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## COVID-19 Exposing Historic Shortfalls in Long-Term Care

Today, all levels of government in Canada are confronted with the stark reality of what many residents, families and civil society witness in long-term care homes on a daily basis: a fundamental lack of coordination and a cohesive set of protocols that could save lives and minimize harm to families and health care professionals.

“COVID-19 has exposed gaping holes in responses and services that have put the lives of older Canadians at risk,” says Laura Tamblyn Watts, CEO, CanAge.

Institutional and social memory will live long after current generations of health care professionals and families who are bearing the brunt of COVID-19, however, realizations made today can turn this into an opportunity to improve the local, provincial and national, public and private long-term care systems.

“Canada lacks a national framework regarding long-term care homes, and the historic argument about jurisdictional responsibilities has just become a barrier to saving lives,” says Dr Jane Barratt, Secretary General, International Federation on Ageing.

“From hashtags that target both younger (#vector) and older populations (#BoomerRemover), the real and lethal impact of ageism on the fundamental human rights of older people has been laid bare by the pandemic,” says Margaret Gillis, President, International Longevity Centre Canada. “Headlines such as ‘4 dead - all elderly’ suggest that the deaths of older people are somehow less painful and less important than those of younger Canadians.”

As part of Canada's Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 guarantees equality and other fundamental human rights such as the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. The rights of older people are human rights, and yet the COVID-19 crisis has brought to the surface stories of mistreatment, neglect and indifference to Canadian seniors both inside and outside of long-term care facilities. Any country or government that stands by and watches as human rights are violated will be held publicly accountable, and their failure to act swiftly will not soon be forgotten.

Now is not the time to throw stones, find someone to blame, or promote further fear. It is the time to demonstrate leadership in collaborative government action through the following tangible steps:

- Establish a COVID-19 Advisory Committee on Seniors to advise and inform governmental directions, and create a “seniors toolkit” for government during the pandemic;
- Develop emergency legislation to address the human rights violations in both health and long-term care systems which includes, but is not limited to, discrimination on the basis of age, the lack of basic needs by older persons, lack of staff, lack of equipment and staff abuse;
- Implement funding immediately for a coordinated national elder abuse response linked to elder law programs which include a public information campaign and the collection of data to advise future policy and programming;
- Establish an international working group on building standards in long-term care facilities, as the current standards do not mitigate even the spread of common infections such as influenza;
- Action by the Government of Canada to lead and support a United Nations Convention on the Rights of all Older Persons, which will see older people as rights holders and ensure that future human rights violations are mitigated.

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