



The English Speaking Catholic Council

Le conseil catholique d'expression anglaise

Seniors are an asset for Quebec

The fact that Quebec is an aging society is widely accepted. The economic consequences of this aspect of public life are discussed regularly and the implications for policy areas like immigration are the focus of much debate. However, one of the most basic policy questions that our aging population creates is the simple one of how well this growing number of Quebec seniors is living. Too often, public debate frames their growing presence and needs as burdens on society rather than as assets.

That's why the Quebec government's initiative to hold public hearings on how to satisfy the needs of an aging population is to be applauded. This consultation is sponsored by Quebec's Minister Responsible for Seniors, Marguerite Blais, and is being chaired by two recognized experts, Sheila Goldbloom and Réjean Hébert. The English Speaking Catholic Council (ESCC) is an enthusiastic participant in this forum on the needs of senior citizens.

Since its earliest days, the ESCC has identified the situation and interests of seniors as particular concerns. The care of seniors, especially the frail elderly, is a moral and social imperative for us. Over the years, our community has created a number of specialized institutions and services for seniors, most of which are now integrated into Quebec's public system of care.

To prepare for these hearings, the ESCC gathered a panel of community-based experts, volunteer leaders and concerned citizens in the field of aging. They identified three key principles on which to build successful reform of care for seniors:

- 1) The recognition of the value of the individual person and the protection of the dignity of each individual as he or she ages. Respect for the dignity of the whole person has an important language dimension because the quality of care a

person receives is linked directly to the capacity for clear communication between health professionals and their patients or clients. Respect for the dignity of the person must also take into account the spiritual dimension of individual well being.

- 2) The celebration of the wisdom and experience of seniors and their ability to enrich the lives of us all.
- 3) The identification of the willingness of younger generations to work with seniors to provide care, to protect dignity, and to promote as independent a life as possible for seniors as our greatest asset in addressing the challenges of aging in Quebec.

The ESCC consultation also identified a number of areas for further action that are detailed in the brief we presented at the hearings and a number of specific recommendations for immediate attention by the Minister Responsible for Seniors and the Government of Quebec have also been developed. The full brief is available at the ESCC's website, www.catholiccentre.ca/esccl.

Among our recommendations for immediate action are:

- a call to protect seniors against abuse, with a special concern for the rights of the frail elderly in long-term care institutions, including a recommendation to develop a formal bill of rights to adequate care.
- a demand to protect and expand the English language capacity of institutions that have traditionally served English-speaking communities,
- a proposal to create a comprehensive information service for seniors and their caregivers, perhaps modeled on Info-Santé, and focusing both on seniors and their caregivers,

- a challenge to structure the health and social services system to take much greater responsibility for the coordination of care for seniors as is currently done with medical services in hospital settings,
- a recommendation to expand the benefits of co-operative and not-for-profit housing models for more seniors and to enhance consumer information and protection resources in the growing for-profit seniors housing market,
- a demand to increase resources available for assisted transport, to leverage the contribution of thousands of volunteers to the well-being of seniors, and
- a warning to recognize the need to invest in the recruitment, training and retention of health care givers specialized in geriatrics.

The challenge of living with an aging population and ensuring the well being of senior citizens is already upon us as a society. We encourage the Minister Responsible for Seniors and the Government of Quebec to move decisively to address the issues that have been raised through the Consultation on Seniors' Living Conditions. Our seniors must be recognized for what they are – a source of enrichment for all Quebecers.

Clifford Lincoln, President

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