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Making progress for seniors

Dear editor:

Over this past year, as the government has implemented Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, it has become clear just how important seniors are in building this province, this country and our communities.

Premier Wynne has been a vocal advocate for seniors and has placed a special emphasis on keeping seniors healthy and in their homes longer.

Ontario is currently home to approximately two million people over the age of 65. Over the next two decades, the number of seniors in North America is projected to more than double. Seniors have much to offer ? they play an active and important role in our province's communities and economy.

We've seen that isolation is a problem seniors face, especially in rural communities. Together we are working with communities to help seniors remain engaged.

Through the Action Plan, the government is addressing the challenges and opportunities of an aging population. This is why we introduced the Ontario Seniors Grant to offer more opportunities for seniors to participate in their communities. We also released the Age-Friendly Community Planning Guide to help municipalities create environments that support independent and active living.

In partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, our government launched the Finding Your Way program last year. The first of its kind in Canada, the program offers a range of tools to help reduce the risk of wandering and going missing for people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias who live at home.

Through the Retirement Homes Act our government is also taking strong action to protect seniors living in retirement homes. The first provincial protections for seniors living in Ontario's retirement homes continue to be implemented. Over the past year, new requirements came into effect, including additional annual staff training, a formal complaints process, police background checks for retirement home staff and volunteers, and mandatory extra expense insurance for retirement homes to ensure coverage of residents' accommodation and care costs during most emergencies.

In addition, responsibility for Ontario's 270 Elderly Persons Centres, which provide social and recreational programs that promote wellness for seniors, will be transferred from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to the Ontario Seniors Secretariat on April 1, 2014. Elderly Persons Centres will benefit from the close relationship they share with the Seniors Secretariat. The centres regularly host local seniors` fairs and over the last year 10,000 seniors have directly benefits from attending these fairs.

Our government continues to work with municipalities, seniors' organizations, and other community partners, to help ensure the programs and services available address seniors' needs and reach the people who need them. For more information please visit http://news.ontario.ca/oss/en/2014/01/progress-for-ontario-seniors.html

Mario Sergio,

Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs