

# THE IMPENDING WAVE

by LAURA DASILVA

## SENIORS + DEMENTIA

Mobilizing policymakers and stakeholders 'critical' to addressing influx of dementia cases among seniors

**A TIDAL WAVE** of dementia is about to engulf Canada's aging population.

Today, 747,000 Canadians are living with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. This number is expected to increase to 1.4 million by end of 2031, according to Alzheimer Society of Canada (ASC).

Annual costs of dementia will increase from \$33 billion today to \$293 billion by 2040 says ASC, posing an overwhelming threat to the country's health-care system and economy.

Mimi Lowi-Young, the CEO of ASC, is pushing for a national dementia strategy that will prevent persons living with dementia and their caregivers from being pulled into the undertow of this wave.

She calls dementia a "non-partisan issue and health priority" and has asked the main political parties to include a national dementia strategy in their platforms leading up to the Oct. 19 federal election. ASC also just launched its 'Raise your Voice' civic engagement campaign to encourage those affected by dementia to speak to candidates about why a national strategy is so critical.

With just under a month to go until voting day, the NDP have pledged to invest \$40 million over four years in a Canada-wide strategy, focusing on screening, diagnosis, support and research. The Green Party, through its National Seniors Strategy, has also committed to a national plan for dementia - though no funding details have been announced.

Currently, Canada is the only G7 country without a national plan in

place. Earlier this year, a single vote could have changed that.

On May 6, Nickel Belt MP Claude Gravelle tabled private member's Bill C-356 *Respecting a National Strategy for Dementia*. The bill was defeated in a vote of 140 to 139 in the House of Commons after Liberal MP Yvonne Jones failed to stand up and register her vote.

"It was heartbreaking to see we lost this very important strategy because one Liberal MP was not paying attention," Gravelle said.

The deciding vote could have also come from Conservative MP Joe Preston who initially voted in favour, but then changed his vote to a nay.

Gravelle was inspired to champion a strategy after watching his mother battle Alzheimer's disease until her death in 2003.

"When my mom had dementia, we didn't know enough," he said. "We didn't understand it and at the time we thought it was just age. But it's not age, it's a disease."

Though she voted against Gravelle's bill, in October 2014 Health Minister Rona Ambrose announced \$31.5 million in funding for Alzheimer's research and committed to working toward a national strategy to fight the "impending loom" of dementia.

**THE 2015 FEDERAL BUDGET** includes a commitment to continue supporting innovation in health care and dementia research. The government proposes to provide up to \$42

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## SENIORS + DEMENTIA

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Photo/ALLEN AGOSTINO

Mimi Lowi-Young is CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

## 6 objectives for a national strategy on dementia

According to Mimi Lowi-Young, Alzheimer Society of Canada CEO, key objectives of a national dementia strategy should include:

- 1 Increasing investment in research, fostering collaboration and improving knowledge exchange and translation.
- 2 Providing a surveillance system and evidence-based information on all aspects of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to inform best practices.
- 3 Enhancing the competency and capacity of those delivering dementia care.
- 4 Increasing awareness about dementia risk factors, early diagnosis and timely interventions.
- 5 Strengthening the integration and co-ordination of care and service delivery across the health-care continuum.
- 6 Recognizing family caregiver needs and developing supports that provide options and flexibility. **To learn more, visit [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)**

## AT THE TABLE



Photo/KEVIN BARRIE

Mary Beth Wighton at 2014 Walk for Alzheimer's in Kitchener.

## DEMENTIA ADVISORY GROUP GIVES A VOICE TO THOSE AFFECTED

A fervent group of people living with dementia is out to prove life does not end with a diagnosis.

The Ontario Dementia Advisory Group (ODAG) was formed in 2014 with the purpose of giving people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias a voice in shaping Ontario's health-care policy.

The five-member group is erasing the assumption that people living with dementia are unable to communicate their needs, wants and perspectives. They are working with the provincial government to develop an Ontario dementia strategy that will impact the province's aging population.

Mary Beth Wighton is a retired owner of a recruiting firm. She was diagnosed with probable frontotemporal dementia in 2012 at age 45. As a member of ODAG, she shares the triumphs and challenges she faces with her partner and daughter through writing and speaking engagements. Here's what she has to say:

“If you don't hear it from the people experiencing it, they just become numbers on a spreadsheet.”

“Wouldn't you rather put in a ramp and some dementia-friendly devices in a home, than put someone in a room?”

“As soon as you switch from your home into long-term care, your finances are out the window.”



Read the full story online at [yorkregion.com/dementia](http://yorkregion.com/dementia)