SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

Editorial

NURSING HOMES WITHOUT WALLS MISSES THE MARK

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Ontario currently has six pilot projects that allow long-term care homes to provide services to elders who live in the community. https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1007823/ontario-expanding-community-access-to-long-term-care-services

Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Long-Term Care and the Waltons Trust, these expanded institution-based "community services" are presented as a way to help more older adults to remain safely in their homes. But this approach fundamentally misses the mark on what elders need and want, and on what long-term care institutions should be doing. https://www.advantageontario.ca/ontario-launches-ltc-pilot-to-help-seniors-remain-at-home-longer/

Government claims that by investing in "nursing homes without walls" they are promoting aging in place. But long-term care facilities are 'total institutions' with no experience in providing what older people need to age safely in their own homes and neighbourhoods.

Non-profit community-based organizations *do* understand this, having delivered community services for decades. The problem is that non-profit community-based seniors' agencies are struggling with significant underfunding and are unable to expand the services they offer. https://irp.cdn-website.com/9100a73e/files/uploaded/OCSA+Pre-Budget+Submission+2026.pdf Any funding for nursing homes to expand their reach should be reallocated to non-profit community organizations. To not do so is to further undermine the community sector.

Long-term care institutions have no business providing "care" to community dwelling older adults since many of these institutions are unable to meet existing legislated standards. The disaster in these Ontario facilities during the pandemic, when more than 4500 people died, plus their continuing difficulty in complying with standards as shown in provincial inspection reports, should disqualify them from delivering community services.

Craigholme, one pilot project, was recently issued compliance orders, including concern that several meal courses were being served at once, impacting food temperatures. Diet texture was also problematic, and "PSW staff were observed not using proper techniques to assist residents with eating." https://publicreports.mltc.gov.on.ca/reportDetails?detailId=a1vOH000000ETyDYAW&homeId=2622&guestUserLang=en-CA At Woodingford Lodge, another pilot project, a June inspection found infection prevention and control procedures not being properly observed. https://publicreports.mltc.gov.on.ca/reportDetails?detailId=a1vOH000000JtlZYAS&homeId=M632&guestUserLang=en-CA

Going back to 2020, the CBC reported that 85% of nursing homes were out of compliance with provincial legislation for the previous five years. https://www.cbc.ca/news/marketplace/nursing-homes-abuse-ontario-seniors-laws-1.5770889 Why then expose elders in the community to these conditions?

Nursing homes should concentrate on getting their own houses in order rather than expanding to the community where they are not qualified. And there is no research evidence that this is a sound idea.

Instead, the Ontario government should make it a priority to join the world-wide movement for seniors to age-in-community, especially since according to IPSOS, 96% of those over 45 say they do not want to end up in a long-term care facility. There are provincial community initiatives underway that could be scaled up if the government would provide support and funding. https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/nearly-all-canadians-96-aged-forty-five-and-older-say-aging-place-enables-preservation-independence

First, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities with social support services (NORC-SSPs) are growing rapidly. These are buildings or neighbourhoods where 30% of the residents are over 65. Queen's University research shows that these programs reduce loneliness while helping to prevent nursing home placements. https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/helping-more-canadians-age-well-home

Second, some Ontario communities and non-profit organizations are using Federal and Provincial funding to build new supportive housing projects for seniors. These affordable, accessible housing units are vital in enabling more older adults to successfully age in place. More communities need to address this significant need. https://caeh.ca/seniors-homelessness-halton-supportive-housing/

Third, PACE (Programs of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly) provides integrated care within apartment buildings and neighbourhoods with high concentrations of seniors. Research shows that PACE reduces hospitalization and emergency room visits while enhancing people's quality of life - a cost-effective way to provide community support. https://www.npaonline.org/about-npa/news/news/2026/06/08/new-federal-study-confirms-pace-outperforms-other-integrated-care-options

Fourth, small neighbourhood not-for-profit care homes are well developed in Europe and the United States, with wide-spread interest in Ontario. These small care homes enable seniors to age near their family and friends in an environment that is free of institutional routine and markers. Elders with dementia and other disabilities have access to nature and participate in normal activities in a home-like environment.
https://mcusercontent.com/36363a028fc1d1a14890ff48e/files/610e4273-7631-c044-84e6-f551d8b65aa1/SSAO_Small_Neighbouhood_Homes_Project.pdf

"Nursing homes without walls" is the wrong way to try to support seniors with disabilities and frailties. Older adults do not want institutions involved in their care. They want individualized community care that honours their autonomy, dignity, and relationships. We know the community approaches that work. Government now needs to fully support them.

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