



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

Editorial

IT IS TIME FOR RIGHTS-BASED SUPPORT FOR OLDER ADULTS

September 7, 2026

OLDER ADULTS ARE BECOMING A POWER BLOCK – IT IS TIME WE USED THAT POWER

“By the late 2070s, the global population aged 65 and older is projected to reach 2.2 billion, surpassing the number of children under age 18. By the mid-2030s, there will be 265 million individuals aged 80 and older, outnumbering infants.” (United Nations, 2026).

As of 2025 there were 41,651,653 people in Canada. Of those 10,816,675 are over the age of 60 (Statistics Canada, 2026). Demographically, older adults now comprise nearly one quarter of the country.

You would never know it by how governments, many health and human services professionals, and even some family members treat us.

For too long we have accepted the status quo, failing to speak up for better treatment. After a lifetime of working, raising families, paying taxes, volunteering, and helping to care for grandchildren, many of us are treated as second-class citizens.

We have quietly accepted care dictated by bureaucratic convenience rather than human need. In too many families, the parents who supported their children into adulthood find themselves abandoned in their final years.

Human rights do not have a best before date. Elders deserve to have their rights, dignity, and autonomy respected.

ONTARIO STILL OPERATES ON A CHARITY MODEL

The current system reduces older adults to passive recipients of care. It strips away autonomy, dignity, and the will to live.

Home Care: A Revolving Door of Strangers

Home care staff arrive when the system dictates, not when the individual needs them. Home care recipients endure a revolving door of caregivers who barely know them, some

lacking the competence or consistency to provide safe, intimate care. The lack of continuity, and in some cases competence, violates trust and leaves older adults vulnerable.

That is the very nature of the charity model – it prioritizes throughput over people, and in doing so violates the autonomy, dignity, comfort, and the ability of older adults to control their own lives, sometimes leaving them feeling humiliated and violated.

SSAO's advocacy and new management at Ontario Health at Home has begun to change this. We look forward to more progress on Home Care Modernization this Fall.

Long Term Care: Institutionalized Poor Houses

Long term care institutions are even worse. Regardless of cosmetic “improvements” these facilities remain rooted in an archaic, institutional charity model. They destroy personal autonomy, enforce rigid institutional routines, and expose residents to preventable infections, abuse and neglect.

Even a cursory review of official inspection reports tells the story. Despite claims of progress the evidence shows that conditions in many facilities have not fundamentally improved in over forty years.

The Ontario government continues to fund these institutions **because they are hearing demands for it from their constituents - which means they are not hearing enough from you!** At the end of this editorial, you will find ways to contact your MPP and drown out the voices of those calling for more institutional beds.

AGEISM DRIVES THIS SYSTEM

Ageism is the root cause of both charity-based elder care and institutionalization. The International Longevity Centre Canada has highlighted UN data revealing the stark reality that **“1 out of every 2 people worldwide holds ageist attitudes against older adults.** This widespread bias actively undermines health outcomes, shortens lifespans, and restricts the basic human rights of older persons globally.”

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-longevity-centre-canada/posts/>

This statistic is not abstract. It means your children, your health care providers, your politicians, and your government may unconsciously view aging as a burden rather than a natural stage of life.

TIME FOR A RIGHTS-BASED MODEL

Change is finally coming through a federal voice.

The International Longevity Centre Canada has declared that “a person's fundamental rights do not decrease as they grow older, meaning dignity, self-determination, and fair treatment must remain absolute across the full lifespan”. They are actively working to

“replace charity-based mentalities with a clear, enforceable rights framework that protects older adults as equal citizens.”

SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION ONTARIO (SSAO) FIGHTS AGEISM AND CALLS FOR CHANGE

For nearly seven years SSAO has targeted the Ontario government’s systemic policies and practices that undermine, demean, dehumanize, and disempower older adults.

Our membership refuses to accept mass institutionalization and the mistreatment of older adults by a system that claims to serve them.

This Fall, SSAO is telling the Ontario government emphatically – **no more!**

- **No more institutions. Redirect funding to non-profit community-based services and supports and residential alternatives to institutions.**
- **No more home care based dictated by system convenience rather than individual need. We are calling for home care to be person-directed with elders and their caregivers in charge, not system-directed.**
- **No more ageist public policies that infantilize older adults and silence their voices. SSAO is speaking up on social media, in letters to the editors of newspapers, and with public officials. Please join us in raising your own voices as well.**

SSAO’S INDEPENDENCE IS ITS STRENGTH

SSAO is an **independent** voice for change. We do not accept government funding so we are never afraid to challenge government policy.

We do not take corporate money, so we fearlessly challenge private companies that exploit vulnerable disabled elders for profit.

We do not rely on foundations with hidden agendas, allowing us to focus entirely on the needs of older adults rather than the priorities of funders who prefer to focus on hospitals and universities rather than older adults themselves.

We insist that elders be a valued part of research initiatives with the clear demand “nothing about us without us!”

We are funded entirely by member donations. This preserves our ability to stand up to anyone who seeks to dehumanize older adults or who fails to take their needs and perspectives into account.

Exercising an independent voice makes us unpopular at times, but we will never compromise our mission to secure fair and equal treatment for all older adults and adhere to the mandate our members have given us – to advance an agenda of alternatives to mass institutionalization.

PLEASE ACT NOW – CONTACT YOUR OWN REPRESENTATIVE

This Fall we are calling on our members to raise their voices. Contact your MPPs and MP's. Click on their names to obtain their e-mail addresses:

https://www.ola.org/en/members/current?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23945354532&gclid=CjwKCAjwzNTUBhAjEiwA7zcvWn19_0Qs4VzTAev8QarQ7IZV2-xG5t5niF3YVxXyPI89BuQ3gSuY9hoCuFAQAvD_BwE

Demand that they truly represent you. Call for an end to government funded institutions and demand redirection of that investment into these proven alternatives:

- **Assisted living apartments with Integrated Wellness Hubs** Support assisted living apartments that incorporate PACE (Program of All Inclusive Care of the Elderly) style Wellness Hubs. See Halton region's model projects: <https://www.halton.ca/for-residents/infrastructure-and-growth/housing-projects> and <https://www.burlingtonoht.ca/community-wellness-hub/>
- **Small Neighbourhood Homes for Dementia:** Replace locked institutional wards with small, community-based, fully staffed homes for people living with dementia. See SSAO's Report and Summary on Small Neighbourhood Homes: https://mcusercontent.com/36363a028fc1d1a14890ff48e/files/04f00511-e498-3b01-6c5e-600076216d0c/Small_Neighbourhood_Homes_Report_Summary_Slidesfor_mail.pdf and https://mcusercontent.com/36363a028fc1d1a14890ff48e/files/610e4273-7631-c044-84e6-f551d8b65aa1/SSAO_Small_Neighbourhood_Homes_Project.pdf
- **Person-Directed NORCs:** Fund elder organized and directed Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities that operate on a *person-directed*, not a *person-centered* model, giving residents full control over their environment and services. Please see Pioneer Network Person-Directed and Full Citizenship Continuum: <https://www.pioneernetwork.org/culture-change/continuum-person-directed-culture/>

We have compiled all the information you need to advocate effectively on our website under these tabs: **Advocacy, Editorial, Research and Policy**
<https://www.seniorsactionontario.com/>

We have also hosted Zoom sessions with experts on these policies and programs. You will find the videos here: <https://www.youtube.com/@seniorsactionontario>

It is time for change. When each of us speaks up, it becomes a movement. And movements move mountains.

Please join us in being the change you want to see in Ontario.

Dr. Patricia Spindel is Chair of Seniors for Social Action Ontario and a lifelong advocate for the rights of elders and people with disabilities. She is the author of Case Management from an Empowerment Perspective – A Guide for Health and Human Services Professionals (Canadian Scholars Press) that challenges the charity model proposing an alternative strengths-based empowerment model.

<https://canadianscholars.ca/book/case-management-from-an-empowerment-perspective-fourth-edition/>

Comments on this and other SSAO editorials are welcome at seniorsactionontario@gmail.com

REFERENCES

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United Nations. (2026). Ageing. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing>