



**The CBC Pensioners
National Association**

Preserving our Future, Sharing our Past

**L'Association nationale
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PNA DISCUSSION PAPER # 4 – ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE



This is the fourth in our series of discussion papers aimed at helping you decide which political party is most likely to meet the interests of older adults in Canada. Timely access to high quality health care is a major concern for seniors. We tend, as a population, to have more health care needs. While we're fortunate to have worked for a company with a well-run pension plan, most of us are living on a fixed income. Having to find money for a high-cost procedure in a private system because the public system either can't accommodate you fast enough or the care it provides is of a lower quality can be financially challenging.

Canadian seniors have contributed throughout their working lives and should be able to count on decent health care after retirement. This is a complex issue given that the provinces are tasked with health care delivery and that delivery is not consistent. We hope you'll find this discussion paper helpful in deciding which party will act in your best interest when you get to the ballot box.

Send us your comments: advocacy@cbcpensioners.ca

THE ISSUE: Preserving universal health care and ensuring access to high quality, affordable health care

WHY IT MATTERS:

This discussion paper provides an overview of the Canada Health Act (CHA), which establishes principles for Canada's publicly funded health care system, ensuring citizens have access to necessary hospital and physician services without direct charges.



In recent years, federal and provincial governments have engaged in discussions to address challenges such as wait times, access to services, and the integration of technology in health care. Initiatives such as increased funding for mental health and proposals for universal pharmacare are often highlighted as key areas of focus across party lines, though the specifics can vary significantly.

Overall, while all parties recognize the importance of the Canada Health Act, their strategies for improving health care differ in terms of funding, delivery models, and priorities.

The Canada Health Act

The Canada Health Act (CHA) is federal legislation that sets out the principles for Canada's publicly funded health care system. Enacted in 1984, it aims to ensure that all Canadian citizens have access to medically necessary hospital and physician services without direct charges at the point of care. The Act is based on five main principles:

1. **Public Administration:** Provincial and territorial health care insurance plans must be publicly administered and accountable.
2. **Comprehensiveness:** All medically necessary hospital and physician services must be covered.
3. **Universality:** All residents must have access to insured health services on uniform terms and conditions.
4. **Portability:** Residents must retain coverage when moving or traveling within Canada.
5. **Accessibility:** All residents must have reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers.

There is currently a coalition of interested groups who argue that some provinces are using loopholes to increase private health care. Because the Act was passed before nurse practitioners became common as primary care providers, and before virtual medical appointments, this coalition is asking the government to ensure



that patients are protected from being billed for these new realities in health care.

WHERE THE PARTIES STAND:

The Canada Health Act is a key piece of legislation that outlines the principles of publicly funded health care in Canada. Each federal political party has distinct positions on health care, often reflecting their broader policy goals.

The Liberal Party of Canada

- **Position:** The Liberals typically emphasize the importance of maintaining and strengthening the public health care system. They advocate for increased funding to provinces and territories, as well as investments in mental health and long-term care. The Liberals emphasize enhancing access to health care for seniors, including home care and long-term care services.
- **Proposals:** They have pledged to increase funding for home and community care, improve the quality of long-term care facilities, and expand access to mental health services for seniors.
- **Actions:** Recent Liberal governments have increased health transfers to provinces, supported initiatives for mental health care, and invested in health technology. The Liberals have implemented pharmacare, and dental care for 2.3 million Canadians who qualify for the program. The dental plan will be also extended to a much wider range of Canadians beginning in May.

The Conservative Party of Canada

- **Position:** Conservatives often advocate for a mixed model of health care that includes both public and private options. They focus on reducing wait times and improving efficiency in the system. Conservatives focus on ensuring that seniors receive timely and efficient care, advocating for a mixed health care model that allows for private options. The party voted against both the pharmacare and dental care plans. Party leader Pierre Poilievre has previously said he'd scrap pharmacare and had refused to



commit to keeping dental care. Now that the election campaign is underway, he has changed his position saying that people who are now covered will maintain the benefit.

- **Proposals:** They often propose measures to reduce wait times, enhance funding for senior care programs, and provide tax credits to support seniors in accessing services.
- **Actions:** Conservative governments have historically pushed for accountability measures in health care spending and promoted partnerships with private providers to enhance services.

The New Democratic Party (NDP)

- **Position:** The NDP strongly supports the Canada Health Act and prioritizes universal access to health care for seniors and advocates for expanding services like pharmacare and dental care.
- **Proposals:** They aim to strengthen and expand public health services, improve access to home care, and ensure quality long-term care, emphasizing that all seniors should have access to necessary services without financial burden.
- **Actions:** The NDP has consistently proposed legislation for universal pharmacare, dental care, and has been vocal in campaigns advocating for increased federal health transfers. The party was instrumental in negotiating with the Liberals the current pharmacare and dental care programs.

The Bloc Québécois

- **Position:** The Bloc focuses on the needs of Quebec and supports provincial autonomy in health care while advocating for federal support. They advocate for preserving and enhancing the public system and emphasize the need for federal support to enhance services for seniors.
- **Proposals:** They advocate for increased health transfers to provinces, specifically for improving long-term care and home care services tailored to the needs of seniors.



- **Actions:** The Bloc has pushed for increased federal health transfers to Quebec and has been involved in discussions around health care funding.

The Green Party

- **Position:** The Green Party advocates for a holistic approach to health care, emphasizing preventative care and addressing social determinants of health. They support expanding services to include mental health and pharmacare.
- **Proposals:** They support expanding health services for seniors, including mental health and palliative care, and advocate for a national strategy to address the unique needs of an aging population.
- **Actions:** The Greens have proposed comprehensive health reforms and increased funding for health services, emphasizing sustainability and accessibility.

WHAT THE PNA SAYS:

All parties acknowledge the growing needs of Canada's aging population and have proposed various initiatives they say are aimed at improving care.

Key themes include increasing funding for home care, enhancing long-term care standards, and ensuring that seniors have access to comprehensive health services, including pharmacare and dental care.

The PNA believes Canada's retirees deserve better access to quality health care. The question is, which party is most committed to taking the necessary action to make sure it happens.

The growing trend to private health care for quick access is not acceptable. Many retirees cannot afford private care.

The party which will enforce the Canada Health Act, putting pressure on the provinces to deliver the best publicly-funded health care, deserves our support.



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CANDIDATES:

To improve the delivery of primary health care, federal candidates could be asked the following questions:



1. **Expansion of Coverage:** The CHA currently covers hospital and physician services. Would you support expanding coverage to include additional primary health services such as nurse practitioners, expanded dental care, vision care, or mental health services?
2. **Addressing Wait Times:** What strategies would you propose to reduce wait times for primary health care services and improve access to timely care?
3. **Funding and Equity:** How would you address disparities in health care access and quality between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socioeconomic groups?
4. **Integration of Services:** How do you plan to support the integration of primary health care services with other levels of care, such as home care and long-term care, to provide a more cohesive and patient-centered system?
5. **Technology and Innovation:** What role do you see for digital health technologies (e.g., telemedicine, electronic health records) in enhancing primary health care delivery, and how would you ensure their effective implementation?
6. **Workforce Planning:** How would you address the current and future needs for health care professionals, including physicians, nurses, and allied health workers, to ensure adequate primary health care delivery?
7. **Public vs Private:** What is your position on public vs private health care?
8. **Expansion of services:** What will your party do to expand dental and pharmacare so that more Canadians can access better healthcare?



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