



Time and cash-strapped Gen X and Y? Join the club

Advocacy group to represent needs of young Canadians

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Baby boomers and seniors may have government's ear, thanks to massive numbers and political clout, but it's younger Canadians – Generation X and Millennials – who are in urgent need of advocacy, according to a professor of public policy at the University of British Columbia.

The proposed remedy: a national, membership-based association similar to those for retirees, but with the interests of people under-45 in mind. Think CARP for the selfies-and-strollers crowd.

Paul Kershaw, the effort's torchbearer, said they aren't assembling to work against seniors but rather to encourage a better balance of government attention across generations.

"Younger Canadians are now squeezed for time and money because they earn \$3 an hour less today than a generation ago – despite years more of post-secondary – only to face average housing prices that are hundreds of thousands of dollars higher," said Kershaw.

"So far, the national response is slow, with governments allocating around \$45,000 a year per retiree compared to \$12,000 per person under 45."

The organization is called Generation Squeeze, and is a reincarnation of what was once an awareness-based campaign dedicated to the issues faced by younger Canadians. Kershaw said the problem is that awareness alone hasn't been sufficient, and he thus hopes to emulate CARP – a 300,000-member association representing those 50 and older – in building real political influence.

"We're now explicitly a mobilization campaign," said Kershaw, who's calling on interested parties to subscribe at GenSqueeze.ca. "Government continues down a path that's leaving less and less for younger generations. That unwillingness to adapt policies for younger people is what's driving this."

Though fee structure and membership format have yet to be established, Kershaw hopes to have both in place by fall 2014. Envisioned are discounts for members at partner organizations – say, better rates on mortgages, or discounts on mobile data – and the ability to sway political platforms.

<http://o.canada.com/news/national/gen-squeeze>



“We’ll be able to say: ‘In your riding, we have 1,500 members of Gen Squeeze. You lost last time by 700 votes. We can deliver those,’” said Kershaw, who is 39.

According to Samara, a non-partisan group working to improve political participation, this leverage would indeed be compelling if members actually engaged. The problem is that young people not only vote in fewer numbers than their older counterparts, they’re also increasingly less likely to ever vote at all.

“We’re raising a generation of people who don’t view voting as a duty or something that’s worth their while,” said Alison Loat, Samara’s executive director. “But it’d be a pretty powerful cohort if it expressed itself.”

Loat noted that in the 2011 election, 38.8 per cent of those 18 to 24, 45.1 per cent of those 25 to 34, and 54.5 per cent of those 35 to 44 cast ballots. By comparison, 64.5 per cent of those 45 to 54, 71.5 per cent of those 65 to 74, and 75.1 per cent of those 65 to 74 did so.

Susan Eng, vice-president for advocacy at CARP, said her group’s secret sauce isn’t necessarily its size – although that helps – but rather the willingness of members to assume the organization’s mantle.

“These issues are things that energize this particular demographic,” said Eng, adding that if they do lose members, it typically isn’t due to disengagement but death.

“They don’t renew.”