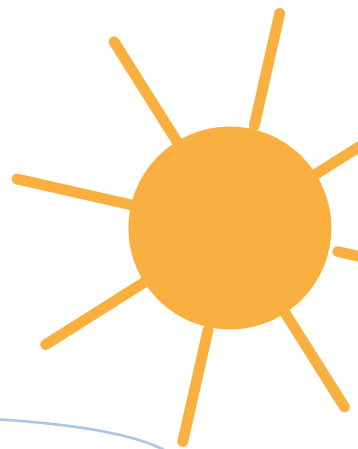


# COVID-19 Recovery

A ROADMAP TO IMPROVE SENIORS' CARE IN ONTARIO

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# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on Ontario’s seniors and has exposed them to the harsh realities of a health care system that underfunds home care.

Research shows that 96% of Ontario’s seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible, but sadly, our health care system is not designed to allow that to happen.

Instead, there has been a long-standing focus by governments on institutional care, making our health system top-heavy. Hospitals and long-term care homes — where the investments are more visible and celebrated by ribbon cuttings and media events with shovels in the ground — have received the vast majority of funding, while health care at home has not been prioritized.

Other countries have struggled with the same issue, however progressive health systems around the world have now begun to place a significant emphasis on home care. In these leading jurisdictions, home care is seen as the first line of care and hospitals and long-term care homes have become settings of last resort.

Ontario had just begun a similar progressive system reform when the COVID-19 pandemic started, and the health system transformation, that emphasizes care in the community, is now in jeopardy.

Even after COVID finally subsides, unless steps are taken immediately, one of the lasting effects of the pandemic could be that it derails Ontario’s health care transformation entirely.

You see, the pandemic has exposed serious worker shortages in the home care system. This shortage is exacerbated by Ontario’s lop-sided pay structure – where the government pays frontline home care workers less for caring for patients in some settings than it does in others. The result: across the

province, seniors, children with special needs, and patients recovering from surgeries are all unable to receive the home care they require because staff have left the sector for better paying jobs.

While Ontario is moving swiftly to train new health care workers, unless the pay inequality is addressed, staff will continue to be forced to choose work in other settings where they can earn significantly higher pay. This pay inequality will have lasting implications as it continues to hollow out staffing in the home care sector. Ontarians will not get the care they deserve at home.

## We simply cannot allow this to happen.

Seniors should not have to go to emergency departments to get the care they require. Ontarians should not have to wait at home wondering if a nurse or PSW will be available to see them that day. Ontarians waiting to have critical surgery should not have to suffer further delays because hospital beds are full to capacity with patients who really need home care but cannot get it.

Through an immediate investment of \$460 million to stabilize the home care workforce and address wage inequalities, the government can ensure more seniors will receive the care they require, and fewer seniors will have missed home care visits that lead to them being admitted to hospitals or long-term care homes.

By stabilizing the sector, this \$460 million investment will help ensure the success of the government’s health care transformation. It will enable the province to follow the example of other jurisdictions, and implement a home-first approach. With this funding, Ontario can create a home care system that will provide seniors with the care they need, in the setting they prefer – moving people out of hospitals, while realizing cost savings in the health care system.

HOME CARE VS LTC/HOSPITAL WAGE RATES			
OCCUPATION	LTC	HOME CARE	DELTA
PSW (hour)	\$22.69	\$17.30	(\$5.39)
RPN (hour)	\$29.40	\$25.14	(\$4.29)
RN (hour)	\$44.14	\$36.98	(\$7.16)
OCCUPATION	HOSPITAL	HOME CARE	DELTA
PSW (hour)	\$23.78	\$17.30	(\$6.48)
RPN (hour)	\$30.67	\$25.14	(\$5.53)
RN (hour)	\$47.75	\$36.98	(\$10.77)

# SUMMARY: A ROADMAP TO COVID-19 RECOVERY



## STEP 1

### Move away from the outdated institutional model

Ontario is trapped in an outdated model that prioritizes institutional health care over a robust home care system. The province must move away from this outdated model, and take steps now to ensure Ontario's home care system is also properly funded to support seniors at home the way they deserve, both now and in the future.



## STEP 2

### Recover from the HHR impacts of COVID-19

The growing wage disparity between home care and other parts of the health system has drastically reduced the availability of home care and risks jeopardizing both the government's health system transformation and COVID recovery plans. The government must immediately invest \$460 million to address wage inequality and stabilize the home care workforce.



## STEP 3

### Support family-funded care

To help make the dream of aging at home a reality, over 150,000 Ontario families support their loved ones with more than 20 million hours of family-funded home care services every year. Ontario should introduce a new tax credit to reimburse 15% of family-funded home care costs, up to a maximum of \$10,000 in annual services (maximum tax credit: \$1,500).



## STEP 4

### Reap the benefits of a modern home care system

96% of seniors want to live at home for as long as possible. Once the home care workforce has been stabilized, an increased investment in hours of home care could make that dream a reality for tens of thousands more seniors. It could reduce the time seniors wait for long-term care by over 50%, saving the province almost \$500M annually. Additionally, it could reduce the number of ALC patients waiting in hospital beds by 300,000 days a year, freeing up significant acute care bed capacity.

## Move Away from the outdated institutional model

Home care is health care, so it is time for it to be put on an equal footing with other areas of the health system. In Ontario, hundreds of thousands of seniors rely on home care every day to help them live safely and independently in their homes. Nursing care, rehabilitation, personal care, or occupational therapy: these are just a few of the many types of health care services that are provided in the privacy and comfort of people's homes.

Around the world, various health care systems have harnessed technology and new medical innovations to give seniors access to more and more supports in their homes. The reasons for this are simple — home is where seniors want to be, and the home is the most affordable setting to provide them with this care. It is a win-win that has caused numerous governments to completely shift the way they think about health care by putting a much greater focus on home care. Today, if care can be safely delivered at home in these jurisdictions, that is where it is delivered. Hospitals and long-term care homes have become the settings of last resort.

Sadly, Ontario is trapped in the outdated model that prioritizes institutional care over individualized care at home.

This model not only means that hospitals and long-term care have received the lion's share of health care funding, it has also created an uneven pay structure that rewards frontline health care workers more if they work in institutional settings (acute care and long term care), than if they work in home care. The result: growing worker shortages and insufficient funding for home care has forced seniors into these congregate settings, when they could have been cared for easily at home. In fact, research shows that 1 in every 9 seniors who entered long-term care could have delayed or avoided their admission altogether if they were provided with appropriate home care supports and service.

1 in 9 New Long-Term Care Residents Potentially Could Have Been Cared For at Home<sup>1</sup>. **This is unacceptable, especially given that 96% of Ontario seniors want to live at home as long as possible<sup>2</sup>.** As citizens, Ontario seniors deserve to be given the supports to do so. Just prior to the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario had begun to transition its health care system to better integrate and elevate home care, but this transformation is now in jeopardy, and will be impossible to implement on a foundation that has cracked.

Ontario must commit to move away from its outdated model of institutional care, and take steps now to ensure its home care system is properly funded to support seniors at home the way they deserve and desire, both now and in the future.

The first step of this process is to address the wage inequalities that exist between frontline health care workers in home care versus the rest of the health care system. Without better supports for the HHR foundation of home care, additional transformative initiatives cannot succeed.





## Recover from the Health Human Resource impacts of COVID-19

This pandemic is a time when virtually all seniors have said they want to stay at home to stay safe, yet home care services in Ontario are getting harder and harder to access.

Sadly, at the start of the pandemic the government focused on supports to shore-up institutional care, and left home care underfunded and under supported. Worse, the government offered even higher pay increases in institutional settings to encourage workers to move from home care to congregate settings such as long-term care homes. The home care sector, which already was faced with worker shortages, saw more and more of its frontline staff leave in search of these higher wages.

The result has been stark. As Personal Support Workers (PSWs) left home care in search of better pay, more and more Ontarians were left without care. In addition, the system has lost more skilled nurses and acceptance rates — or how often home care providers take on new patients — have fallen to historic lows — now below 50%<sup>3</sup>.

Today, this situation has become untenable. Waitlists continue to grow for PSW, nursing and therapy supports, while the growing wage disparity between home care and other parts of the health system now risks jeopardizing the government's health system transformation plans. At the same time, waitlists mean patients are forced to occupy badly-needed acute care beds, or move into LTC beds prematurely. This is a terrible outcome for the 96% of Ontarians who say they want to live at home, receive care at home and end their days at home.

Unless immediately addressed, the home care system will be unable to recover from COVID-19, and many seniors across the province will lose access to the home care supports they have come to rely on to maintain their independence.

The government must immediately invest \$460 million to address wage inequality and stabilize the home care workforce. This funding should be directed to:

- Set a fair (and equitable) wage for PSWs that goes beyond a blanket wage enhancement for all health sectors
- Bring home care professionals back into the sector to serve patients at home
- Support wage increases for critical clinical staff such as nurses and therapists as well as frontline managers and office supports

This investment will mean that more seniors can receive the care they require, and that fewer seniors will experience gaps in their home care scheduled services, that would have resulted in unnecessary admissions to hospital or a long-term care facility.



## Support more family-funded care

Many families cannot get the care their loved ones need through publicly-funded programs. That's when they turn to family-funded home care services. To help make the dream of aging at home a reality, over 150,000 Ontario families support their loved ones with more than 20 million hours of family-funded home care services every year.

Seniors rely on these services to allow them to live more independently, to remain in their own homes longer, and avoid safety risks that could cause a serious fall, injury or illness requiring unnecessary acute care or long-term care admissions.

Now, more than ever, family-funded home care services are essential when desperate families need help for their loved ones. Research has shown that 91% of Ontario seniors would like the government to introduce a new home care tax credit to support their access to more family-funded care.

This new tax credit should reimburse 15% of home care costs, up to a maximum of \$10,000 in annual funded home care services, with a minimum qualifying threshold of \$1000. This would make the maximum benefit to a provincial taxpayer \$1,500, which would go a long way to support families who fund critical home care services.



## Reap the benefits of a modern home care system

We know that 96% of Ontario's seniors want to live at home for as long as they can. While today that is not an option for many, it is possible to build a new senior care system that can make that dream a reality.

By following the example of other jurisdictions and implementing a home-first approach to its health care system, Ontario can create a home care system that will provide seniors with the care they need, in the setting they prefer – their own homes.

With a properly supported home care system, better linkages can be built with primary care. Additionally, integrated models can be put in place between home care and acute care to facilitate smooth and safe transitions home. These changes will allow seniors to get home quickly, and receive their nursing, physical therapy and other key supports in the comfort of their homes, instead of occupying hospital beds.

These changes will also help reduce the number of seniors who must leave their homes and move to congregate settings because the health care supports weren't available to them at home.

Once the home care workforce has been stabilized, an increased investment to meet an additional 4.6M hours of care could reduce the amount of time seniors wait for long-term care by more than 50%, saving the province almost \$500M annually. Meanwhile, an increased investment to meet an additional 7.5M hours of care could also reduce the number of days ALC patients wait in hospital beds by 300,000 bed days a year<sup>4</sup>.



## CONCLUSION

Ontario's seniors have been through a lot these past 24 months. In unprecedented times, seniors and their families have understood that sacrifices have had to be made.

Yet, as we emerge from this pandemic and look to the future of seniors' care in Ontario, seniors and their families need more, or we risk failing to deliver on what they deserve as they age. Seniors expect the government to rebuild the health system to serve all their needs (home care, acute care or long-term care). They expect the health system to do everything in its power to keep them healthy and happy at home. And as we have seen in places around the world with top-tier home care systems and a home-first approach to health care, the expectations of Ontario seniors are entirely reasonable and attainable.

Policy makers take note: continue to favour the use of congregate settings at your peril. 96% of seniors have said very clearly that they want to live at home for as long as possible. This is the roadmap that can allow that to happen. It is what hundreds of thousands of Ontario seniors and their family members demand.

## CITATIONS

1. Canadian Institute for Health Research, August 6, 2020
2. Campaign Research In. poll conducted between September 24th and 29th, 2021.
3. "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Home Care Personal Support and Nursing Services," Government of Ontario, January 2021
4. "Meeting the Future Demand for Home Care in Ontario", Accenture, October 2020



[HomeCareOntario.ca](https://HomeCareOntario.ca)