

# The entire process of choosing home care contractors needs an independent sober second look

Home care contracts should not be a way to reward friends of any government with lucrative contracts. Ontarians deserve so much better, Patricia Spindel writes.

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Older and disabled Ontarians should be able to expect that their government will deliver a home-care system that is non-profit, where competitive bidding is a thing of the past, where a solid track record matters, and where profits go into direct care, rather than the pockets of wealthy corporations, Patricia Spindel writes.

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By Patricia Spindel

As Ontario ages, and elders continue to say they want to age in their own homes and communities, home care is becoming a vital source of assistance to many.

With Ontario having introduced a new pre-qualification process for home-care providers, Ontario taxpayers should have been able to expect more transparency and accountability and a higher quality of home care delivery. But that is now being questioned when examining who received those new home-care contracts, and which organizations and companies continue to be home-care providers.

With the release of the new 2024 pre-qualified home-care providers list one might have expected highly qualified organizations and individuals, especially non-profits, to be featured. That does not appear to be the case.

The majority of new contracts have gone to for-profit companies.

It should also be reasonable to expect that government would be careful about awarding major contracts to companies with a close relationship to government — either as friends or political donors — in order to avoid the appearance or fact of favouritism. How then do we explain a lucrative home-care contract having been awarded to Care Company Inc. owned by Laura Harris, the wife of Mike Harris, former premier of Ontario?

And how do we explain another company, Medavie Blue Cross, headed by a former PC premier of New Brunswick and former appointed head of Ontario Power Generation also receiving a home-care contract?

The chair of the advisory board of another company that received a contract is a former deputy minister appointed during the Harris/Eves governments.

Another company is owned by someone who was a significant donor to the PC Party.

What would cause the government to continue to award a home-care contract to ParaMed, a subsidiary of Extendicare — a company that was prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice and found liable in a \$38-million lawsuit for billing “Medicare and Medicaid for materially substandard nursing services that were so deficient that they were effectively worthless and billed Medicare for medically unreasonable and unnecessary rehabilitation therapy services ...”?

It is also a mystery how companies whose owners, managing directors and managers with backgrounds in sales, accounting, hairdressing and esthetics, engineering and as corporate consultants or senior corporate executives managed to land home-care contracts.

The list goes on.

Older and disabled Ontarians should be able to expect that their government will deliver a home-care system that is non-profit, where competitive bidding is a thing of the past, where a solid track record matters, and where profits go into direct care, rather than the pockets of wealthy corporations.

The thousands of home care users in Ontario who rely on home care to be able to stay out of long-term care institutions should be able to feel confident that their government will actually serve their interests not those of private sector friends of the government and political donors.

All of us should be able to expect transparency and accountability in the criteria used, the decision-making process, and in knowing who has made these decisions in the awarding of home care contracts, but that is not the case.

The entire process of choosing home-care contractors needs an independent sober second look. Elders, people with disabilities and their families are counting on that because too many are reporting that continuing to have a failing home-care system is putting them at risk. Unions have alleged the Ford government is breaking Ontario's home-care system. They are absolutely right with current evidence of questionable home care contracts being awarded to these companies.

Home care contracts should not be a way to reward friends of any government with lucrative contracts. Ontarians deserve so much better. They deserve a real, functioning, accountable home-care system.

*Patricia Spindel is the chair of Seniors for Social Action Ontario and a former associate dean of Health Sciences at Humber College.*