

## Summary

Although researchers have been warning of the aging of Canada's population for decades, governments do not yet have an overarching policy strategy to deal with the profound, long-term socio-economic implications of this demographic shift, let alone its more immediate impact on seniors' care. This study by Harvey Lazar is premised on the current imbalance between the demand for and supply of care for seniors, the expectation this imbalance will grow and the need to re-evaluate the federal government's policy role in this regard.

Formally, the constitutional responsibility for seniors' care rests with provincial/territorial governments. However, both they and the federal government play an important role. While the provinces/territories plan, manage, and oversee the delivery of health care and social services, federal pension and income support programs for seniors and transfer payments to the provinces for health and social services have a significant influence on the availability and accessibility of seniors' care. And in the context of an aging population, with the resulting labour shortages and mounting pressures on the health care system, Ottawa is likely to be called upon to do more.

Lazar examines the federal government's present role in care for seniors and its policy options for the future. He presents a full range of potential measures directed at both the demand and the supply sides of caregiving, and spanning the whole continuum of care from light to complex cases. He then assesses these options according to 1) whether they are compatible with the constitutional division of powers and functional intergovernmental relations, and 2) whether they constitute sound public policy based on 10 specific criteria and policy goals.

Lazar concludes that there are many degrees of policy freedom available to Ottawa to help address the growing and underfunded care needs of seniors, without undermining the leadership role of the provinces/territories in this area. While most of the measures he proposes are focused directly on seniors — to enhance their financial capacity to purchase the care services they need and provide insurance against catastrophic care costs — there are also some supply-side measures aimed at increasing caregiving capacity across the country.

Lazar points out that the next opportunity to make meaningful policy decisions on aging and care will be during the upcoming renegotiation of the health and social transfers due for renewal in 2014. In his view the onus is on the federal government to provide projections of seniors' care needs nationally and to articulate what future role it sees for itself, taking full account of how its interventions might influence the success of provincial care programs.