

Minister of  
Seniors



Ministre des  
Aînés

Ottawa Canada K1A 0J9

October 17, 2022

Mr. Robert J. Morrissey, M.P.  
Chair, Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and  
the Status of Persons with Disabilities  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Morrissey:

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) in its report, entitled *The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Well-Being of Seniors*, tabled in the House of Commons on June 13, 2022.

The Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to recommendations made by the Committee. The Government would like to thank both HUMA for this study as well as the witnesses who appeared before the Committee.

The Government acknowledges the Committee's recommendations and notes that many of them strengthen and complement existing measures that contribute to the healthy aging of the Canadian population. This includes significant investments made prior to and in response to the pandemic to support seniors' community-led solutions.

We welcome the Committee's report as both reassurance that we are focused on the right initiatives and as a resource to inform ongoing government policy, programs and service delivery decisions to ensure the financial security, health and well-being of seniors. Canada, as a strong supporter of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), is working with partners across all levels of government and civil society to raise awareness of the Decade which aims to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live.

The Government is pleased to provide a response to the Committee's recommendations focused on three themes that show the Government's leadership in supporting the healthy aging of Canadians: (1) Fostering the social inclusion and safety of seniors (2) Improving supportive care and services; and (3) Supporting the income security of seniors.

Canada

## **1. Fostering the Social Inclusion and Safety of Seniors (Recommendations 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16)**

A number of witnesses commented on how both the health and mental well-being of older Canadians were affected negatively during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee's recommendations relating to fostering the social inclusion and safety of seniors include: (1) raising awareness about ageism and (12) elder abuse, (11) providing funding to fight elder abuse, (13) setting up a toll-free number to allow for the reporting of elder abuse and direct seniors to appropriate resources, (7) promoting seniors' social connections, (8) develop broadband internet across the country, (9) increasing access to internet service, (10) supporting the digital literacy of seniors, and (16) facilitating the use of the New Horizons for Seniors Program for medium-term projects.

### **Raising Awareness about Ageism (Recommendation 1)**

The Government is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion, promoting a positive image of older persons and working towards eliminating ageism and ageist stereotypes across all aspects of society. As a strong supporter of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, Canada is committed to changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing.

To that end, the Government supports seniors-serving organizations to raise awareness about ageism by funding projects under the New Horizons for Seniors Program. The purpose of the program is to increase seniors' social inclusion, which consequently raises awareness of ageism and helps combat it.

Furthermore, the National Seniors Council is working to identify measures to counteract ageism by shifting the public discourse. The National Seniors Council reports to the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Health. The Council advises Ministers on matters related to the health, well-being and quality of life of seniors.

In addition, the Forum of Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors has identified ageism and its social and economic impacts as a priority. The Forum has released a report entitled *The Social and Economic Impacts of Ageism*, as well as a complementary case study on ageism during the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2022, the Forum launched a nation-wide consultation on ageism. Through this consultation, the Government is raising awareness about ageism. An email promoting the consultation, including the online questionnaire, was sent to close to 5,000 community organizations supporting seniors across Canada (excluding Quebec). Community organizations will be invited to organize their own discussion groups and to share their thoughts and experiences on ageism. Additionally, the Forum of Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors will lead eight roundtables across the country to learn more about the impacts of ageism on the

Canadian population of seniors and older adults. The roundtables will engage close to 200 Canadian experts, seniors, family members, care givers and other individuals interested in addressing ageism.

### **Promoting social connections and facilitating use of the New Horizons for Seniors Program for medium-term projects (Recommendations 7 and 16)**

To promote social connections, the New Horizons for Seniors Program creates opportunities for older adults to be more connected, supported, and active members of their communities. The New Horizons for Seniors Program funds a variety of organizations including non-profit organizations, Indigenous organizations, coalitions and networks, research organizations, educational institutions, public health and social services institutions, municipalities, and provincial or territorial governments. The entire funding envelope of the New Horizons for Seniors Program is dedicated to enhancing seniors' social inclusion. All funded projects must help advance this objective. For example, projects can promote intergenerational mentoring and engagement. In the program's last call for proposals held in fall 2021, 3,003 projects were funded. Since its inception, the New Horizons for Seniors Program has funded over 33,500 projects in hundreds of communities across the country with a total investment of more than \$720 million, and half a million seniors benefit from the program every year.

The current annual budget of the program is \$70 million and Budget 2022 committed an additional \$20 million over two years, beginning in 2022-23, for an expanded New Horizons for Seniors Program to support more projects that improve the quality of life for seniors and help them continue to fully participate in their communities. Options are being explored to address the Committee's recommendation to make it easier to use the New Horizons for Seniors Program for medium-term projects.

In addition to giving existing projects the flexibility to adapt to meet the pandemic-related needs of the seniors they were serving, the New Horizons for Seniors Program worked with United Way Centraide Canada and its regional and local partners to provide \$9 million in pan-Canadian funding to seniors-serving community-based organizations working with Canadian seniors. As well, the community-based stream provided an additional \$20 million in funding to community organizations to help them pivot their activities to address seniors' needs during this difficult time.

Aligned with the recommendation to promote social connections, the Government has allocated more than \$2 billion for the Indigenous Community Support Fund to support Indigenous communities and organizations to respond to short-term COVID-19 related needs such as providing funding to address issues including social isolation.

The Government supports and promotes the Age-Friendly Communities model across Canada and internationally. The actions taken on Age-Friendly Communities by our Government cut across the various themes covered by the Report, including promoting

social connections, contributing to the well-being and overall health of seniors. The Government is funding a World Health Organization project, “Guidelines for developing and sustaining national age-friendly programs,” which is examining evidence on effective practices and creating guidance to support communities to choose interventions with the strongest evidence for enhancing the abilities of older people.

### **Developing broadband internet, increasing internet access and supporting digital literacy (Recommendations 8, 9 and 10)**

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for seniors to have access to reliable internet to maintain connections with families and friends, as well as to access important services.

The Government continues to prioritize investment in the development of broadband internet. In 2019, the Government released High-Speed Access for All: Canada’s Connectivity Strategy. As part of this Strategy, the Government launched the Universal Broadband Fund in 2020 to expand connectivity in rural and remote communities in collaboration with provinces, territories, and other partners. The Universal Broadband Fund, which will provide \$2.75 billion to support high-speed internet projects across the country, builds on existing initiatives that continue to be rolled-out. For example, the \$585 million Connect to Innovate program is bringing improved internet to over 975 communities, and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission has announced several projects under its \$750 million Broadband Fund.

Further, the Government is committed to continuing to help low-income seniors get the internet service they need. Through Canada’s Connectivity Strategy, the Government is committed to ensuring that all Canadians, including seniors, have access to high-speed internet by 2030. Additionally, through the Connecting Families initiative, the Government of Canada is supporting low-cost internet service for those who need it most. The eligibility criteria for the program were recently expanded beyond low-income families to include low-income seniors. Seniors who qualify for the maximum Guaranteed Income Supplement are now eligible to benefit from discounted home internet service. Considering the average market rate for a high-speed internet connection is \$78 per month, eligible low-income seniors can benefit from average cost savings between \$58 and \$68 per month through the Connecting Families initiative.

In addition, the Government is committed to developing digital literacy skills, particularly among underrepresented groups in Canada, which includes seniors. The Government’s Digital Literacy Exchange Program funds non-profit organizations to support digital literacy training initiatives for Canadians who need improved skills and confidence in using computers and the internet. Since the launch of this program in 2017 with an investment of \$29.5 million over 5 years, the Government has provided digital literacy training to Canadian seniors with the basic digital literacy skills needed to fully participate in the digital economy and society. This was particularly important during

COVID-19 induced lockdowns. On July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the Government launched the second phase of the Digital Literacy Exchange Program and announced a \$17.6 million federal investment to provide digital literacy training to an additional 100,000 program participants.

In response to the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has created for the accessible publishing industry and the importance of reading materials to decrease isolation for persons with print disabilities, the Government of Canada announced an additional \$1 million in 2021–22 to support the work of the Centre for Equitable Library Access and the National Network of Equitable Library Services. Additionally, Budget 2022 announced funding of \$25 million, over five years, to support the Centre for Equitable Library Access and the National Network of Equitable Library Services in the production and distribution of alternative format materials and advancement of digital literacy skills among persons with print disabilities; to conduct research to better understand gaps in availability of accessible reading materials; and to launch a new Equitable Access to Reading Program to boost the production of accessible format reading materials through innovative partnerships.

The New Horizons for Seniors Program also supports the development of digital literacy for seniors. The community-based call for proposals held in 2021-22 gave priority to funding projects that supported seniors' digital literacy under the national priority of supporting healthy aging, which was addressed by 83% percent of funded projects. More than \$9 million was attributed for projects supporting digital literacy. For example, through the New Horizons for Seniors community-based stream grant, funding was provided to help local seniors access technology and stay connected with digital tools.

**Raising awareness, providing funding to fight elder abuse, and a toll-free line to direct seniors to appropriate resources on elder abuse (Recommendations 11, 12 and 13)**

The Government of Canada recognizes that elder abuse is a serious issue affecting older persons in Canada. This is why the Government will work with provincial and territorial governments through the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum to inform federal/provincial/territorial programming and policies directed at addressing elder abuse in the next three years.

The Government made a commitment 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.

Justice Canada is working with Statistics Canada and other key departments on an exploratory study to identify possible ways to address national elder abuse data gaps. In addition to this research study, Justice Canada is collaborating with the Edmonton Police Service to conduct a case study of their dedicated elder abuse team to examine

the extent, nature and outcome of elder abuse cases coming to their attention. Any future criminal law reform to address elder abuse would be informed by Canada's already robust criminal law framework, which includes *Criminal Code* offences of general application regarding all forms of violence/abuse, fraud and failure to provide the necessities of life to a dependent who is unable to withdraw from a person's charge due to age or other circumstances. It also contains specific provisions to address elder abuse in the sentencing context. For example, sentencing courts must treat, as aggravating factors, evidence that: an act of fraud had a significant impact on a victim given their age (section 380.1); the offender abused a position of trust or authority (paragraph 718.2(a)(iii)); and the offence had a significant impact on the victim given their age and other personal circumstances including their health and financial situation (paragraph 718.2(a)(iii.1)). Section 781.04 further requires sentencing courts to give primary consideration to the objectives of denunciation and deterrence if the offence involved the abuse of a person who is vulnerable because of personal circumstances. In summer 2021, the Government held nation-wide consultations to seek feedback on a federal policy definition of senior abuse. In support of the Minister of Seniors' Mandate Letter commitment to "strengthen Canada's approach to elder abuse", the Government will be moving forward with creating a federal policy definition.

The Government raises awareness on elder abuse through a number of communications activities to promote this issue. These include media lines, web content and social media. To raise awareness among seniors to prevent financial abuse, the Government has been implementing a number of activities. In 2018-2019, the National Seniors Council consulted with experts, seniors, and service providers on ways to reduce financial crimes and harms against seniors. The Council published on the Government of Canada's website "*The What We Heard Report: Financial Crimes and Harms Against Seniors*", available online. It contains a summary of federal initiatives addressing the issue. Lastly, in consultation with industry and consumer groups, the Government created the Seniors' Code of Conduct to guide banks in the services they deliver to better meet the needs of seniors. This includes training and processes for detecting and preventing financial abuse among the elderly.

The Government provides funding to fight elder abuse through a number of programs in place that support seniors who have been victims of elder abuse. The Family Violence Initiative helps address elder abuse by providing information and resources for professionals and the public. Additionally, the Victims Fund is available to provincial and territorial governments and non-governmental organizations to support projects that address the needs of victims and survivors of crime in the criminal justice system, including victims and survivors of elder abuse. In 2021, in response to the rising number of cases of violence against seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victims Fund made \$1 million available for the development and dissemination of public legal education and information materials, addressing senior abuse and neglect, that are specifically designed to reach seniors and those responsible for their care.

The Government is also working to prevent and address family violence through the Preventing and Addressing Family Violence: the Health Perspective investment that supports projects to implement health promotion programs and interventions to prevent and address family violence, including elder abuse. The overall aim of the investment is to increase the evidence base and uptake of health promotion programs and interventions that are effective in preventing, and addressing the health impacts of family violence.

The New Horizons for Seniors Program also helps to combat elder abuse by funding projects designed to raise awareness of the problem and prevent elder abuse. Recipients develop programs, materials, tools, and other resources to expand awareness of and to prevent elder abuse, including physical, psychological, neglect and financial abuse. As part of the 2021-22 community-based stream call for proposals, 607 projects identified that they support the national priority of preventing elder abuse, representing 20% of all New Horizons for Seniors Program community-based projects (at a total cost of \$13 million) for this cycle. All 22 of the collective impact projects funded through the pan-Canadian stream of the New Horizons for Seniors Program help seniors have more and better contact with other people and avoid isolation, thereby decreasing the risk of elder abuse.

To help direct seniors to appropriate resources on elder abuse, the Government operates the Victim Services Directory, an online service that helps service providers, victims and individuals to locate services for victims of crime, including elder abuse, in communities across the country.

## **2. Improving Supportive Care and Services (Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6)**

The Committee heard from witnesses about how seniors living in long-term care facilities were significantly affected by the pandemic and public health measures. The Committee's recommendations relating to improving supportive care and services include: (4) increasing the number of accessible affordable housing units, (2) developing an immigration strategy for health care professionals, (3) ensuring accountability and transparency with regard to national standards for long-term care, (6) adjusting the Canada Health Transfer to account for population aging, and (5) increasing home care and support services.

### **Increasing the number of accessible affordable housing units (Recommendation 4)**

Helping seniors to access affordable housing, and stay in their homes and their communities, is a top priority for the Government of Canada.

For seniors to age in place, they must have adequate, suitable and affordable housing. The National Housing Strategy is an ambitious, 10-year plan to invest over \$72 billion to

give more Canadians a place to call home. The National Housing Strategy includes a number of programs to increase the supply of affordable housing through a human-rights based approach that focuses on addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including seniors, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and racialized groups.

National Housing Strategy affordable housing supply programs include minimum requirements for accessible units. These minimum requirements differ from program to program. For example, the National Housing Co-Investment Fund, which provides capital for new affordable housing and renovation and repair of existing affordable and community housing requires projects to ensure that at least 20% of units are accessible and that common areas are barrier-free. The Rental Construction Financing Initiative, which provides low-cost loans for the construction of purpose-built rental housing, requires that at least 10% of units are accessible.

During the pandemic, the Government created the new Rapid Housing Initiative to help quickly develop new affordable housing units to support vulnerable Canadians, including seniors. This program has already supported the creation of more than 10,000 new affordable housing units and Budget 2022 provided an additional \$1.5 billion for further investments. The Rapid Housing Initiative program requires projects to exceed the accessibility requirements in their local jurisdiction.

As the Government moves forward with implementing the adjustments to key National Housing Strategy supply programs, such as the National Housing Co-Investment Fund and Rental Construction Financing Initiative, that were announced in Budget 2022, we will consider options to increase the social outcomes of these programs, including accessibility, affordability and energy efficiency targets.

To support seniors living safely at home, Budget 2022 doubled the qualifying expense limit of the Home Accessibility Tax Credit to \$20,000, which now provides a tax credit of up to \$3,000 for accessibility renovations or alterations. Further, to support families in multigenerational homes, Budget 2022 introduced a Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit, which would provide up to \$7,500 in support for constructing a secondary suite for a senior or an adult with a disability (beginning in 2023).

### **Developing an immigration strategy for health care professionals (Recommendation 2)**

The pandemic has intensified the labour shortage in the health sector. The Government has shown national leadership in implementing a suite of programs to help address this issue.

For example, foreign credential recognition can represent a barrier for the integration of newcomers, as it can be a lengthy, complex and expensive process which can delay integration of internationally educated health professionals into the health workforce.



The Foreign Credential Recognition Program is a contributions program supporting the labour market integration of skilled newcomers focusing on supporting internationally educated health care professionals to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Budget 2022 proposed to provide \$115 million over five years, with \$30 million ongoing, to expand the Foreign Credential Recognition Program and help up to 11,000 internationally trained health care professionals per year have their credentials recognized and find work in their field.

The Government recognizes the need to provide and increase pathways to permanent residence for health care workers. Temporary foreign workers can play a role in addressing short-term labour shortages in health care. In particular, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program enables employers, such as a hospital, to hire temporary foreign workers to fill gaps in their workforce when they cannot find workers domestically. The Government has taken action in recent years to help attract and retain health care professionals. From May to November 2021, a temporary public policy referred to as Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway was open to support the transition of temporary residents with recent Canadian work experience in essential occupations – including health care workers – or those who have recently graduated from a Canadian post-secondary institution. Over 91,000 applications to this pathway were received and close to 7,500 applications were created under the dedicated health-care streams. With this process, 1,500 temporary residents in the health care stream obtained permanent residency in June 2022. The Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway will continue processing applications into June 2023. Lessons learned from the new Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway will inform the development of future economic immigration programming.

The Government of Canada's core economic permanent residency programs are positioned to support longer-term labour needs in the health sector. Many health occupations are considered to be "high-skilled" for the purposes of permanent economic immigration to Canada, making them eligible for the Federal High-Skilled Programs, as well as the portion of the Provincial Nominee Program managed under Express Entry. Thousands of Invitations to Apply have been issued to health workers through these programs in the last five years, with over 22,400 health workers obtaining permanent residency through the Federal High-Skilled Programs and the Provincial Nominee Program in the same period, including just over 3,600 physicians and 8,600 nurses.

Health workers are also eligible for various other regional and occupation-specific pathways. The Provincial Nominee Program allows provinces and territories to create programs or "streams" to identify candidates who meet their evolving labour needs. All provinces and territories have skilled worker and/or international graduate streams that can be used to nominate candidates to fill labour needs in the health sector, while others prioritize health workers through healthcare specific streams using existing federal and provincial levers, and partnerships with regulatory bodies, education institutions and employers.

The Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot also allows employers, including those in the health care sector, to access new sources of talent by facilitating skilled refugees' access to existing economic immigration pathways. Throughout the pilot, the most common occupation for Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot applicants was in the following national occupational classifications - Nurse aides, Orderlies and Patient Service Associates.

Domestically, the Government has also taken action to address the labour shortage in the health care sector. In the 2020 Fall Economic Statement, the Government invested \$38.5 million for the Long-Term and Home Care pilot project. Launched in December 2020, the pilot project aims to address labour shortages in long-term and home care by testing a new recruitment and training model for supportive care assistants; developing career advancement pathways to assist new workers to upgrade their micro-credential to a full personal support worker certificate; and exploring how to improve consistency in personal support worker training programs.

### **National Standards for long-term care (Recommendation 3)**

Seniors deserve to live in safe and dignified conditions. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada has been working collaboratively with provinces and territories to protect vulnerable Canadians in long-term care. The Government has responded in a number of ways, including through key investments made to support residents and staff as well as new funding for provinces and territories to enhance access to home care, initiatives to support efforts to augment the health workforce, and strengthening long-term care.

During the pandemic, the Government has supported provinces and territories and made significant commitments to address longstanding issues in the sector. Budget 2021 announced a \$3 billion investment, starting in 2022-23, to support provinces and territories in their efforts to ensure standards for long-term care are applied and permanent changes are made. The Government will work collaboratively with provinces and territories to flow this funding as part of collective efforts to make sure that seniors and others in care settings live in safe and dignified conditions. This funding will help support workforce stability, through wage top-ups and improvements to workplace conditions; and strengthened enforcement, through accreditation and regular inspections of long-term care homes.

Additionally, Budget 2021 funding builds upon the Safe Long-Term Care Fund, announced in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement, which transferred \$1 billion to provinces and territories to protect people living and working in long-term care.

In March 2021, two expert standards development organizations, the Health Standards Organization and the Canadian Standards Association Group, launched an independent

process to develop new national long-term care standards. The Standards Council of Canada, a federal Crown corporation, has established the standards development process that the Health Standards Organization and the Canadian Standards Association Group are following, and will approve the final standards. This process is complementary to, but independent from, the federal government's work to engage provinces and territories to help support improvements in long-term care. The standards will be released in December 2022. This is an important step to improving care for seniors that will set the bar higher for safe and respectful care in these facilities.

The Government has reiterated the commitment to national long-term care standards in the Minister of Health's mandate letter. The Minister of Health, with my support will continue to work with provinces and territories to foster improvements in long-term care, including using federal funding, and exploring options to develop federal legislation.

### **Adjusting the Canada Health Transfer to account for population aging (Recommendation 6)**

To support our health care system, the Government provides long-term, predictable funding to the provinces and territories through the Canada Health Transfer. The Canada Health Transfer is the largest major transfer to provinces and territories and supports the principles of the *Canada Health Act*.

In 2022-23, the Canada Health Transfer will provide \$45.2 billion to provinces and territories. Since the Canada Health Transfer was established in 2004-05, the Government has supported, on average, 33% of provincial and territorial health expenditures through cash and previously transferred tax points.

The Canada Health Transfer is allocated to the provinces and territories on an equal per capita basis to provide comparable treatment for Canadians, regardless of where they live. The Canada Health Transfer grows in line with the economy (a three-year moving average of nominal gross domestic product growth) with funding guaranteed to increase by at least three per cent per year. Thanks to Canada's strong economic recovery, the Canada Health Transfer is projected to provide provinces and territories with more than \$12 billion in funding over the next five years than what was expected prior to the pandemic.

The Government also provides significant funding for health care through measures outside the Canada Health Transfer, a number of which directly support seniors, as outlined below (recommendation 5).

The Government is committed to working in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to strengthen health care systems and to discussing with provinces and territories the long-term strength, sustainability and resilience of the health system after

the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure that Canadians, including seniors, receive the health care services that they deserve.

### **Increasing home care and supportive services (Recommendation 5)**

We know seniors want to live healthy, safe, and independent lives. We also know that most seniors want to be able to stay at home, in their own communities. The Government of Canada is determined to strengthen how we support seniors so that they can stay in their own homes and communities.

For instance, the Government has established stable federal funding to provinces and territories for home and community care. The Government is providing \$6 billion over 10 years, which started in 2017, for provinces and territories to improve access to home and community care services, including palliative care. This investment is expected to help more Canadians receive the care and services they need so that they may remain at home longer. Bilateral agreements outlined how federal funds would be used for the first five years of the 10-year Budget 2017 commitment. The Government will be working with provinces and territories to enable access to funding that remains available over the next five years.

Furthermore, to address the immediate health and social service needs of Indigenous communities, the Government announced in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement an investment of \$186.8 million over two years to address needs and gaps in supportive care facilities in the context of COVID-19 and provide additional home care in Indigenous communities. Budget 2019 provided \$8.5 million to work with First Nations and Inuit communities in developing a new and more holistic long-term and continuing care strategy. Budget 2022 announced an investment of \$268 million in 2022-23 to continue the provision of high quality health care in remote and isolated First Nations on-reserve communities. This funding is intended to support seniors and at-risk Indigenous people to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This includes support to remain living safely at home, in a community care setting (e.g. Elders' lodges), or a supportive care facility. It also promotes provision of care by care workers who are effectively trained and properly resourced to work during the pandemic in a culturally competent and culturally safe manner.

To help seniors access the services they need to be able to age at home, the Government established the new grants and contributions program "Age Well at Home Initiative". This \$90 million investment in helping low-income and otherwise vulnerable seniors to age in place was announced in Budget 2021. This new initiative will provide funding for seniors-serving organizations to pilot how volunteers can be leveraged to provide practical supports such as meals, housekeeping, and yard work to low-income and otherwise vulnerable seniors in their communities to help them stay in their homes and communities as long as possible. Funding will also be available for regional and national projects to expand services that have already shown results in helping seniors

stay at home. The opportunities for funding were made available to seniors-serving organizations through competitive calls for proposals launched in June 2022. Age Well at Home will complement provinces and territories' efforts to help seniors by generating lessons learned about mobilizing seniors-serving organizations and volunteers to support seniors who want to age at home. Further, Budget 2022 announced the creation of an expert panel to study the idea of an Aging at Home Benefit.

In addition, supporting seniors to age in place is a national priority under the New Horizons for Seniors Program. As part of the 2021-22 community-based stream call for proposals, 780 projects identified that they support the national priority to help seniors age in place, representing 26% of the 3,003 New Horizons for Seniors Program community-based projects funded. This constitutes an investment of almost \$16.3 million.

### **3. Improving Income Security (Recommendations 14 and 15)**

Seniors are living longer than ever before, however, with increasing age, they also face greater financial vulnerability. As seniors get older, they tend to have lower income and often face higher health-related expenses because of the onset of illness or disability. This vulnerability is further compounded by a reduced ability to supplement income with paid work, by the risk of outliving savings and the risk of becoming a widow or widower. That is why the Government has taken action to help make life more affordable for Canadians as they age.

In Budget 2021, the Government of Canada committed to moving forward with investments that give Canadian seniors a better quality of life, including stronger financial security. In July 2022, the Government increased the Old Age Security pension by 10 percent for seniors aged 75 or over. In order to help address the immediate needs of this group of seniors, the Government provided a one-time payment of \$500 in August 2021 to Old Age Security pensioners who would be aged 75 and over as of June 30, 2022.

The Government remains committed to improving the income security of seniors and continues to seek ways to strengthen the Old Age Security program, as demonstrated by a broad range of measures taken since 2016, such as restoring the age of eligibility for the Old Age Security pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement to 65 and increasing the Guaranteed Income Supplement by up to \$947 per year for the lowest-income single seniors. Consistent with the Committee's recommendations, the Government has also committed to increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement by \$500 per year for single seniors and \$750 for seniors couples, starting at the age of 65.

The Old Age Security program benefits are fully indexed to preserve their spending power. Increases are calculated, each quarter, using the Consumer Price Index, as measured by Statistics Canada.

## **National Strategy and Seniors Advocate (Recommendation 17)**

Finally, the Committee recommended the creation of a federal office of the seniors advocate who would have a mandate to develop a national seniors strategy.

The Government of Canada has shown national leadership in supporting the healthy aging of Canadians across the three key areas of action. The Government is committed to continuing to provide leadership in these areas and is pleased the Committee agrees with the need for ongoing attention to seniors' issues. As proof of its commitment, in July 2018, the Government appointed a Minister of Seniors. The role of the Minister is to better understand the needs of Canadian seniors and ensure that federal programs and services are developed to respond to Canada's aging population.

Furthermore, the Government works with other jurisdictions, as well as experts, to address issues facing seniors in Canada. For example, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum is a useful vehicle for the Government of Canada to exchange with and learn from provinces and territories on approaches to address seniors' issues.

Our Government is committed to seniors and ensuring they are able to safely engage in all aspects of society. That is why the Government has provided leadership and made significant investments in a number of important areas. The Government will use the Committee's report in its reflection on the best way forward and potential next steps to address seniors' issues during and after the pandemic. The Government will continue to do its part and looks forward to continuing to work with provinces, territories, the HUMA Committee and other key stakeholders to continue advancing the social and economic inclusion of seniors and their well-being.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kamal Khera', with a horizontal line underneath.

The Honourable Kamal Khera, P.C., M.P.

Minister of Seniors