



Bring Care Home

STABILIZING ONTARIO'S HOME CARE SYSTEM & REBUILDING
A BETTER SYSTEM OF SENIORS' HEALTH CARE

2023 Pre-Budget Consultation Submission

February 2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have all seen the news – we are reminded daily that hospital beds are full, and front-line health care staff are in short supply. Behind these headlines is the cold reality that every day, people are struggling to get the care they need because our health care system is under strain.

For families, this means more time waiting for urgent care in hospitals, with some patients waiting days just for a hospital bed. Others are stuck in the hospital because they can't get the home care they need. As wait times creep up and staffing levels go down, families are suffering.

Most permanent solutions to these current challenges will take time to deliver better care to patients. Most, but not all.

Ontario's home care system can be stabilized and scaled-up faster than any other part of the health system. It is the quickest, most effective way we can give our loved ones the care they deserve and relieve the pressure on overcrowded hospitals—and it can be done in a matter of months, not years.

Nothing is faster than home care.

Unlike institutional care, which takes time to add capacity as infrastructure is retrofitted or built from scratch and new staff are trained, a properly supported home care system can be scaled very quickly.

Home care doesn't require new buildings or expensive machines or layers of red tape and institutional bureaucracy. It is a nurse at the bedside of a senior completing a medication check. It is a physiotherapist helping a new Mom recover from surgery in her living room. It is a social worker checking in to evaluate the emotional status of a senior. It is a PSW helping a patient using a wheelchair to dress and manage a wound. These important interactions build a web of at-home health care that keeps people healthy, and much less likely to require a trip to the hospital.

In fact, with more than 60,000 staff, Ontario's home care system delivers more care to our seniors than any other part of the senior care system.

But decades of underfunding and low wages have driven front-line home care staff to higher paying settings including retail and food service sectors. Sadly, the impact of COVID-19 and recent high inflation has accelerated this trend. But with the right supports, these staff can be quickly attracted back into home care. With the right supports, home care can be stabilized and expanded quickly, to deliver more health care to people in their homes and in their communities.

For the health care system to get back to normal, we need to reduce the pressure on hospitals by providing more care for more people in the right place—their home. We need to bring PSWs home. We need to bring nurses home. We need to bring therapists home. We need to bring patients home. We need to bring care home.

If Ontario doesn't move to stabilize home care quickly, much is at risk, including its own plans to modernize home care and transform the health system.

Modernization will not succeed without a stable system.

Simply put, modernization of home care cannot occur without the system being stable first. You wouldn't try to build a house on unstable ground, and you should not try to build a new home care system without first ensuring the sector is on stable footing. Attempting large-scale reforms without a stable workforce is will directly impact Ontarians.

20.7
HOURS

Average Patient
Wait-times in
Emergency
Departments¹

59%

Nursing
Acceptance
Rate in Home
Care²

RECOMMENDATIONS

To stabilize the home care system and better support more patients outside of hospitals, the government should:

- 1) Fast track the expenditure of the remaining \$880M budget commitment for home care towards contract rate increases to better support home care staff, and also towards proven innovative funding models such as High Intensity Supports at Home (HISH) and Hospital at Home.
- 2) Develop a system-wide Health Human Resources strategy, which prioritizes home care.
- 3) Modify and enhance the newly created Home Care Tax Credit to better support more seniors wishing to remain living at home.



THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Ontario's hospitals and emergency departments continue to face significant volume pressures, at a time when they are dealing with health human resource (HHR) shortages. Permanent solutions to improve HHR in these settings will take time.

In the interim, change is needed to discharge patients from hospital faster, and prevent them from having to go to the hospital in the first place. The solution lies in a stabilized home care system.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, currently 1 in 11 hospital patients have their stays extended until home care services or supports are ready. To make matters worse, 10% of those patients now wait more than 42 days before receiving home care services. If this problem was rectified, it would free up critical hospital beds, and help keep people healthy at home.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

While patients wait in hospital for home care, in towns and communities across the province others are forced to struggle without the care they need at home. Ontario's home care wait-list has been recently estimated to be 15,000 people. Behind that figure are real people who struggle every day while policy makers prioritize investments in other parts of the health system.

Meanwhile, caregiver burden continues to rise. According to a recent report from the Ontario Caregiver Organization, the number of caregivers who spend ten or more hours a week providing support to someone in their life spiked to a third of caregivers during the pandemic, and has not shrunk since re-opening. In fact, 25% of caregivers say that since the easing of restrictions, their responsibilities as caregivers have become even more difficult.⁵

HOME CARE VACANCY RATES⁴

Nursing : 17%
PSWs: 12%

THE CORE ISSUE

All health care settings are struggling to keep pace with demand, as HHR shortages stretch front-line workforces to their limits. This has caused demand for health care staff to surge, and supply has not kept pace.

Ontario's home care system has not been spared from this problem, and today, the system is significantly short on staff.

Decades of underfunding and low wages have driven front-line home care staff to the retail and food service sectors, because the pay is comparable to home care. Compounding this problem is the reality that other parts of the health system are able to pay more. Today, a PSW working in home care receives an average of \$4.61 less per hour than if they work in hospital, while an entry-level home care nurse receives on average \$11 less than their counterparts in hospitals. Unfortunately, this gap is amplified over time.

Lower wages paid in home care are a deterrent to both recruitment and retention of front-line staff.

This situation has led to extremely high vacancy rates for home care nurses and PSWs. As a result, Ontarians do not receive the home care they need.

1 IN 11

Have their hospital stays extended until home care services or supports are ready³



WAGE EXAMPLES

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Home Care PSW | \$20.30/Hr* |
| Amazon Warehouse Worker | \$20.37/Hr |
| Costco Cashier | \$19.87/Hr |

*After \$3 PSW wage enhancement

RISK TO MODERNIZATION

The government is in the process of transforming health care to ensure the right care is delivered in the right place and to facilitate faster access to care. Part of this important plan is the modernization of the home care system, and to integrate it with Ontario Health Teams.

Home care providers have been deeply involved in co-designing and testing new models, and strongly support the transition to a more integrated system. However, experience has shown that efforts to create large-scale change during times of instability can lead to further staff loss, and even disruption of care.

It is critically important, therefore, that the home care system is stabilized before large-scale efforts are taken to modernize the home care system.



STABILIZING HOME CARE

With the right supports, home care can be stabilized and expanded quickly to deliver more health care to people in their homes and in their communities.

Front-line health care staff can be attracted back into home care, and the system can once again become competitive with other health settings so new graduates can be attracted and psw, nursing and therapy capacity can be expanded.

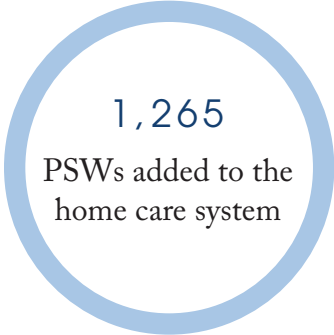
The 2022 Budget announced a commitment of \$1Billion in new funding towards home care. To-date, \$880M of those funds remain unallocated. To capitalize on this historic investment, the government must fast-track spending to ensure the sector is stabilized.

Recommendation

Home Care Ontario, 'the voice of home care in Ontario'TM, recommends the government fast-track the remaining \$880M, and invest it in the following ways:

- \$578M towards contract rate increases to support HHR growth and system stabilization.
- \$272M towards increased capacity to support health system pressures in Acute Care, and LTC.
- \$30M towards increased investments for care model innovations.

Our research indicates that a 10% increase in PSW wages would add 1,265 PSWs to the home care workforce, while a matching increase for nurses and therapists would have a similarly significant positive impact on recruitment and retention efforts going forward.




1,265
PSWs added to the
home care system

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

By fast-tracking the remaining \$880M in the manner above, the province will quickly move to stabilize home care. These increases will improve the average wages of front-line health care providers, supporting recruitment and retention efforts and growing capacity.

The investments will also help address cost pressures such as other staffing costs for supervisors and schedulers as well as help to improve benefits and address increased technology costs.

The sector estimates that with the additional staffing created by these investments, the system will have capacity to deliver an additional 2.72 million more home care hours to Ontarians.



2.72M
More hours of
home care

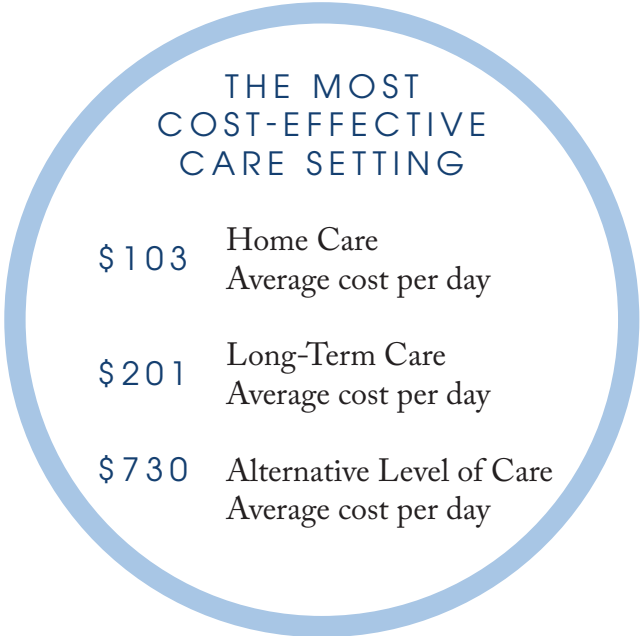
A SYSTEM-WIDE HHR STRATEGY

The reality is that home care, long-term care and hospitals are all facing health human resource shortages. Sadly, many of today’s challenges are driven by policy makers prioritizing care in one part of the system over the others – an approach that needs to end.

To support Ontarians at home, a health system-wide HHR solution is needed, not a siloed approach. Government must address its total HHR challenges by taking a whole-system approach, one that equally prioritizes home care and identifies it as a unique and specialized setting of practice. Only then will new health care staff be attracted to work in home care and appreciate it for the tremendous setting that it is.

Recommendation

Develop a system-wide HHR Strategy, which prioritizes home care as a unique and specialized setting of practice.



THE SENIORS CARE AT HOME TAX CREDIT

To help make the dream of aging at home a reality, families support their loved ones with over 20 million hours of family-funded home care services every year.

Family-funded home care supports seniors to live more independently, to remain in their homes for longer, and avoid accidents and illnesses that could cause them to leave their homes unnecessarily.

As identified by a recent study from the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, financial assistance is rated as caregiver's most important unmet need, "ranking this higher than more traditional policy priorities, such as navigational or mental health supports."⁶

Now more than ever, family-funded home care services are essential, and families need help.

The 2022 Ontario budget introduced the new Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit; a refundable personal income tax credit intended to help seniors with eligible medical expenses, including expenses that support aging at home.

This was a tremendous step, that is in line with other jurisdictions like Quebec, where significant tax supports are available to help seniors live independently at home.

However, Ontario's new tax credit unfortunately doesn't help everyone it should.

There are two primary challenges that currently stand in the way of this tax credit being available to many seniors living at home and incurring significant family-funded home care expenses.

These are:

1. Seniors must obtain a disability certificate – while many seniors struggle physically and mentally they may not necessarily meet the Canada Revenue Agency's stringent eligibility tests for a disability certificate. These seniors will therefore not be able to claim expenses related to the in-home care they depend on to keep them healthy, safe and living at home.
2. The income threshold is too low – the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit is means- tested and targeted towards low to moderate income seniors. The credit is fully phased out for seniors with incomes above \$65,000, but according to Statistics Canada's 2020 Income Survey, the median household income for Canadian seniors is \$65,900.⁷ As a result of this current low-income threshold, half of Ontario's seniors will not be able to take advantage of this new tax credit.

Recommendation

Modify and enhance the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit to support Ontario seniors by exempting the requirement for an approved disability certificate and eliminate, or significantly increase the current existing income threshold.



CITATIONS

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3. CIHI, Hospital Stay Extended Until Home Care Services or Supports Ready, 2022
4. Ontario Community Support Association, Front-Line Vacancy Survey Results, 2022
5. Ontario Caregiver Organization, Spotlight Report: Caregiving in Year 3 of the Pandemic, 2022
6. Ontario Caregiver Coalition, 2023 Pre-Budget Submission, January 2023
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HomeCareOntario.ca