



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

EDITORIAL

LESSONS NOT LEARNED BY THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT: ANOTHER COVID WAVE HITS LONG-TERM CARE

July 18, 2022

Once again, 65 long-term care institutions are in outbreak in a 7th COVID wave, as well as 51 retirement homes. People 80+ are being hit especially hard (Pasioka, 2022).

Seniors for Social Action Ontario (SSAO) predicted this, telling the Ford government in 2020 to listen to older adults and invest in community-based in-home and residential alternatives and end its reliance on institutions.

In the past two years SSAO has written extensively about alternatives – both in-home and residential, that could have been created. Instead the Ontario government thought it could build its way out of the long-term care crisis by institutionalizing at least 30,000 more older adults.

Institutionalization IS The Problem

It is institutions themselves that are causing this problem and putting older adults in them at extreme risk of infection and death. Congregating together so many people of advanced age living with health conditions makes no sense, especially when no government has ever been able to ensure these facilities are safe or comply with the Long Term Care Homes Act. Enforcement efforts and therefore protection of residents have always been weak.

Even after two years of the pandemic, inspection reports were showing inadequate infection prevention and control procedures in these facilities, as well as under-staffing. This was also true of the worst hit long-term care facilities during the first waves of the pandemic. These were facilities where conditions were so grim that they had to be taken over by hospitals and the military.

In spite of facilities still not being compliant when it comes to infection control and staffing, most were not subject to penalties, with many receiving no more than “Written Notices” or “Non-Compliance Orders”.

THE EXAMPLES: THE FACILITIES WITH THE WORST TRACK RECORDS ARE STILL OUT OF COMPLIANCE AND GETTING MORE BEDS FROM THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT

Orchard Villa, Pickering

As of May, 2020, 77 residents had died at Orchard Villa in Pickering, and families reported long standing problems there (CBC News, 2020). It was the worst hit facility in the first COVID wave, and was subject to an order by the Medical Officer of Health to have Lakeridge Health intervene. Things were so bad that the military was also called in, and described horrific conditions in the facility in its report. See:

<https://www.macleans.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/JTFC-Observations-in-LTCF-in-ON.pdf>

Nevertheless an Inspection Report dated March 10, 2022 stated: “the Licensee failed to ensure that all staff participate in the implementation of the Infection Prevention and Control Program (IPAC)” (Pg. 6).

The facility received a Written Notice. <http://publicreporting.ltchomes.net/en-ca/File.aspx?RecID=29406&FacilityID=20100>

In spite of ongoing issues with this facility’s track record, the Ontario government planned to give Southbridge Care homes, which owns Orchard Villa, funding to build 722 new and 1,070 redeveloped beds (Katawazi, 2021).

Tendercare, Scarborough

81 residents died at Tendercare in Scarborough, which was cited 13 times by inspectors for not having complied with health and safety regulations that included residents not being given water, or timely medication, and staff not using appropriate infection prevention measures (Russell, 2021).

Nevertheless, an Inspection Report dated January 31, 2022 stated: “The licensee failed to ensure the staffing plan included a back-up plan for nursing and personal care staffing that addresses situations when staff cannot come to work.” (Pg. 4)

It received a Written Notice. <http://publicreporting.ltchomes.net/en-ca/File.aspx?RecID=29057&FacilityID=20490>

Tendercare is getting 2 new and 254 upgraded beds from the Ford government (Ontario Government, 2021).

Hawthorne Place, North York

Hawthorne Place, where 51 residents died (Howlett, 2021) was also the subject of the military report which described lack of infection prevention and control, forceful and aggressive transfers of residents by staff, residents crying out for help and getting none, and on and on. It was one of the facilities under investigation by the Long Term Care Ministry and the Coroner's Office (Beattie & Reddekopp, 2021).

Nevertheless, a June 7, 2022 Inspection report stated: "the licensee has failed to ensure any surveillance protocols issued by the Director for a particular communicable disease or disease of public health significance were complied with.....There was actual risk of harm to residents, staff and visitors related to not following the RAT device's instructions as they pertain to the accuracy of the test results and consequently potential spread of infectious disease" (Pg. 2)

It also received a Written Notice. <http://publicreporting.ltchomes.net/en-ca/File.aspx?RecID=29726&FacilityID=20595>

Rykka Care Centres, owner of Hawthorne Place Care Centre, is slated to get funding from the Ontario government to build 160 new and 192 redeveloped beds. (Katawazi, 2021).

Downsview Long-Term Care Centre

65 residents died at Downsview Long-Term Care Centre - one of two under investigation by the Ministry and Coroner's Office that was also taken over by the Canadian military. The military reported that 26 residents died of dehydration prior to its arrival because of lack of staff (Lieberman, 2021).

Nevertheless an Inspection Report dated May 18, 2022 stated: "the licensee has failed to ensure that the infection prevention and control (IPAC) standard issued by the Director was followed by staff related to routine practices and additional precautions.....There was a risk at time of the non-compliance related to staff not following the home's IPAC program. There was a risk of infection transmission to one resident when they were not assisted with HH prior to their meal, another resident when the required PPE was not worn by a PSW and to other residents and staff when staff did not follow the home's IPAC practices. There was a risk to residents and staff when the RAT device instructions were not followed related to the accuracy of the results" (Pgs. 2 and 3).

The facility was cited for non-compliance. See: <http://publicreporting.ltchomes.net/en-ca/File.aspx?RecID=29644&FacilityID=20071>

GEM Health Care Group Ltd. which owns Downsview Long-Term Care facility is also slated to receive funding from the Ontario government to build 21 new, and 295 redeveloped beds (Katawazi, 2021).

WHAT COULD GOVERNMENT HAVE DONE?

The Ministry of Long-Term Care Inspection Branch has several sanctions at its disposal that could have been used in these situations. It could have ceased admissions until non-compliances that posed a danger to residents were addressed. It could have indicated that licenses would either be revoked or not renewed, and it could have placed the facilities under different management. None of these actions were taken in spite of the track records of these facilities.

SENIORS ARE IGNORED WHILE SELF-DUBBED ADVOCATES ADDRESS SYMPTOMS, NOT ROOT CAUSES

Once again, the self-dubbed “advocates” are calling for vaccines rather than pressuring the government to reduce the numbers of people in long-term care facilities by creating alternatives to them (Pasieka, 2022).

Alternatives could include staffing up condos, apartments, and homes in the community; funding caregivers to take people home; instituting a Money Follows the Person program to allow individuals and families to contract for their own services and supports; greatly expanding the High Intensity Supports at Home Program; funding PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) programs like the one in Burlington, funding elder care co-ops, especially in rural communities and urban neighborhoods where older adults are a major demographic - all in order to get and keep people out of these dangerous facilities.

None of this is occurring, even now, after six waves of the pandemic.

Older adults could have told the press these things, but in a classic case of ageism, were not asked to comment on the latest deaths in these facilities in spite of their decades of acquired wisdom on this very topic.

THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT’S ANSWER? INSTITUTIONALIZE 30,000 MORE

Once again residents will get sick and die because of Ontario’s heavy reliance on institutionalization. The Ontario government has committed to institutionalizing 30,000 more older adults and people with disabilities, rewarding the owners and operators of the institutions at the expense of those having to live in them (Ontario Government, 2022).

WHO IS GOING TO STAFF THEM?

Once again institutions will be short-staffed because staff will get ill, and others will leave in disgust. “Ian Da Silva, National Director of Operations for the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association, which represents nearly 50,000 of these workers, says health care workers being out with COVID-19 in this seventh wave is compounding the

short-staffing challenges already present in the field. We're talking about staffing that's already stretched to the breaking point now and to add an infection on top of that, even one or two staff....it would be devastating. The association is getting reports of PSWs being responsible for 30 to 40 people in their wings, he says.” (Pasieka, 2022).

This, of course, is nothing new. Some facts may be in order here from the Ontario government’s own staffing study.

Not only is there difficulty recruiting staff, but keeping them is just as, if not more difficult, because of the working conditions.

The government reports that 25% of PSWs with 2 or more years of experience leave the long-term care sector annually. Health Force Ontario reports that 50% of PSWs are retained in the health care sector for fewer than 5 years. 43% have left the sector because of burnout and having to work short-staffed. 40% leave the health care sector after graduating, or within a year of being trained. The average overall job tenure of PSWs has dropped 10 months between 2015 and 2017, even before the pandemic hit (Ontario Government, 2020).

Which raises the question – if the government and long-term care companies can’t staff the facilities that are already in operation, how do they expect to be able to staff 30,000 additional beds? This is a system poised to collapse on the most vulnerable people in Ontario.

And the informal monitoring system by family and friends who visit may also be dismantled again if infection and death rates in these facilities climb high enough. Expect to see even essential caregivers barred again.

LONG-TERM CARE MINISTER “UNAVAILABLE”

In spite of all of this occurring again, and the long-term care system continuing to be in shambles, when the CBC provided an opportunity to the Minister of Long-Term Care to discuss these latest outbreaks, they were told he was “unavailable” (Pasieka, 2022).

This is the government the public voted for.

THE GOVERNMENT LEARNED NOTHING

Ontario learned nothing from the first six waves when it comes to long-term care. It is difficult to imagine what it would take for it to learn anything from this wave.

Had the government invested heavily in Intensive In-Home Supports two years ago, far fewer people would have been entering and being placed at risk in long-term care institutions now. Hospitals could have emptied their alternative care beds and people could have returned home with assistance.

Had this government redirected the \$7 billion in funding for institutions, primarily operated for-profit, towards creating residential alternatives in the community operated by non-profit agencies, and funded PACE Programs, thousands could have been kept out of these facilities, and the need for new institutional beds eliminated.

Instead it threw good money after bad, and here we are – again.

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