

## Saskatchewan Provincial Budget 2017-18 Concerns and questions raised by the Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM)

SSM is concerned about how some aspects of the recent Saskatchewan Provincial Budget may affect older adults. We encourage older adults and others around the province to consider the changes being made as a result of this budget, to ask questions about it, and to raise concerns.

Age-Friendly Communities, an initiative supported by SSM, encourages older adults to be involved in decision making in their communities, and encourages government leaders at all levels to take seriously the opinions of older adults. Age-Friendly, a global movement started by the World Health Organization, promotes healthy, accessible, inclusive communities where people of all ages are listened to, respected and valued.

Addressing the current provincial deficit is important. However, it is equally important to ensure that the needs of the people of Saskatchewan, particularly the most vulnerable, are being met. Our measure as a society comes from our ability to provide for a good quality of life for our citizens. Not all decisions can be made based on financial cost – the cost to our physical, mental and spiritual health must also be taken into account.

The following are some of the areas SSM has questions and concerns about. We look to our Provincial Government to ensure these concerns are addressed.

### 1. **Funding for health care services**

Good health is key to being able to live a full and active life. To maintain good health requires access to a variety of services as part of our health care system or at affordable costs.

Many older adults have fixed incomes not protected from inflation and cost increases. The recent provincial budget has made significant changes to funding that may affect the health and wellbeing of older adults and others.

Included in the changes are:

- Increased long term care charges
- Loss of funding support for chiropractor services
- Loss of support for hearing aid and podiatry services
- Introduction of PST on health insurance premiums
- Uncertainty about service levels with the merger of the health regions

How can people on fixed incomes, including many older adults, afford important services that are going to be eliminated or cost more?

## 2. Reduction of Hospital Chaplaincy Services

Overall health and wellbeing includes access to spiritual care. People in hospitals, and their family, are usually stressed and often facing a time of crisis in their lives. Some of these people are not regularly associated with any faith community, or may be a long way from their home faith community. Government supported chaplaincy services ensure that spiritual support is available to all people in hospital and their families. Government supported chaplaincy services also help to provide the listing of names of those in hospital who want spiritual care from local faith visitors.

How will the health and wellbeing of the whole person be provided for including spiritual care?

## 3. Loss of STC Bus Service

Transportation is an essential service for people to allow them to access services, participate in the life of their communities, and stay connected with family and friends.

Transportation needs change for many older adults. Driving may be restricted. Mobility issues may affect walking. Connecting to services requires affordable, appropriate transportation.

With STC service no longer available, how will the provincial government address the need to provide the valuable services STC has offered.

These include:

- Transportation to appointments e.g. medical
- Transportation to access services only available in another centre
- Accessible, affordable transportation, particularly for people in rural communities
- Freight service e.g. cancer medications to be administered locally for those too frail to travel
- Transportation of library books for the interlibrary loan system
- Providing the sole public transportation option in many areas

How will the gaps created by ending STC services be addressed?

## 4. Reduction in Funding for Library Services

Older adults can become isolated due to ageism, chronic health problems, lack of transportation, low income, living at a distance from family, and critical life transitions.

Libraries provide a valuable service that assists in reducing isolation of older adults. Library materials help older adults stay connected with current issues in the world, and provide a source of education and entertainment. Libraries are places where older adults can learn about and try out technology. Local libraries often provide programming that helps build stronger community connections for older adults and others.

How will the loss of these valuable services that libraries provide be addressed?

## 5. **Increases in PST**

For older adults on low and/or fixed incomes, increases in the costs of goods and services can have a significant effect on their ability to access some of the things essential to their lives. It can also mean having to cut back on the sort of activities that help increase their quality of life.

How will the most vulnerable people in our society, including some older adults, be protected in the light of increases in taxes?

## 6. **Reduced Funding for Communities**

Strong communities ensure a healthy population and high quality of life. The loss of SaskPower and SaskEnergy payments in lieu from local communities has left many communities struggling to address this reduction in resources.

The shortfall in funding to communities is likely to result in:

- Reduced services
- Increased taxes

With reduced funding, how will communities be able to provide necessary services to sustain healthy, vibrant communities?

### **To the Provincial Government**

SSM is asking the Provincial Government to reconsider some of the actions in the provincial budget, or to look at ways to address the shortfall in needed services created by the budget. This will ensure that the wellbeing of all people in the province, including older adults, is maintained.

### **To Older Adults**

SSM is encouraging older adults around the province to make their views known by contacting their MLA.

The following petitions are also available for those who wish to make their views known in this way:

Libraries – asking the government to renew its commitment to the invaluable programming, education opportunities, and public spaces our libraries provide across this province, and restore the \$4.8 million in funding for public libraries that was cut in the 2017-2018 budget.  
<https://friendsofrpl.ca/2017/03/28/save-sask-libraries-petition/>

STC – asking the government to immediately stop the plan to scrap and sell-off the Saskatchewan Transportation Company and to resume transportation services to the people of Saskatchewan.  
<http://www.saskndp.ca/stc>