

Anticipating an Aging Alberta is a key platform of the Seniors Health Strategic Clinical Network. An aging population is having significant impacts on Alberta, including its health system. It is important that health system leaders recognize the importance of including the impacts of an aging population in all of our work, through the full spectrum of services from population and public health, to community based primary health care, to acute care, to long term and supportive living through to end-of-life care.

## **Public health, prevention, declining fertility rates and population aging**

Improved population health, prevention of avoidable causes of mortality in infancy, childhood and adulthood together have enabled survival of most of those born to reach old age. This together with declining fertility rates has resulted in unprecedented population aging in developed countries.

## **Growth in numbers of old and very old citizens in the next 20 years**

The number of seniors (age 65 and over) in Canada will double in the next 20 years. During the same time period the number of Canadians over 85 years of age will quadruple.

## **Dementia and frailty are:**

### **1. Major causes of disability in old age**

Dementia and frailty in old age alone or in combination with other chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes and musculoskeletal disorders are the major causes of disability in old age.

### **2. Under recognized and underreporting**

Dementia and delirium are under-recognized and under-documented across healthcare settings. Delirium is a medical emergency, often occurring in individuals with previously unrecognized dementia that requires prompt attention to identify underlying causes and effective treatment. These conditions are related to increased visits to emergency department, acute care hospital admissions, prolonged length of stay and to discharge destinations other than that prior to admission.

### **3. Expensive**

Dementia has recently been recognized the most costly chronic disease. Dementia costs more to American society than heart disease and cancer!

## **Frailty is an important health issue for older Albertans**

Other healthcare systems have recognized the impact of frailty on hospital admissions and the development of avoidable functional losses during hospital care. A systematic assessment for frailty in hospital admissions of older persons together with prompt implementation of interventions designed to reduce nosocomial-acquired disability is required. A Canadian National Centre of Excellence—the Canadian Frailty Network has been established with participation of members of Strategic Clinical Networks in Alberta to advance recognition and care of older persons with frailty (see: [www.cfn-nce.ca](http://www.cfn-nce.ca))

References available on request