Aging in Canada
Chappell NL, Hollander MJ. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press
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The book *Aging in Canada* is part of a collection on the “Issues in
Canada” by Oxford University Press. Other topics in this series
include crime, poverty, racism, and substance abuse. Therefore, at
first glance, the aging process and older people are reified as a social
problem. Fortunately, the topics discussed within the book clarify
this misnomer of a title. A more inclusive title would be, *Continuing
Care in an Aging Canadian Population: Call for Attention (not Alarm)
and Change*.

This book serves two main purposes, the first being to examine
the extent to which older adults are burdening (or will burden) the
current Canadian health care system. The authors argue that,
although our population is undergoing a dramatic age
demographic shift, this population-level change will not cause an
insurmountable demand on continuing care (formal or informal).
The evidence focuses on traditional “health” (i.e., illness) outcomes
that are often correlated with aging (e.g., frailty, chronic conditions,
longevity); however, it is also noted that aging is a continuous,
multi-dimensional and dynamic process that comes with both
negative and positive change. In addition to older adults who
require formal continuing care, informal caregivers are also
considered. The authors advocate that researchers, policy analysts
and health practitioners should not have an alarmist or fatalistic
approach to continuing care and they proactively respond to
skeptics who may disagree. The second objective of the book is
twofold: a) to describe the current health care system and how it
provides continuing care and b) to discuss how and why the
current health care system could be modified and reformed to
provide more appropriate continuing care. The authors do a fine
job of reviewing the strengths and shortcomings of current systems,
policies and practices. They compare and contrast health care
models and frameworks to synthesize a series of recommendations
on how to derive a more cost-effective, sustainable and flexible
health care system that meets the needs of individuals – both
younger and older – who require continuing care. This book shows
that changes to the continuing care system are needed and that,
even though it will be challenging, these changes are possible.

Throughout the book, historical, social, political and economic
perspectives are given to generate arguments and deliver evidence.
Provincial, national and global considerations are discussed to
highlight the areas in which Canada is leading and other areas from
which Canada can learn. Issues and topics of debate are explored
and explained and the authors propose potential resolutions. This
triangulated and constructive approach adds value and strength to
this book. The expertise and major works of the authors are
eloquently summarized with critical self-appraisal that reads like
narrative. Certainly, their common knowledge does not represent
that of another reader, especially that of a lay person or student. As
a result, a few parts of the book could have benefited from a greater
number of recent citations. Such information would provide
primary data sources to interested readers, learners and stakeholders.

Overall, *Aging in Canada* provides a refreshing and balanced
presentation of research and policy on a topic that is often
portrayed in a nihilistic and biased way. The evidence presented
clearly supports a long overdue call to action on a twenty-plus year-
old debate. Although this book does not claim to present a
comprehensive solution, it does offer a convincing analysis and
appraisal of the current continuing care system. The authors
challenge us to no longer blindly accept the existing formal health
care system that does not efficiently promote or protect health –
despite being predicated on decline and disease. Rather, we should
be thinking critically about the next steps that are needed to
develop, implement and evaluate a broad, comprehensive,
integrated, multi-level health care system. With the age-
demographic shift, we also need a paradigm shift to bring about
change in policies and practices. This book supports, and possibly
guides, such change.

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