

Why Dementia Matters in this Election

As someone who has worked in the field of dementia for many years, I look ahead to the future with a mix of hope and concern. Hope, because the Calgary community truly is one that lifts one another up when times are hard. Concern, because drastic measures are needed now to prepare for the impending impact on our community, our healthcare system and our economy.

17,000 Calgarians are living with dementia (Alzheimer's disease being one type), and this number is set to double over the next decade. The Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS) tells us that one in five baby boomers will be affected by dementia. Age is the biggest risk factor; none of us can avoid this reality. (In some rare types of dementia, there is a genetic link, but this makes up only a small percent of cases.) And women, unfortunately, are disproportionately affected.

Clearly, this is a non-partisan issue that will affect us all. So what can we do about it?

It's my sincerest wish that, on April 16, whichever party forms government will immediately get to work to address this critical issue.

For starters, the government can commit to the provincial Dementia Strategy. We are hearing from families that this is what they want. Real commitment and investment. The Alberta Dementia Strategy & Action Plan (ADSAP) was released in 2017 – its vision, a future where impacted Albertans are valued and supported from onset to end-of-life.

The strategy has been a good starting point. And more is needed, now, to ensure its fulfillment. For its vision to be realized, it must be resourced appropriately to work with communities around sustainable solutions.

Columnist Catherine Ford recently cautioned that “politicians neglect growing needs for seniors care at our peril.” And the CAHS describes many “still experiencing limited access to dementia assessment and services, fragmented care and inappropriate end-of-life care.”

Having more long-term care beds appears in most platforms and fills a critical need. However, it does not address all of the complexities around dementia. (Further, I implore politicians to rethink their use of the outdated term ‘beds’. This issue is not about beds – it is about people.)

We know that our current care models don't meet current needs. The solutions we need will require an ‘all-hands-on-deck’ approach. The cost of dementia care is high and anticipated to increase significantly. In 2011, annual dementia care costs were \$8.3

billion for Canadians. In just 12 years from now, that number will double to a staggering \$16.6 billion.

There is even more of a financial toll when you consider that many people leave paying jobs in order to care for a family member, as most people with dementia live at home. In 2011, family caregivers in Canada provided 19.2 million unpaid hours of care, this number is also expected to double to 38.4 million hours by 2031.

Stigma also prevents people from accessing care and engaging with the community. People need help navigating the healthcare system. And they would benefit from a relationship-based model of care.

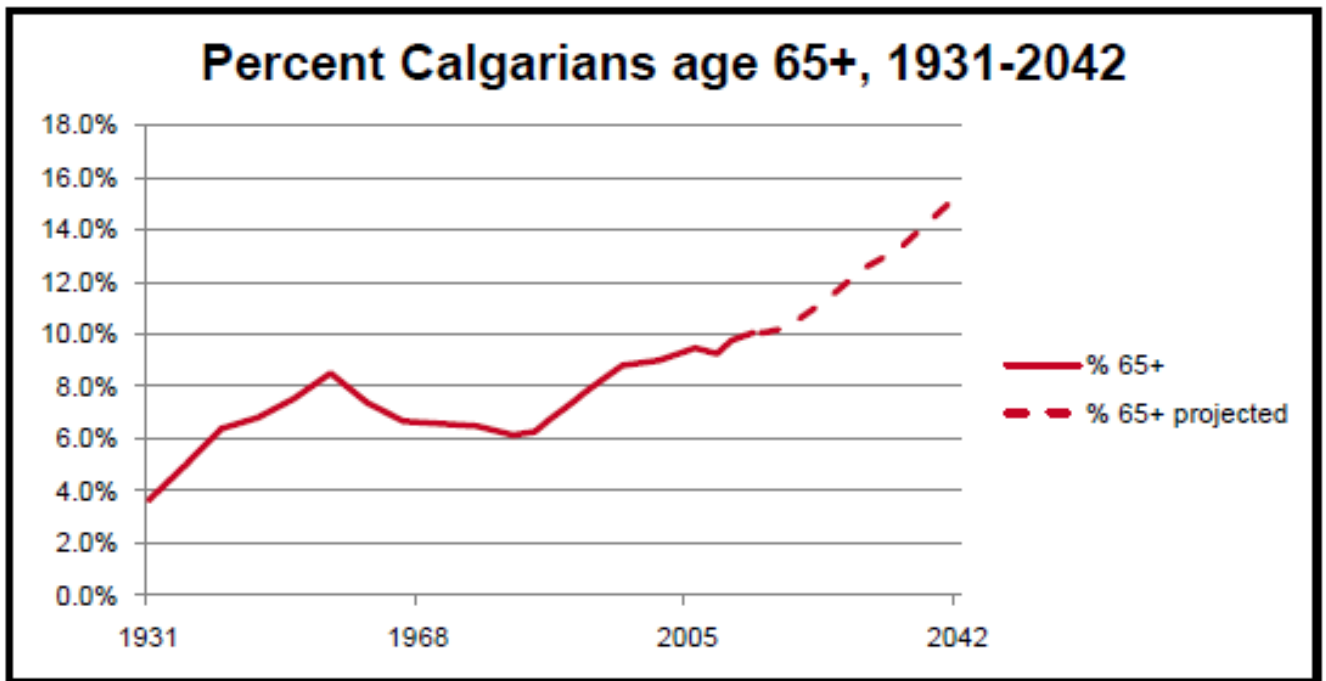
Alzheimer Society of Calgary and Dementia Network Calgary have established some of the initial groundwork and visioning for a different future state of dementia care for the Calgary community.

The economy is the number one issue in this election. Dementia care is an economic issue and it is also a health and social issue. One that affects local families, like yours and mine. Everyone can take one small step today. I urge you to ask your candidate about their plans for tackling dementia care and hold them accountable.

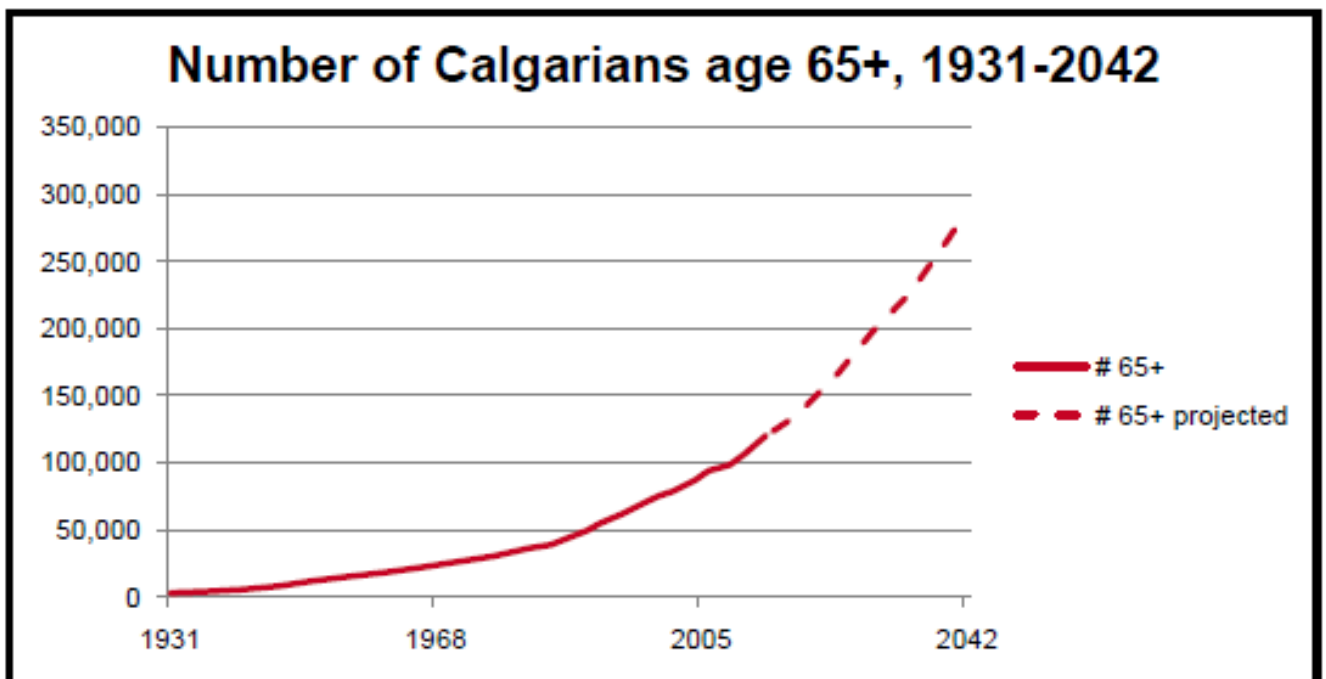
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Calgary Seniors = ■ Calgary = ■

POPULATION (continued)



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1931-1981; City of Calgary, City of Calgary Civic Census 1984 - 2014; City of Calgary, Corporate Economics Population Projections 2014 - 2042.



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