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National Institute on Ageing (NIA) Applauds Ontario's Comprehensive Budget for Older Ontarians

***Government decisions build on the NIA's Evidence-Informed National
Seniors Strategy***

March 29, 2018, TORONTO – [The National Institute on Ageing \(NIA\)](#) applauds the Ontario government's budget which builds on recommendations put forward by the NIA and the National Seniors Strategy to provide free prescription medications for all older Canadians, new subsidies for dental care, more support for older adults to age in place, and more support for caregivers.

Creating OHIP+ For All Seniors: The NIA, through our [National Seniors Strategy](#), has called on governments to improve access to prescription medications for all older adults. OHIP+ would accomplish that goal in Ontario. Starting in August 2019, OHIP+ would be expanded to all older adults aged 65+, eliminating the annual deductible and medication co-payments for older adults under the current provincial prescription medication program.

All Ontarians aged 65 and over would receive prescription medications free of charge, regardless of income, saving the average older Ontarian approximately \$240 per year. Evidence shows that people take prescription medications more reliably when they're provided for free, which results in savings from the downstream costs related to not taking medications as directed.

As noted in the National Seniors Strategy, 70% of older adults aged 65 to 79 take at least one prescription medicine and 30% take at least five prescription medications concurrently. Expanding OHIP+ is a smart evidence-informed policy that should improve access to prescription drugs among older adults and is actually the standard of care already in other universal health care systems around the world.

"The 2018 Ontario budget has taken comprehensive action on the substantial issues that matter to older Ontarians, from drug and dental coverage, to more support for ageing at home and caregivers," said Michael Nicin, Executive Director of the National Institute on Ageing. "It's especially encouraging that the government continues to build their policies and programs on the evidence provided by the NIA and its National Seniors Strategy. The budget measures announced can go a long way toward supporting Ontario's ageing population."

While removing barriers to medication access is one of the evidence-informed recommendations that has been made by the NIA, its National Seniors Strategy also recommended that governments should help improve appropriate prescribing practices by their health care providers and look at

ways to purchase prescription medications on a national scale – that have allowed other nations with universal pharmacare programs to spend significantly less to deliver them.

“This is a good first step, but if we don’t ensure that older adults aren’t taking unnecessary medications and start buying prescription medications on a national scale, then the costs of this program will remain unnecessarily high and limit our ability to advance other important initiatives,” said Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Sinai Health System and the University Health Network.

Reducing Dental Costs: The budget announced plans for a new Ontario Drug and Dental (ODD) Program for people who don’t have coverage from an extended health plan. Sixty per cent of older adults in Ontario do not have a plan that covers dental costs, according to the budget document.

Starting in summer 2019, The ODD would reimburse participants for up to 80% of eligible dental expenses, up to an annual maximum of \$400 for singles and \$600 for couples.

The new ODD responds to the National Seniors Strategy call for government support for wellness and prevention programs that support healthy ageing. Often neglected by governments and individuals, oral health is integral to a person’s general health and well-being. Older adults who couldn’t otherwise afford to take care of their dental issues, could now find an easier, more affordable path forward should the ODD be implemented.

Supporting Seniors to Continue Living Independently: The National Seniors Strategy has also called on governments to help older Canadians have access to affordable housing to help them age at home in their communities and remain independent.

The budget responded with over \$1 billion over three years to help older Ontarians with the cost of maintaining their homes. The goal of the Seniors’ Healthy Home Program, starting in 2019-20, would be to design a benefit that provides up to \$750 per year for every eligible household led by Ontarians who are 75 and older. The budget notes that older adults spend more on average than other age groups on domestic and other custodial services that allow them to stay independent.

Providing Greater Support for Caregivers, Home Care, and Compassionate End of Life Care: The province is also investing an additional \$650 million over the next three years to provide more home and community care for clients and caregivers. This includes \$180 million for 2.8 million more hours of personal support, including caregiver respite.

The province is aiming to provide a further boost to its provision of compassionate palliative and end-of-life care, investing an additional \$15 million this year. The funding will support 20 new residential hospices across the province.

As announced last week, the Ontario government is investing \$35 million to support caregivers of people living with mental health issues. Caregivers, often unpaid family members and friends, can experience significant levels of stress and mental health challenges.

The NIA's recent report, [Why Canada Needs to Better Care for Its Working Caregivers](#), specifically called for health care and respite support for caregivers as well as further investments in home care to alleviate some of the burden borne by caregivers in helping older Ontarians age at home.

The \$2.1 billion investment in childcare will also help caregivers, especially 'sandwich' generation women. In 2012, almost 30 per cent of Canadian caregivers were women aged 35-44, which are pivotal years for building a strong career and working towards financial security, at a time when they are often caring for their young children as well.

Protecting Ontario's Pension Plan Members: Building on the 2017 budget announcement that the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund (PBGF) would be increased from \$1,000 per month to \$1,500 per month, the 2018 budget outlines a plan to make the increase retroactive to May 19, 2017. The increase and retroactivity will be a significant source of income security, especially to former Sears employees.

About the National Institute on Ageing (NIA)

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is a new policy and research centre based at Ryerson University in Toronto. The NIA is dedicated to enhancing successful ageing across the life course. It is unique in its mandate to consider ageing issues from a broad range of important perspectives, including those of financial, physical, psychological, and social wellness. The NIA is also focused on leading cross-disciplinary research to better understand the issues that can lead to the development of evidence-informed actionable insights that can meaningfully contribute towards shaping the innovative policies, practices and products that will be needed to address the multiple challenges and opportunities presented by Canada's coming of age. The NIA is committed to providing national leadership and promoting a collaborative approach that also seeks to continually establish municipal, provincial, federal and global partnerships with other academic centres, and other ageing-related organizations.

To learn more about the NIA visit our website at <http://www.ryerson.ca/nia> and follow us on Twitter @RyersonNIA

For more information, contact Allan McKee, Communications Officer, National Institute on Ageing | Phone: 416-586-4800 ext. 5845 | Email: Allan.McKee@sinaihealthsystem.ca

Or

Michael Nicin, Executive Director, National Institute on Ageing | Phone: 647-678-0757 | Email: Michael.nicin@ryerson.ca