



## OWN E-LETTER – April 2016, Vol. 3, Issue 1



Eng-AGE ©

### Chair's Report – Marilyn Schafer



Happy Spring to all!

With the arrival of Spring comes our signature event, Equality Day on April 17th. This year we are fortunate to have the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, a long-time member and supporter of OWN, as our guest speaker. The flyer is included with this issue. Please plan to attend as we are working to make it a very special event indeed.

Coming up to 30 years old, we are resilient and functioning - still on our feet and kicking while many other organizations have closed their doors. We have two members around 100 years old. We are keeping up with the times by producing our newsletter online and making the **Contact** into an annual issue which will be covering a specific topic in depth. This year we have a review of Ontario cities that are 'Age-Friendly'.

Toronto is an Age-Friendly City: The biggest news in the community right now is that Toronto recently gained Age-Friendly status under the World Health Organization (WHO). Age-friendly communities support residents of all ages, but especially women. Women are caregivers of children and of the elderly, still outlive men, and often become widowed. As a result, supportive communities support women, making this WHO program a women's issue.

Last month I attended a special meeting of the Service Canada Senior's Advisory Committee on Old Age Security. It is now possible to apply online, and they want to extend this service throughout the country; however, there are many problems. For example, the country is not completely covered by online service, and some seniors don't know that you have to apply. The letter the government sends out is ambiguous. The contractors working on system revisions heard many suggestions from the committee.

In this newsletter we are starting a new section **OWN Members in the Community**. If you are active elsewhere in the community please email us at [info@olderwomensnetwork.org](mailto:info@olderwomensnetwork.org) and let us know so we can recognize your contributions.

Check our website and facebook page for more info on OWN activities and news.

<http://olderwomensnetwork.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/OlderWomensNetwork/>

**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed in the following articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Older Women's Network.

## **Activism:**

### **City of Toronto Seniors' Advocate:**

Letter to OWN from Liz McFarland, constituency assistant to Councillor Josh Matlow:

Thank you to OWN for your congratulations to Josh regarding his recent appointment as the City's Seniors' Advocate! I will be sure to share your well wishes with him directly. I know he was touched to receive OWN's letter.

During Josh's first year as our city councillor, he initiated the [City of Toronto's Seniors' Strategy](#): a proactive, holistic and inclusive initiative that seeks to create a truly accessible, respectful and age-friendly Toronto.

Since its inception two years ago, 86 of the 91 recommendations have been either partially or fully implemented, including the provision of seniors-centred social services at appropriate TCHC buildings, and an increase in home visits by City paramedics. Josh is proud of the major steps his office has taken, but there is still more work to be done!

That's why Josh is thankful to Council for giving him the opportunity to serve as the City of Toronto's Seniors' Advocate, so he can continue working on the [next phase](#) of the Seniors Strategy with City staff and incorporating feedback from residents.

## **Violence Against Women: - It is Never OK**

There are no grey areas when it comes to sexual violence or harassment.

Learn more about the concrete steps Ontario is taking to end sexual violence and harassment, change attitudes, provide more supports for survivors and make workplaces and campuses safer from, and more responsive to, sexual violence and harassment. The reports on the roundtable are available online:

2015 Action Plan is here:

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/action-plan-stop-sexual-violence-and-harassment>

The Progress Report 2015 – 2016 is here:

[https://files.ontario.ca/mi-2005\\_svhap\\_progress\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://files.ontario.ca/mi-2005_svhap_progress_report_en.pdf)

Both reports can be downloaded.

## Systems Advocacy:

### OWN endorses a letter to Premier Wynne



Dear Premier Wynne,

As presented, the 2016 Ontario Budget contains a plan to have many seniors pay substantially more for prescription drugs, based on their incomes. In addition, the government is planning to increase the co-payment for filling prescriptions. Under this plan, seniors with incomes over \$19,300 for a single person or \$32,300 for a couple, will have to pay nearly double the deductible before their drugs are covered. Deductible costs will increase from \$100 to as much as \$170. In addition, all seniors, regardless of income, will see their co-payment rise when they go in to get prescriptions filled.

Premier, we are asking you to cancel the fee increases for seniors and uphold the principle of universality for our health care system. As Ontario pays down its deficit, the fundamental values that underlie our public health care programs should not be abandoned.

Universal publicly-funded health care is understood as a fundamental value in Canada. The idea that the wealthy and the poor share the same health services and therefore have a common interest in its quality and success, is cornerstone to our health system.

This is the foundational belief for our public health care system, supported unanimously by all political parties when the Canada Health Act was passed, and it is the foundational value upon which we are calling for an expansion of public health care in Canada to cover a national prescription medicine program for all Canadians. Ontario has, in many ways, led that call. We are asking you not to break now with the principles that underlie that vision.

Public health care is about taking care of each other. We pay through our taxes for care when we are of working age and healthy --and we share the cost across society -- so that the burden for care is not shouldered by the sick, the elderly and the dying. This is a point of pride for most of us. Already seniors face mounting out-of-pocket costs for long-term care, respite and medical supplies. As local hospital services are closed in more and more towns, seniors face significant new costs for rehabilitation, lab tests, and travel costs. Unofficially, home care is already subject to means-testing, forcing families to shoulder ever more of the expense. When one adds to these existing user costs to the planned higher deductibles and co-payments for drugs, the burden for middle income seniors is becoming unbearable.

In fact, Premier, as you know, across Canada, the progressive public interest organizations that work on health care are advocating for the principles of the Canada Health Act not only to be safeguarded in hospitals and clinics, but also extended to cover home care and drugs in a bid to protect equity and

reduce suffering as health care is reformed. It is distressing to see the Ontario government moving in the opposite direction.

That our public services should enhance social cohesion and improve equity is a quintessentially *liberal* idea. Indeed, the universality and equity principles were written into the Canada Health Act under the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau and Health Minister Monique Bégin. They have been upheld by governments of all stripes since. They should not be abandoned lightly.

Ontario already has a means-tested method to provide income for needed health care services. It is called the tax system. Through the rebuilding of a progressive tax system that asks the wealthy and corporations to pay their fair share, funding can be raised for needed care and services. Premier, there is no reason to increase user fees on people when they are elderly, sick, dying and least able to pay. Respectfully, we ask you to reconsider the policy direction of dismantling universality and subjecting more health care services to user fees at point of need.

Sincerely,

*Derrell R. Dular*  
Managing Director  
Alliance of Seniors  
Older Canadians Network

*Natalie Mehra*  
Executive Director  
Ontario Health Coalition

**NOTE:** Thanks to this letter and the commitment of other community non-profits, the Minister of Health and Long term Care reversed his decision to increase the annual deductible, and actually increased the thresholds to qualify for the low income seniors benefits.

**Press Release April 4<sup>th</sup>:**

## **Ontario Lowers Drug Costs for Over 170,000 More Low-Income Seniors**

*Province Commits to Consult on Ontario Drug Benefit Improvements*

Ontario is making changes to the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program that will allow more than 170,000 seniors to become newly eligible for the low-income seniors program. As a result, they will save approximately \$130 on average per year in out-of-pocket drug costs and almost half-a-million Ontario seniors will pay no deductible and only a co-payment of up to \$2 per prescription.

Starting August 1, 2016, the government proposes to increase the income thresholds to qualify for the low-income seniors benefit:

- from less than \$16,018 to less than or equal to \$19,300 for single seniors, and
- from less than \$24,175 to less than or equal to \$32,300 for senior couples.

These new thresholds are aligned with the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System and will be indexed to ensure they remain aligned in future benefit years. With these changes, Ontario seniors will

continue to enjoy the lowest on average out-of-pocket drug costs of any seniors across the provinces in Canada.

## QUICK FACTS

- Since 1996, there have been no updates to the income thresholds for the ODB low-income seniors program and the co-payment and deductible for non-low income seniors, even though the cost to the government per senior has increased by nearly 130%.
- With the proposed changes, in addition to the over 170,000 seniors who will be newly eligible for the low-income program as of August 1, 2016, approximately 30,000 additional new seniors would become eligible for the low-income seniors program each year.
- Seniors whose income continues to stay under the adjusted income threshold each year would continue to qualify for the \$0 deductible and \$2 co-payment.
- At present, there are over 4,300 drugs on the ODB Formulary. More than 1,000 drugs have been added since 2009 and 13 new drugs have been added since the 2016 Budget.
- Ontario will also publicly fund the shingles vaccine for seniors aged 65 to 70.

## LEARN MORE

- [Ontario Drug Benefit Program](#)

**For public inquiries call ServiceOntario, INFOLine at 1-866-532-3161 (Toll-free in Ontario only)**

Media Contacts:

Shae Greenfield, Minister's Office, 416-325-5230

David Jensen, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

416-314-6197

**[ontario.ca/health-news](http://ontario.ca/health-news)**

## Income Retirement Security (CPP and OAS):

The following letter from **Canadian Pensioners Concerned** was endorsed by OWN:

March 11, 2016

The Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister

Office of the Prime Minister

80 Wellington Street

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

We write this letter as a supporter of the National Pensioners Federation and as an activist organization for public education on issues facing Canadians as they age. Our organization closes at the end of this month due to a shrinking membership and funds. We believe that your Liberal Government should be putting issues facing its senior citizens within a framework that is open, inclusive and diverse and with a ministerial voice at your Cabinet table. We see no such responsibility being taken by any of your ministers. When will this happen?

The past Conservative Government over the nearly ten years eroded a strong voice for older adults and reduced it to mere tokenism and ineffectiveness with its National Seniors Council. In the Harper years we did not see a Strategic Plan for an aging population – little was done for elder abuse, nothing for a national pharmacare plan, nothing negotiated for national standards for home care and community services with provincial ministries and within the Canada Health Accord, nothing for a National Housing Strategy with accompanying funding. When can we expect a Strategic Plan with funding linked to it?

Please seek input from senior citizen organizations in Canada. In Ontario there are a number of such organizations, most of which participate in the Liaison Committee of the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat. An important voice is the National Pensioners Federation [www.nationalpensionersfederation.ca](http://www.nationalpensionersfederation.ca) and its President, Herb John.

We await your Liberal Government's strategic plan and implementation of it with multiple ministries, if not a Minister Responsible for Senior Citizens to coordinate and address Canada's aging population and its needs.

Sincerely,

Barbara Kilbourn, President  
Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Inc.  
[canpension@gmail.com](mailto:canpension@gmail.com)

### **OWN Members in the Community:**



Many OWN members volunteer and help out in various ways in their community. If you, or someone you know, is actively doing things for the community, please let us know about it. In this newsletter, we feature Sharon Danley. The item below first appeared in the St. James Cathedral newsletter:

The St. James Cathedral Tuesday Drop-In has different ministries that help out in the neighborhood from week to week. We'd like to highlight one of our OWN members, Sharon Danley, who helps to make a difference in the lives of the people served by the Cathedral.

### **How did you first find out about the opportunity to volunteer at the St. James Drop in?**

After my darling daughter Andrea Main passed away at Christmas in 2012, I started attending St. James. After my first year of grieving, I inquired about offering my time and expertise to the community of the Cathedral.

Hair cutting seemed to be needed and I knew from my vast experience in Film, TV, Business and Bridal, that people's sense of self-worth and mental health rises when they look and feel well-groomed.

### **Why do you feel this is important for you?**

I provide professional digital makeovers for many women around the world and ask that they pay it forward in time, talent or money to a person or group in need in their postage stamp of the globe in honour of my darling Andrea. [www.youtube.com/twominutetips](http://www.youtube.com/twominutetips)

And as my personal contribution in that "pay it forward" thinking, I give what I can to our friends at St. James – it's as simple and as important as that.

### **Networking and Partnerships:**

**OWN members Erin Harris, and Sharon Danley (who represents Survivors of Medical Abuse and Disabled Women's Network), with Premier Wynne at the reception celebrating International Women's Day. Both members are on the Premier's roundtable on Violence against Women, and requested that the Premier release the Sexual Assault Task Force Report.**



### **Age-Friendly events:**

On March 19<sup>th</sup> 2016 the Toronto Council on Aging held a very successful working session on developing age-friendly community hubs. The focus was on how geography and ethnic diversity can work together for systemic change(s). OWN joined over 100 seniors representing a neighbourhood cabinet. Speakers included Minister Mario Sergio, Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs, Scot McKean Manager of Community Development for the City of Toronto and Karen Pitre, Special Advisor to the Premier on Community Hubs. We look forward to a follow up strategy and future outcomes.



**OWN**

**HOUSING COMMITTEE**

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*An Ode to Carol Goar at the Toronto Star*

Dear Ms. Goar,  
Thank-you for all your years of wonderful articles.

I especially want to thank you for one article which set a group of us on a challenging project. When I saw your article about Professor Paul Shecter's social marketing class at Seneca College, I contacted him and arranged to be resource person for a term on behalf of the Older Women's Network housing committee (of which I am a member). The class divided into 6 teams, each developing a campaign to persuade developers to build fully accessible apartment buildings. OWN has followed up on the students' reports and contacts we made during the course. As a result, we are now collaborating with Quadrangle Architects to plan a charrette, to which we'll invite decision-makers (developers and politicians).

With 15% of Canadians having a mobility-related disability, and many more with other disabilities, the time has come to build universal design into every home so that nobody is forced into homelessness and isolation due to lack of accessibility.  
Thank-you for your part in inspiring this campaign.

Now may you have a wonderful retirement. No doubt you'll find yourself drawn into new adventures too!

Kate Chung  
OWN Housing Committee

REPLY

What a lovely outcome to a few words I said. Thank you ever so much for telling me about it and good luck.

I appreciate your generous words about my work at the Toronto Star.

With gratitude,  
Carol Goar



## Open Letter:



Please use this draft letter to send a message to Ontario's Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Ted McMeekin to tell him that we need government action now!

Hon. Ted McMeekin  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Government of Ontario  
Re: Time to Fast Track Inclusionary Zoning Legislation

Dear Minister McMeekin,

First, I would like to thank you for the Province's recent announcement that it will pass legislation allowing municipalities to adopt inclusionary zoning policies. With these new powers, municipalities will be able to require developers to create affordable housing within new residential developments. This is good news for all of us who have been advocating for inclusionary zoning for years.

Now it's time to fast track that legislation so that we don't miss another single opportunity to develop much-needed affordable housing. There are already two private members' bills (Bill 3 and 39) on inclusionary zoning before the legislature. We are asking for your leadership to bring forward one of these bills immediately, and to get this legislation passed before the legislature breaks for the summer. We can't afford any more missed opportunities to create affordable housing in Ontario.

Municipalities, planners and community organizations have urged the provincial government to act on inclusionary zoning for years. They have waited long enough. Please move now to provide municipalities with this valuable tool to address the housing crisis.

Sincerely,

CC: Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario  
CC: your local MPP

## Feminist of the Year Award



OWN celebrates Equality Day on April 17<sup>th</sup>. In 2010 OWN agreed to create a Feminist of the Year Award to women we believe have made outstanding contributions to the status of women. The first recipient was Suzanne Johnson in 2012, followed by Dr. Marion Lynn in 2013. The recipient of the 2016 award is the Honourable Carolyn Bennett. Come and join us and celebrate yourself on Equality Day.

### Eligibility criteria for choosing the winner:

- Recipient will be a member in good standing with OWN
- A Canadian citizen, and has agreed to accept the award
- Any member of OWN can submit a nomination to council before February in a given year
- The award will be presented at the Equality Day event on April 17<sup>th</sup>
- The recipient's name will be engraved on the Nellie McClung statuette, which will remain the property of OWN and be on display in the OWN office

## Appreciation of OWN Members

Elsie Dollekamp – long-time member and dedicated donor to OWN's past and future initiatives  
Conratulations to Edith Ginsburg on becoming 100 years young in June.

Heartfelt thanks to Jeanne Rowles, Linda Slavin, Ursula Franklin, Rosemary Harrell, Marie O'Connor, Joanna Wilson, and Janice Tait, long-time donors and supporters of OWN; and to our newest supporting member Dr. Anne Mildon.

We also thank and welcome Clara Huang Speer, our 1<sup>st</sup> American resident member from Los Angeles.

## Anam Cara

**Anam Cara** is a gaelic term for soul mate. Soul mates share a bond that transcends time and place. OWN has a commemorative record book which honours individuals or a group. A donation to OWN purchases a page in the book with a message concerning the honoree, a photo, or any other tribute desired. This book is on permanent display at the OWN office. It is a great way to celebrate a life. If you would like to take advantage of this, please contact the OWN office and we will send you an application form.