



The Government of Canada and Elder Abuse: Breaking the Silence  
Speaking Notes  
The Government of Canada and Elder Abuse: Breaking the Silence  
Notes for Address by  
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Good afternoon everyone, bienvenue.

I am pleased to be here today to announce measures that my colleagues in Cabinet and I hope will make a real difference in the lives of Canadian seniors.

So many of you have travelled from outside the capital, and indeed, from outside the country to be here.

You recognize that elder abuse is a serious problem, and you're determined to do something about it.

I thank you for your commitment, and I feel privileged to be with you this afternoon.

I would like to thank the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and its partners for organizing this conference to coincide with World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Elizabeth, Gloria, Lynn, Lia, thank you.

Being here today reminds me of my work with Mothers Against Drunk Driving and how critically important it is to bring difficult issues out into the open and make a difference.

My work with MADD taught me how challenging it can be to get people to discuss deeply personal issues.

It also convinced me of the necessity of raising awareness in order to change attitudes, and increase prevention.

I think everyone here today would agree that raising awareness of elder abuse is the key to its prevention.

The more Canadians and others become aware of the existence of elder abuse, the more they will recognize it as a problem, and start working toward solutions.

That is what this conference is all about, and that is why I am here today.

Caregivers, people in law enforcement, health professionals, and seniors themselves have told our Government that elder abuse remains largely hidden behind closed doors because many seniors who experience abuse feel embarrassed, isolated or afraid to speak out.

I am here today to say—no longer.

Today I am pleased to announce that the Government of Canada will launch a national, multimedia public awareness campaign to break down the wall of silence that surrounds elder abuse, and show seniors and those that work with seniors that abuse cannot, and will not be tolerated, and that help is available.

Through this awareness campaign we hope to change the attitudes of Canadians, especially family members and care providers who care for seniors on a regular basis—

Raise awareness so seniors understand that help exists in communities across Canada; and—

Take action to support victims, their families, and give those who care for seniors the tools necessary to better detect the problem.

I will speak in greater detail about this exciting campaign in a few minutes, but first let me say a few words on why taking action on elder abuse is so important for our Government.

As everyone here knows, elder abuse involves the betrayal of trust: between spouses, between parents and children, between a senior and a caregiver, or a fraudster or a scam artist.

As academics, advocates, community leaders, and elected officials, we know that elder abuse comes in many ugly forms: physical, financial, emotional, psychological, even sexual.

And we know that it happens, because we hear about it all the time. For example, it has been reported that

- a recently married 79 year old Edmonton man was left financially stranded after having his life savings drained by his 50 year old wife;
- a mentally exhausted 53 year old caregiver in Nova Scotia physically assaulted his 98 year old mother, stating simply that he “cracked” from the stress of looking after her;
- a 53 year old room cleaner at a Quebec retirement home is facing several theft and fraud-related charges after stealing the bank card from a room she was cleaning and robbing the resident of her life savings; and
- an investigation team was called in to inspect a long-term care centre in Alberta after an 89 year old woman was deliberately given improper medication and hospitalized for dehydration.

Let me be clear: elder abuse is a serious crime.

It is happening in communities across Canada.

And it is allowed to continue because of a wall of silence that prevents seniors and those who care for seniors from speaking out.

Our Government intends to break down this wall of silence.

We will show seniors that elder abuse exists, that it is not tolerated, and that there is help available.

In Budget 2008, our Government announced that we will be committing \$13 million over three years to combat elder abuse.

Today, I am announcing the Government of Canada will be launching a nation-wide public awareness campaign to “rip the tape” from the mouths of victims of elder abuse and break the silence.

We will also be supporting frontline workers: caregivers, community organizations, law enforcement—in other words: people who work with seniors on a daily basis—by providing them with the tools necessary to recognize the signs of elder abuse. With support, they will be in a better position to point seniors to where help is available.

Our public awareness campaign will begin on October 1, International Day of Older Persons.

We hope to find ways to not only help victims, but prevent elder abuse before it happens.

I say this because we are already learning that the key to prevention is public awareness.

Recently our officials have had the benefit of being a part of exciting new research on elder abuse commissioned by the Government of Canada.

In the last several months we have polled Canadians and asked them for their views on elder abuse, and what we as public policy makers should do about it. The findings are compelling.

The vast majority of Canadians we polled believe that elder abuse is hidden or goes largely undetected.

Canadians overwhelmingly believe that family members, seniors’ organizations, governments at all levels, and law enforcement have an important role to play.

Nearly one quarter of Canadians polled believe they know of a senior who might be experiencing some form of abuse.

And finally, 9 out of every 10 Canadians we polled told us that raising awareness among seniors about their right to live safely and securely is the most important issue for governments when it comes to elder abuse.

The results are clear. Our findings have told us that Canadians want government to do something about this. Support needs to be provided to front line workers—medical organizations, the RCMP and local police forces, seniors' organizations – to give them the tools necessary to make a difference. And the key, first and foremost, is to have governments showing leadership and raising awareness.

To many of you in the room today, this will not come as a surprise.

As experts, you know that the data on elder abuse is limited. You know that it is often difficult to get an accurate picture of the problem because so few seniors are willing to speak out.

You know that many seniors do not report abuse because they are ashamed. Or afraid. Or isolated. Or unwilling to create friction within their families.

We need to break that silence.

I invite all of you to discuss these findings and have a look at some of the proposed concepts for our public awareness campaign at our conference booth. I welcome your comments.

These new investments will complement other measures already being put in place by our Government to improve the safety and security of our seniors.

In the Speech from the Throne our Government committed itself to combating elder abuse and fraud.

In October, Rob Nicholson, Minister of Justice, introduced Bill C-27, to protect Canadians, including seniors, from identity theft.

Identity theft is a serious criminal activity that is more lucrative now than ever before.

This legislation will give police and law enforcement officials the tools they need to fight the criminals and scam artists who are doing irreparable damage to Canadians, particularly seniors.

Our Government, led by Minister Nicholson, has also introduced changes to improve the Youth Criminal Justice System , which, for example, will hold young offenders accountable for serious crimes with meaningful consequences. We have tabled legislation to crack down on serious drug crime, and implemented mandatory prison sentences and reverse onus on bail for serious gun crimes.

These changes will make our communities safer for Canadians, and safer for seniors.

As all of you know, we have also expanded and improved the New Horizons for Seniors Program, to help organizations raise awareness of elder abuse at the community level.

Our National Seniors Council has travelled the country and met with seniors and seniors groups. The Council's recommendations formed the foundation of the investment I've announced today.

During this conference many of you will hear updates from officials on our work to advance the Madrid Action Plan, as well as our F/P/T forum led by the federal government on financial abuse of seniors. Our friends at Justice Canada, and the Public Health Agency also have a crucial role to play.

We are working with our partners to improve the lives of seniors in real, tangible ways, and I hope that each and every one of you here feel that you are an important part of this.

Seniors have invested so much in Canada, and that's why our Government is working hard to invest in seniors and in their communities. But this work is impossible without the personal investments of each of you.

Thank you again to our conference organizers for hosting me this afternoon. And thank you to everyone for being here. If there are any questions, I invite you to join me shortly where I will be available to answer your questions and questions from media.

Thank you, merci.