

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2020 Budget**

By: AGE-WELL NCE Inc.

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Main Recommendation: Continue funding AGE-WELL, Canada's technology and aging network, through the Networks of Centres of Excellence program (2020-2023) and provide ring-fence funding thereafter.

CONTEXT

Older Canadians are now the fastest growing segment of our population, as more baby boomers turn 65 in the coming years. According to recent demographic projections, one in five Canadians will be aged 65 or older by 2024.¹ This unprecedented demographic shift will present both challenges and opportunities, many of which we are just beginning to experience. In response to this change, the Government of Canada has taken steps to meet the needs of older adults. Still, there are growing needs and future opportunities for the federal government to support research and innovation in the field of technology and aging to ensure that older adults continue to lead healthy and independent lives.

With the recent launch of the National Dementia Strategy, the *Accessible Canada Act*, and various provincial and territorial seniors' strategies in the works, it is evident that the priorities and needs of older Canadians are being taken into consideration through policy and practice. As the implementation of these initiatives moves forward, we hope that this trend continues and is reflected in the 2020 Budget.

ABOUT AGE-WELL

AGE-WELL is Canada's technology and aging network. AGE-WELL is dedicated to the creation of technologies and services that benefit older adults and caregivers. Our aim is to help older Canadians maintain their independence, health and quality of life through technologies and services that increase their safety and security, support their independent living, and enhance their social participation.

AGE-WELL is developing practical technology-based solutions to address the challenges of an aging population including those who experience impairment, disability or illness, but AGE-WELL is more than just a technology research network. AGE-WELL shares ideas, concepts, and knowledge amongst all stakeholders—seniors, caregivers, industry, community, government, and researchers. AGE-WELL empowers individuals and groups to guide how social, economic, legal, and cultural issues related to digital technologies for seniors are addressed. By promoting diversity and equal opportunity we are especially able to amplify the voices of vulnerable populations such as those

¹ Statistics Canada. (2018). Canada's population estimates: Age and sex, July 1, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/190125/dq190125a-eng.pdf?st=38K06rR8>

with mild to severe cognitive impairment or dementia, as well as Indigenous communities across Canada.

Launched in 2015 through the federally-funded Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program, AGE-WELL addresses a wide range of complex issues in technology and aging through receptor-driven multidisciplinary research, training programs, partnerships, knowledge mobilization and the commercial development of technologies.

KEY CONSIDERATION FOR 2020 BUDGET

Minister Duncan announced in December 2018 the planned phase-out of the NCE program. We are actively applying for renewal of funding to build on our momentum beyond 2020, but our funding is not guaranteed. The winding down of the NCE program, which provides funding to *operate* national research and innovation networks in addition to supplying a source of R&D funding, will create a gap in the development and validation of innovative technologies that can improve the quality of life of older Canadians.

We recommend that the Government of Canada continues to demonstrate a commitment to seniors and their caregivers by investing further in accessibility and dementia research and the development of assistive devices and technology-based solutions by AGE-WELL. Renewing the network until 2023 and providing ring-fence funding, to an organization that has put Canada on the map as a leader in technology and aging, is paramount to ensuring that Canadian seniors live well and age well. The AGE-WELL network is a trusted group of experts that inform current and future policy initiatives to take a forward-thinking approach, which includes technology and innovation as part of the solution.

AGE-WELL'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AGE-WELL has built a unique pan-Canadian network that brings together seniors, caregivers, industry, community, government, and researchers to develop and deliver technology-based solutions to support healthy aging. Through our partnerships, we have leveraged federal funds at a rate of 1.5 to exceed, in four years, all of our initial targets as a network.

There are 99 technologies, services and policies/practices in AGE-WELL's innovation pipeline. These are practical products that address real-world challenges to help older Canadians maintain their independence, health and quality of life, and to help their caregivers in achieving this. AGE-WELL supports 28 startups that are commercializing products, creating wealth and generating more than 100 jobs.

With more than 700 trainees, AGE-WELL is preparing the next generation of researchers and entrepreneurs in technology and aging. Many of our trainees are already securing jobs in industry, academia, community organizations, and government.

It is increasingly being recognized that collaboration and interdisciplinarity in research creates knowledge that is better understood and applied. AGE-WELL is putting Canada at the forefront of the international AgingTech sector by leveraging partnerships between seniors, caregivers, industry, community, government, and researchers.

CANADA'S RESEARCH AGENDA FOR TECHNOLOGY AND AGING

AGE-WELL works across sectors to support the implementation of technology-based solutions and funds a dynamic program of research. In 2018, we launched eight Challenge Areas that will drive AGE-WELL's research and innovation agenda for 2020 and beyond. These Challenge Areas are a call to action and our foundation for a future national roadmap on technology and aging in Canada. They are a starting point for ongoing partnership and collaboration opportunities.

AGE-WELL will continue to drive innovation in the sector, influence policy and practice, and support R&D through strategic investments in the following eight Challenge Areas:

1. Supportive Homes & Communities
2. Health Care & Health Service Delivery
3. Autonomy & Independence
4. Cognitive Health & Dementia
5. Mobility & Transportation
6. Healthy Lifestyles & Wellness
7. Staying Connected
8. Financial Wellness & Employment

HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR AGE-WELL

AGE-WELL's eight Challenge Areas were a result of an extensive review and consultation process carried out with AGE-WELL members, partners, older Canadians, and caregivers; these Challenge Areas are representative of what is important to Canadians in the technology and aging space.

AGE-WELL is calling for a **National Seniors Strategy** that aligns with our eight Challenge Areas and emphasizes the role of technology research and innovation in this sector. There is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to leverage its existing investment in AGE-WELL to develop this strategy. AGE-WELL can provide access to over 4,700 older adults and caregivers engaged in network projects and activities.

Aside from healthcare system innovation, AGE-WELL is working on influencing policies and programs that improve the lives of older Canadians while also providing social and economic benefits to all Canadians. We were actively involved in the consultation

process for the **National Dementia Strategy**, and hope that our positive relationship with the federal government in the technology and aging space continues.

The National Dementia Strategy states that “new federal investments of \$70 million over 5 years will also help to ensure we make meaningful progress on the national objectives of this strategy.” Two key areas of focus in the strategy are to increase research and develop innovative and effective therapeutic approaches for dementia. AGE-WELL is actively doing this work and further funding would allow the network to continue accomplishments in this area that exemplify the full spirit of Canada’s National Dementia Strategy.

For example, our research agenda for 2020 and beyond includes Cognitive Health & Dementia as a key challenge area. AGE-WELL announced 25 core research projects in 2019, seven of which aim to support people with dementia in maintaining or improving their independence, safety, and overall wellbeing. Projects include new technology to monitor health data, social robots to increase social engagement for older adults, and advanced technologies to monitor pain behaviours and communicate needs to caregivers. These projects are already progressing along the innovation pipeline, with some of them being in the testing stage before moving to the market for wide-scale adoption.

AGE-WELL is also well positioned to help the federal government with the implementation of the **Accessible Canada Act** when it comes to defining a body of research and innovative technologies that are working today and can be scaled up. Network funding is essential in ensuring that assistive devices and accessibility research being done by AGE-WELL scientists can continue.

As Canada’s population demographics shift and older adults outnumber youth, there is an evident need to innovate our public healthcare system. Technological advancements offer solutions to many of the obstacles we are currently facing in making our public healthcare systems more efficient and equitable, especially when it comes to older adults and remote communities.

CONCLUSION

In order to continue making advancements in the AgingTech sector, we are asking the Government of Canada to provide ring-fence funding for AGE-WELL. Technology grants us with an unprecedented opportunity to improve the health of older adults and caregivers, create more sustainable healthcare solutions, and open up new possibilities for businesses and government. As an emerging sector that is quickly gaining traction, we hope that the federal government continues to stay committed to research and innovation in the technology and aging space, and that this commitment is adequately reflected in the 2020 Budget.