

# Home care is key to improving care for all seniors

By **Sue VanderBent** Contributor  
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The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed long-standing challenges that many health care workers have faced while caring for Ontario's most vulnerable seniors. As a result, the government is looking now at ways to better support workers in the long-term care system, including the advice of an external Staffing Study Advisory Group.

It is clear these issues are not new, and the long-term care system needs additional support to address the staffing pressures that continue to impact resident care. However, it is also clear that no part of the health system operates in a silo, and consideration of the full impact of the health human resources needs of the system must be taken into account.

A system-wide lens must be used if we truly want to improve care for all seniors. The province must recognize that Ontario's long-term care workforce is interconnected to its home care workforce. A great percentage of our front-line health care workers — including nurses, therapists and personal support workers — are qualified to work in both sectors. Because of this, staff in both the long-term care and home care sectors must be supported by the government in the same ways. If not, the consequences for the stability of care for our seniors could be dire.

We recently saw Quebec give a significant pay raise to long-term care workers, but not home care workers. This poorly planned decision resulted in a mass exodus of home care staff from the sector. As a result of ignoring the home care system, Quebec's actions left their seniors without access to the home care they need to stay stable in their homes.

Ontario's home care system delivers more care to seniors than any other part of the health care system, which is why publicly funded

home care workers must be supported in the same way as long-term care workers. With the right tools, our home care system could do even more to support seniors at home as well as continue to reduce the number of non-essential visits to hospitals that can overwhelm our health system, particularly during a pandemic.

We know that home care workers in Ontario are already paid considerably less than those in long-term care. This situation must be corrected, not made worse. To stabilize the entire health system, home care workers must be paid at parity with those in long-term care. Workers in both sectors deserve a raise for the critical support they provide to our seniors.

Ontario's seniors are relying on the government to protect them. Safe, reliable, and compassionate home care from well-trained and well-paid staff is key to improving overall care for seniors.

Our province has a chance to get it right, and it is imperative that we do so for the future of the entire health care system.

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