



RTOERO urges Canadians to speak with one voice this election on issues of dignity, survival

Toronto, August 30, 2021 – RTOERO is sounding the alarm on issues of dignity and survival during the federal election campaign. This week, it launched a digital campaign urging Canadians to speak with one voice on three critical issues: environmental stewardship, geriatric healthcare and seniors strategy.

The campaign invites Canadians to send a letter to their candidates asking for their positions on the issues. The campaign website is vibrantvoices.ca/federal. A social media campaign will run featuring the [campaign video called One voice](#).

Quotations

“If dignity and survival aren’t at the core of all decision-making now, with the breadth of our knowledge and resources, then it calls into question our character and ethics as humans,” says Rich Prophet, RTOERO chair of the board. “By speaking with one voice on critical issues, our hope is we can drive home for candidates that we expect compassionate leadership and real action.”

“The response to the pandemic shows that we can work together to drive massive change,” says Jim Grieve, CEO of RTOERO. “That’s what we need now to secure a sustainable, flourishing future for every Canadian.”

Resources for media

Op-ed articles

RTOERO has prepared the following op-ed articles on its three focus issues for the election. Media is invited to use the articles with an RTOERO byline or repurpose the content in other ways. If publishing as op-ed articles, the byline can be Rich Prophet, RTOERO chair, and Jim Grieve, CEO of RTOERO.

- [It’s time for national pharmacare](#)
- [Canadians deserve a dignified and financially secure retirement](#)
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White papers

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About RTOERO

RTOERO is a bilingual trusted voice on healthy, active living in the retirement journey for the broader education community. With 81,000+ members in 51 districts across Canada, RTOERO is the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education retirees. It welcomes members who work in or are retired from the early years, schools and school boards, post-secondary and any other capacity in education.

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Federal election 2021 op-ed – pharmacare

It's time for national pharmacare

The pandemic has revealed much about health inequities. Certain segments of the population have been harder hit.

There's another health system issue that puts most Canadians at a disadvantage. Canada is the only country in the world that has universal health care but that doesn't also provide universal drug coverage.

Think about it. We have access to doctors and diagnoses without being out of pocket. But we don't have the same access to the medications that might be needed from those recommendations.

During this federal election campaign, the need for a national pharmacare program should be one of the hot button issues.

Canadians consistently pay among the highest prices for prescription drugs. Ten per cent of our citizens do not have adequate coverage to meet their needs. One in four households can't afford to fill their prescriptions.

Pharmacare is now fragmented, with a few provinces offering some drug coverage. We're left with a patchwork of over 100 public prescription drug plans and 100,000 private plans – confusing and incomplete.

The solution demands a national initiative. The economic case is clear. Universal coverage would be cost-effective, centralizing infrastructure and providing Canada with superior leverage for negotiating drug prices.

National pharmacare would also allow for better monitoring of medications, and reduce the burden on other parts of the health care system. For instance, one in six hospitalizations could be avoided if prescription drugs were used more appropriately

RTOERO is a trusted voice for healthy, active living in retirement. We are the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education community retirees. Pharmacare is of prime importance to our 81,000-plus members, and to Canadians of all ages and stages.

Politicians have been talking about a national pharmacare program for decades. It's past time for any party that wants to form a government to commit to how they would

implement or accelerate national pharmacare, over what period, and they would cooperate with the provinces to make such a program work.

We want to see a national health plan that ensures access to the medications that are essential to our well-being. So that we can have a healthier population and cut costs too. And so that anyone who is financially strapped doesn't have to choose between purchasing the necessities of everyday life or medical prescriptions.



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Federal election op-ed – environment

Environment isn't an election issue – it's about our survival

Election cycles are short, and the issue-of-the-day can hit at immediate concerns. The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, health care, jobs and the cost of living are all, understandably, top of mind. Yet a sustainable future, for Canadians and our planet, depends on environmental stewardship. That's what will ensure our long term well-being.

Climate change, air quality, water quality, bio-diversity loss and pollution can be intimidating concepts. And the news can be disheartening.

This July was the hottest month in recorded history. Here in Canada, wildfires have been worse than ever, and the connection to climate change is clear. And in August, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said it's "unequivocal" that human activity is driving climate change, and is affecting the Earth – our oceans, atmosphere, ice and biosphere – in a manner that's "widespread and rapid".

While the harm is daunting, progress is possible. That's why the environment is one of the core advocacy issues for RTOERO. We're a trusted voice for healthy, active living in retirement. Our 81,000-plus members believe in the power of our community to secure a better future, and understand that the health of our environment is paramount to that.

The response to the pandemic shows that we can drive massive change with the right leadership. During this federal election campaign we want to focus on four environmental areas where we can make a difference.

One, environmentally-sustainable transportation.

Transportation accounts for about one-quarter of Canada's carbon emissions. As our population and economy grows, so do the number of vehicles on our roads. Progressive government policies can drive more sustainable transportation, i.e. electric vehicles, cleaner public transport, clean fuel standards, biking, etc.

Two, plastics.

In 2020, the federal government announced a ban of six single-use plastic items (grocery bags, straws, stir sticks, cutlery, six-pack rings and food containers made from hard-to-recycle plastics), to be phased out by 2022. Still, the ban leaves out a huge

chunk of plastics we actually use everyday. We need a government approach to manage the entire life cycle of plastics.

Three, common recycling standards.

With all the recycling efforts made by municipalities and companies, there's much room to improve. For instance, Deloitte reports that just 9% of the plastic waste generated annually in Canada is recycled. One hurdle to greater progress: the lack of a harmonized approach across jurisdictions.

Government policies or incentives can help us move from a linear economy (ongoing consumption of resources) to a circular one (reusing resources). Other steps can help us to increase the recycling rate, and lower contamination rates, i.e. non-recyclable material in the recycling system.

Four, safe water supply.

Our freshwater resources are a national treasure. The Great Lakes, for instance, holds over 20% of the entire world's surface freshwater. Pollution and misuse threatens that. Meanwhile, while urban centres enjoy access to clean water, several First Nations communities across Canada often face drinking water advisories.

Legislation and changes in business practices both have a role in protecting our freshwater sources. We also need to upgrade water systems and alleviate the drinking water crisis in First Nations communities right now.

A sustainable future depends on responsible use of resources, conservation and protecting our air, land and water. Individuals, companies and industry groups all have a part to play in environmental stewardship, and so does government.

We need to hold government accountable to maintain the viability of our ecosystems for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.



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Federal election op-ed – income security

Canadians deserve a dignified and financially secure retirement

Statistics Canada estimates that 12% of senior families are considered low income, and that 28.5% of single seniors qualify as low income — that's 600,000 Canadian seniors living in poverty.

Increases to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security program (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) are all steps in the right direction. However, more needs to be done. For many people, CPP and OAS don't cover living expenses, and OAS can be clawed back.

Throughout the pandemic, when many Canadians have been hard hit financially, there has been talk about a universal basic income. While that's worthy of discussion, what's clear is that Canada's older adult population, in particular, needs basic rights ensured in terms of income.

During this federal election campaign, we should be talking about defined benefit (DB) pensions. With DB plans, employers and employees contribute to a pension fund, which is pooled and invested. Retirees are then paid a specific amount, for the rest of their lives, using a formula that usually considers years of employment and salary.

These are the pensions as we traditionally think about them. However, the rate of individuals covered by a DB pension continues to decline across the country.

RTOERO is a trusted voice for healthy, active living in retirement. A financially secure retirement is of prime importance to our 81,000-plus members, and to all older Canadians.

No employer, in either the public or private sector, should be allowed to change the compensation promised to employees once they have retired. A pension is a commitment. Employees provide their service while making contributions into a pension plan, and employers compensate them in retirement with deferred wages. Employees and pensioners trust their employers to honour their pension promises.

Governments must commit to better public policy to: 1) safeguard accrued benefits; and 2) protect employees and retirees ensnared in corporate insolvencies?

When properly managed, DB pensions are the best way to ensure retirement income security. Up to 80% of all pension dollars spent come from investment returns, which are then pumped right back into local economies.

Supporting and strengthening DB pensions is a way to help our seniors, and ensure that they can continue to contribute meaningfully to local and national economies and communities.

Canadians deserve a secure retirement, with a guaranteed and sufficient source of income. That will ensure that they can afford to enjoy a healthy, active and dignified retirement.