Democrats believe that dental care must be accessible for every Ontario senior. That's why we will extend public dental coverage to every senior without retiree benefits. And seniors will be able to seek dental care at the provider of their choice, including their local dentist or at a public dental clinic.

Helping Seniors Afford to Keep their Homes: Too many seniors are forced to move out of their homes to less expensive ones – often far from their community and the life they've built there, leaving behind their friends, family, religious and cultural communities. Seniors have worked hard and built our province. They deserve a government that respects their contributions, and will work to help them be able to live in their own homes and their own communities. Andrea Horwath and the NDP will make life easier and more affordable for seniors by allowing people over the age of 55 who own their home to defer property taxes until their house is sold. No senior should ever need to sell their home to pay their property taxes. The province will finance the deferral, so municipalities don't see their tax bases reduced. Evidence from a similar program in British Columbia shows that seniors will maintain substantial equity in their homes, ensuring that they can pass something along to their kids and grandkids.

How will your party support and promote the mental health of older adults?

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will ensure that when people need help, it will be there for them. For too long, people have been left without the mental health care they need. It has been eight years since the legislature's Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions recommended urgent changes, but the Liberal government has ignored most of those recommendations.

It's time to improve mental health services with change for the better. We will hire 2,200 new mental health care workers, allowing 28,000 more Ontarians to access the services they need every year, including services ranging from psychotherapy to help in navigating complex systems of care.

We will invest in 30,000 new supportive housing units over the next ten years, building at least 3,000 every year – the number recommended by the Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council.

We will increase supports for the more than 190,000 Ontarians living with dementia, and for their families and caregivers. An NDP government will continue the \$100 million investment in Ontario's Dementia Strategy over three years. These investments will continue to expand community dementia programs, respite care services, and crucial programs to help patients and families navigate dementia care and access the services that they need.

We will also improve the coordination of Ontario's fragmented mental health services by establishing a dedicated Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to lead the effort to build an integrated mental health and addictions system that delivers care close to home, consistently and comprehensively across the province.

How is your party supporting and encouraging mandated geriatric training for all health care professionals, and what funding and other measures will your party commit?

We will work with health care professionals and health system partners to ensure that all health care professionals have the training they need to provide exceptional care to patients in hospital, residents in long-term care, and people who receive home and community care. As Ontario's population ages, we will provide the support that health care professionals and providers need to provide excellent care to every senior. The people who built this province deserve nothing less.

In addition, we will stop the layoffs of nurses and health care professionals in our hospitals. Too many dedicated health care workers have been cut, first by the Conservatives and now by the Liberals. It's time to stop the cuts. Andrea Horwath will place a moratorium on further layoffs, and work with health sector partners to develop a comprehensive review of staffing needs.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will restore a legislated minimum standard of care for every long-term care resident in Ontario, and fund long-term care homes so they can meet it. The standard will require every long-term care home to give each resident a minimum of four hours of hands-on care every day on average. Long-term care residents, families, and frontline workers have been advocating for legislated minimum standards for many years, but the Liberals and Conservatives have refused to listen. Andrea Horwath and the NDP will get the job done.

What will your party do to ensure seniors have access to a coordinated network of supports, including homecare?

For more than three-quarters of a million Ontarians, home care makes a world of difference. It's what let's people live at home, in their own community, with dignity and comfort. But in Ontario today, home care is in bad shape. An estimated 4,500 Ontarians are stuck on wait lists for personal support services. Exhausted family caregivers are filling in the gaps. Seniors are waiting, and wondering when their home care worker will arrive – and whether it'll be the same worker they had last time.

We can build the best home care system in Canada, with the same high quality of care no matter how much money you have or where in Ontario you live. Andrea Horwath and the NDP will immediately increase home care funding by \$300 million. This investment will allow us to eliminate wait lists for personal support services and increase service hours, so health care providers have more time to spend with each person who needs care. We will remove arbitrary caps on care imposed by the Conservatives and left in place by the Liberals. We will offer more respite care for family caregivers, and ensure consistent, reliable care throughout Ontario – no matter where you live.

Caregiving can be a rewarding experience but can also involve financial hardship, stress and mental health challenges. How will your party support unpaid caregivers who play a vital role in Ontario's health care system?

New Democrats recognize the incredible work of caregivers, including unpaid family caregivers. We recognize the challenges that caregivers face, and the high rates of stress and burn-out that caregivers are experiencing in Ontario today.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP believe that we must provide better support to help caregivers. Our plan to build the very best home care system in Canada includes a \$300 million investment, which will ensure that more respite care is available for family caregivers. This means less stress, less worry, and more support for families. In addition, this investment will increase home care services, so that people can rely on the home care system to meet their needs and

relieve the tremendous demands placed on family caregivers. We will eliminate the wait lists for personal support services, and increase service hours so that health care providers have more time to spend with each person who needs care. We will remove arbitrary caps on care that were imposed by the Conservatives and left in place by the Liberals. And our investment in home care will ensure consistent, reliable care is available to everyone who needs home care, no matter where you live in Ontario.

How will your party ensure Ontarians understand and report elder abuse? What will your party do to ensure seniors who are abused get support and assistance?

No senior in Ontario should ever experience elder abuse or neglect. Seniors built this province; they deserve to have a Premier and a government that protects their safety, invests in their health, and ensures that every senior can live in comfort and dignity. That's not too much to ask for.

New Democrats will invest in the health care services that seniors need. We will end the crisis of hallway medicine in our hospitals, expand access to long-term care, and improve access to home care services, including eliminating the wait lists for personal support services. We will extend publicly-funded dental coverage to all seniors without retiree health benefits. And we will help seniors stay in their own homes by allowing people age 55 and over who own their home to defer property taxes until their house is sold.

We will also work with seniors advocacy organizations and community groups to ensure that seniors are better protected and are never put at risk of elder abuse. Elder abuse is completely unacceptable and no senior should ever have to live in fear. We will work with you to stop it – and to ensure that every senior who has been impacted by elder abuse gets the supports and services that they need to recover and to live well in safety.

What is your party's retirement income security plan for seniors now and future generations of seniors?

A NDP government is fully committed to improving Ontario's pension landscape. First and foremost, New Democrats will seek to expand pension coverage to more Ontarians to try and undo the growing and unsettling trend of more and more Ontarians being left to fend for themselves upon retirement. A well-managed workplace pension plan is the best path to income security in retirement and we will work to give more Ontarians the opportunity to join workplace plans. To start, we will remove barriers to joining jointly sponsored pension plans (JSPP). But this is only the beginning.

New Democrats believe much more can be done to protect Ontarians' pension benefits from abuses or during times of crisis. To this end we will lobby the federal government to make meaningful reforms to better protect pensioners during insolvency so that what happened to pensioners at Sears, Nortel and countless others, does not happen again. We will also not shy away from directing the Financial Service Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to take actions that will enhance pension security. Pensions are deferred wages and need to be treated as such.

Additionally, a NDP government will bring Pension Benefit Guarantee Fund (PBGF) benefits up to \$3,000 per month from \$1,500 and index future benefits to inflation. The PBGF backs-up pension benefits for members of single-employer pension plans whose plans have been wound-up without paying out promised benefits to members. Until this January, PBGF benefits had not been increased since the fund was established in 1980. \$1,000 per month may have been enough in 1980 but it is far from sufficient today. Bringing benefits up to \$1,500 as the government recently did, continues to fall

short of what is need to provide these pensioners security in their retirement. Adjusting for inflation PBGF benefits need to be brought up to \$3,000 per month in order to provide the same level of benefits as was intended when the PBGF was first established.

Lastly, income security during retirement is about more than a stable pension that can be relied on. It is also about being able to make the most of a fixed income. That is why Andrea Horwath and the NDP will make the investments necessary to make our province a more affordable place to live. With our promise to reduce hydro bills by 30% on average, free dental and pharamcare for all, and programs like our deferred property tax program for seniors which will allow seniors to put off paying their property taxes until they sell their home, New Democrats are committed to making Ontario a more affordable place for everyone.

The rate of individuals covered by a DB pension continues to decline... How will your party support defined-benefit pension plans?

New Democrats believe that defined-benefit (DB) pension plans offer the greatest level of retirement income security for plan members. DB plans gives members piece of mind in their retirement with clear, dependable benefits and minimal risk to them. That is why we believe more Ontarians should have the opportunity to join DB plans. As a start, a NDP government will remove barriers to joining jointly sponsors pension plans (JSPP). And this is only the beginning. A NDP government is fully commitment to improving the pension landscape for all Ontarians so we can all retire with dignity, security and peace of mind.