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(ADRIEN VECZAN / Staff)

# Ottawa 'aging people into poverty'

## Added wait for OAS panned

By **EVA HOARE**  
Staff Reporter

Making people wait two years longer for Old Age Security is effectively "aging people into poverty," says the Nova Scotia spokesman for the Canadian Association of Retired Persons.

Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty confirmed Thursday what had been hinted before the budget — many of us will have to wait until we're 67 to qualify for OAS.

That move will leave many Nova Scotians and Canadians at a big monetary disadvantage, said Bill VanGorder, past president of the association and a member of the national advisory committee for the group.

"There are a lot of Nova Scotians who are at or below the poverty line who really need that money," VanGorder said in an interview shortly after the Harper government announced its budget.

"The real point is that there are real people who depend on that money for years," he said. "We're putting off that money for two years for them and that's worrisome."

VanGorder said he realizes

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**BILL VanGORDER**  
Canadian Association  
of Retired Persons

people need to plan for retirement, but stressed there are many people with lower-paying jobs and health issues who aren't able to do that.

"It's going to download the need to help those people to provinces and municipalities," he said.

Women may be the most adversely affected, he said, citing Statistics Canada figures that show 18 per cent of women living alone over the age of 65 are in poverty.

Michal Cada, who teaches electrical engineering at Dalhousie University, agrees, saying women, especially mothers, should be treated better by Ottawa. In Europe, where Cada is from, some countries allow mothers to retire earlier, he said.

Cada, 61, said the government

should not view seniors here identically, especially those who need more help to retire.

"People have different jobs. You can't judge everybody the same," said Cada, who won't be directly affected by the changes.

"Some people have heavy labour work and by the age 55 or 60, you just burn," he said. "You don't have enough energy to work."

"If you are a miner, or if you have a difficult mental job . . . These people, they need to retire because they can't perform anymore."

Like VanGorder, Cada also criticized the amount of money that would be lost by those forced to wait an extra two years to receive benefits.

"That's a big loss."

The federal government said it was making the change to counter the high costs of benefits being provided to an aging Canadian population. When fully implemented, it is estimated the change will save Ottawa almost \$11 billion per year.

Gord Wilson, VanGorder's New Brunswick association counterpart, hopes the feds haven't ignored those who would be harmed by the OAS changes.

"That is where the issue is, with those whose health is not

good and they are forced to stop working earlier. What's going to happen to them?" Wilson said in an interview from Fredericton.

"If it is going to be a carte blanche, you're going to have to wait an extra two years right across the board and no considerations are going to be made for the exceptions and the ones it's going to hurt, then it's a bad policy."

He fears Ottawa is merely making across-the-board cuts without identifying waste.

"Is this just an easy way to solve budget problems without looking at some other wastes?" he asked. "That's what maddening."

VanGorder said his association argues for "free choice" and that doesn't appear to be happening.

"This isn't giving people a choice. It's forcing people who can least afford it. One senior said to me he feels the federal government has just turned off the light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

Ottawa won't start phasing in changes to the OAS until 2023, meaning that anyone over 54 won't be affected by the age limit change.

*With files from Davene Jeffrey (ehoare@herald.ca)*

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