



SAFE, STRONG AND STABLE

THE FUTURE OF ONTARIO'S HOME CARE SYSTEM

HOME CARE ONTARIO

2021-2022 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Introduction

Over the last twelve months, Ontario's health care system has faced unprecedented challenges. Of the many lessons learned during the pandemic, one is that a strong home care sector is a critical support to maintain a resilient, accessible and equitable health care system for all Ontarians. Home care keeps people healthy at home, giving hospitals the capacity to treat COVID-19 patients and others in need of acute care.

Home care supports seniors to live at home for longer, which means fewer people living in congregate care settings, where they are vulnerable to infection. And, in a time of stay-at-home orders, home care ensures the frail and vulnerable to comply with public health directives without sacrificing their own wellbeing.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of frontline staff and the record-setting development of vaccines, the pandemic will soon recede, and society will begin to return to normal. Yet the pandemic has made it clear that we cannot let some things go back to the way they were. The pandemic laid bare vulnerabilities in the health care sector that must be addressed, so the tragedies of the past year are never again visited upon the people of Ontario.

The pandemic also exposed the degree to which Ontario's health care workforce is linked together. As a result of chronic underfunding by past governments and the overall shortage of Personal Support Workers (PSWs), nurses, and other health professionals, there is a high amount of labour mobility. This has caused workers to move throughout the health care system in search of better wages or working conditions.

Home Care Ontario has long highlighted that nurses, therapists and PSWs in the hospital and long-term care sectors earn more than their peers in home care - the result of decades of underfunding for the home care system. We have reported that these higher wages in other areas of the health care system have been slowly draining home care providers of their workforce, particularly PSWs and nurses. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has accelerated this trend. PSWs and nurses are being drawn away from home care in ever greater numbers, incentivized by actions the government is taking to ensure adequate staffing levels in hospitals and congregate care settings.

Chronic Underfunding of Home Care

Over the past decade, the only additional investments (outside of statutory obligations) made in the base rates paid for the delivery of home care PSW services have totaled 2% (April 2017-1% and April 2018-1% for PSW General Service hours). Between 2014 and 2016, the home care sector was funded to increase the base wage of PSWs by a total of \$4 (plus 22.7% for statutory benefits), from \$12.50 to \$16.50. In the same time period, there has only been one bill rate increase for nursing services, a 2% increase effective April 1, 2018. Therapy services received an increase of 2% at that time as well.

Since 2010, the Ontario Consumer Price Index has risen by 16%. The resulting gap between rising costs and funding levels has significantly compromised the ability of contracted Home Care providers to offer not only competitive wages and benefits, but to invest in critical resources that support capacity, such as technology, specialized training/education, and recruitment investments such as hiring incentives. At the same time, costs for infrastructure, including personnel such as schedulers, managers, supervisors, and quality and risk personnel have risen, but there is downward pressure on salaries for these roles as well, considering the lack of increase in funding.

Historically, increases in overall service volumes, combined with efficiency measures, have allowed organizations to find the ability to make some investment, but this essential freeze in investment has gone on for too long, and increasingly the sector is unable to keep pace with demand.

It is through a post-pandemic lens that this pre-budget submission looks at the future of home care in Ontario, and in particular, the interaction between home care and other important areas of the health care sector. Ontario’s health care system functions as a set of interconnected and interdependent units. When changes are made to one area, they will have impacts throughout the health system. This means that, without mitigating actions, the government’s \$1.9 billion investment in the new Long-Term Care Staffing Strategy will have a dangerously destabilizing effect on home care. For this reason, as Ontario plots its path forward to a post-pandemic health care system, we are calling on the government to take specific actions to support home care and the sector’s hundreds of thousands of patients.

Specifically, Home Care Ontario is calling for the launch of a health human resources strategy for the home care system that includes:

1

\$373M IN STABILIZATION FUNDING TO ENSURE HOME CARE CAN CONTINUE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN STAFF TO PROVIDE THE VITAL CARE ONTARIANS RELY ON.

2

\$25M IN NEW TRAINING SUPPORTS TO HELP MORE PEOPLE JOIN THE SECTOR MORE QUICKLY, AND ALLOW EXISTING STAFF TO UPSKILL AND STAY IN THE FIELD.

3

A TAX CREDIT TO SUPPORT THE MORE THAN 150,000 FAMILIES AND SENIORS WHO FUND THEIR OWN HOME CARE SERVICES EVERY YEAR.

The pandemic has exposed deep gaps in our health system and presented a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the province to impose system-level solutions. Ontario cannot afford to go back to the hallway health care that was all too common in our province before the COVID-19 pandemic. With this pre-budget submission Home Care Ontario—The Voice of Home Care in Ontario™—presents an optimistic, achievable look at the future of health care in Ontario, in which there is a strong and growing role for high quality, professional home care.

1

STABILIZATION FUNDING

Home care plays a critical role in Ontario’s health care system. Home care reduces pressure on emergency departments and supports post-operative patients to return home from hospital quickly. Home care also keep seniors living independently for longer, reducing pressure on an overburdened Long-Term Care system.

But more than a decade of underfunding continues to erode home care’s ability to perform these vital services. PSWs, nurses and therapists in the hospital and Long-term Care sectors continue to earn more than their peers in home care, and these discrepancies are creating growing health human resource challenges that undermine the level of care our seniors can receive at home.

HOME CARE IS ALREADY DRASTICALLY UNDERSTAFFED. HOME CARE IS IN NEED OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ADDITIONAL STAFF. THE CURRENT SHORTFALL HAS CAUSED REFERRAL ACCEPTANCE RATES IN HOME CARE TO FALL DRASTICALLY. FOR FISCAL 2020-21, Q2 HOME CARE ACCEPTANCE RATES FELL TO THE FOLLOWING LEVELS:



This means more and more Ontarians are waiting for home care services in the community and growing pressure is exerted on hospital emergency departments. ALC rates in hospitals continue to rise due to inability to discharge patients efficiently from acute care. Even before the pandemic, PSWs and nurses were leaving the home care system for higher-paying work, better hours and working conditions in other areas of the health system, (such as Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), hospitals and Long-Term Care)



Home Care Ontario appreciates the actions the government has taken to stabilize the health care system and keep Ontarians safe throughout the pandemic. But for lasting change that achieves an overall net benefit to the health and wellbeing of Ontarians, the province needs to look at its actions through a system-wide lens.

For example, the recent announcement of a Long-Term Care Staffing Strategy with significant investments to improve the working conditions in Long-Term Care, including enhanced wages and increased staffing levels, are long overdue and great news for Long-Term Care staff, residents and their families. But without targeted actions to ensure simultaneous stabilization in home care, the Long-Term Care Staffing Strategy will significantly weaken the provincial home care sector.

As we have documented in previous submissions, the biggest challenge home care has faced in recent years is in the area of staffing. Unless immediate investments are made to ensure home care providers can retain and attract frontline staff, the service capacity of the home care sector will continue to shrink, as existing and future workers are drawn away from home care and into other health settings and the broader economy. The impact of such destabilization will be felt by tens of thousands of Ontarians who rely on home care to live at home, receive care at home and, if possible, end their days at home.

69% of Ontario seniors believe that professional caregivers such as personal support workers should be paid at the same rates regardless of whether they work in home care, long-term care or in hospital.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The government should immediately invest \$373M to increase home care bill rates beginning April 1, 2021, in lockstep with the implementation of the Long-Term Care Staffing Strategy. This will ensure no one part of the health care ecosystem is disadvantaged in attracting and retaining the staff necessary to keep patients healthy, safe, and in the setting where they need and want to be. The goal of these investments should be to ensure home care workers are compensated at parity with their peers in Long-Term Care.

Over and above funds to directly support wages and benefits to service delivery staff, this funding would go towards improving issues facing the workforce, including:

- Additional improved wages and benefits where most needed (for example on-call, shift premiums to address increasing complexity)
- Investments in coordination/scheduling to improve caregiver retention
- Investments in training, development, and educational programs (e.g., palliative care, dementia and responsive behaviours).

IN ORDER TO ENSURE ONGOING STABILITY, THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD COMMIT TO AN ANNUAL BILL RATE INCREASE TO SUPPORT HOME CARE CAPACITY WITHIN A MODERNIZED HEALTH CARE SYSTEM. THIS WOULD ENABLE HOME CARE TO, FOR EXAMPLE, REDUCE THE WAGE DISPARITY GAP AND THEREAFTER KEEP PACE WITH OTHER HEALTH CARE SETTINGS, PARTICULARLY LONG-TERM CARE AND THE ACUTE CARE SECTOR.

2

PSW TRAINING SUPPORTS

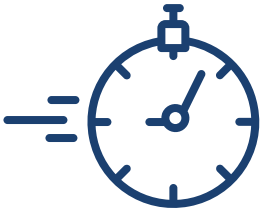
Increasing bill rates for home care will go a long way towards stabilizing and growing the workforce. However, Home Care Ontario estimates the system needs 10,000 additional PSWs to support care in the home and, as a result, more must be done to recruit and train the frontline staff the system requires.

There are not enough existing educational opportunities and there are financial barriers to participation, limiting the potential to attract a sufficient number of workers. More affordable options need to be created that will attract students to enter the profession.

The home care sector has worked with educational institutions to develop new innovative training options that can rapidly deploy workers, but the sector needs the government’s support to expand these programs to foster wide adoption.

RECOMMENDATION:

The government should invest \$25 million to increase funding to the PSW Training Fund Program in order to expand its applicability to provide students with \$2,500 paid training when they participate in three additional types of programs:



- 1. PSW Certificate programs delivered by licensed educational institutions, including FAST¹ (a 20-week accelerated delivery program).



- 2. Certified Supportive Care Worker or similar programs delivered by licensed educational institutions.



- 3. Home Support Worker Training Programs provided by employers of HSW’s, with curriculum and placement hours that replicate home care curriculum requirements. These programs are delivered by clinical educators through service providers.

3

TAX CREDIT FOR FAMILY-FUNDED HOME CARE

Seniors want to age at home, and are increasingly turning to family-funded home care to supplement government funded services. In fact, this represents a significant portion of the home care services received in Ontario. Last year, approximately 150,000 families funded home care services for a loved one, resulting in more than 20 million hours of care across the province.

When they access care from safe, qualified home care organizations, this family contribution creates further capacity across the health system and those who can take this step should be supported and encouraged to do so.

IN A 2015 NATIONAL SURVEY, 63% OF CANADIANS SAID THEY ARE NOT IN A GOOD POSITION TO CARE FOR THEIR ELDERLY FAMILY MEMBERS IF THEY NEED ADDITIONAL CARE AND THAT IT WORRIES THEM GREATLY². THIS PUTS FAMILIES IN A DIFFICULT POSITION WHERE THEY MAY FACE A PRECARIOUS SITUATION IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THEIR LOVED ONES.

At the same time, a recent study of Ontario seniors showed that 77% believe the government should help seniors and their families to access home care services from reputable organizations through relief measures, such as a new tax credit³.



77% of Ontario seniors believe the government should financially support seniors and families who access additional home care services from reputable organizations through a new tax credit or other relief measures.

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to support the families and seniors who access home care services for themselves and their loved ones, the government should introduce a Home Care Tax Credit.

- The Home Care 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.

CONCLUSION:

The importance of the home care sector in supporting Ontarians' wish to live at home for as long possible has come into sharper focus as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the need for a strong home care sector to reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system has been highlighted across the province. When the pandemic is over, the government needs to ensure a strong, stable home care system is in place to support Ontario's aging population, take pressure off other areas of the health care system and act as a buffer against any future threats to Ontario's health care system.

There is no denying that demand for care in the home will only increase in the years to come. With changing demographics, and as a result of personal choices made by Ontarians, demand for home care is likely to outpace the demand for long-term care in congregate, institutional settings. This direction should be embraced by the province. Not only is home care the preferred choice of Ontario seniors, it is less expensive and far safer than congregate care settings.

However, unless immediate investments in home care are made beginning with Budget 2021, the home care system will not be able to service these increasing demands. Wait lists will continue to grow. Frontline workers will continue to exit the sector and the dual crises of hallway medicine and long wait times for elective surgeries will continue to mount.

ENDNOTES:

1. [OFFERED BY CONESTOGA COLLEGE, ONTARIO](https://www.conestogac.on.ca/fulltime/personal-support-worker-fast-delivery) <https://www.conestogac.on.ca/fulltime/personal-support-worker-fast-delivery>
2. [2015 NATIONAL REPORT CARD: CANADIAN VIEWS ON A NATIONAL SENIORS' HEALTH CARE STRATEGY. REPORT. AUGUST 2015.](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/2015-08/6959-report.pdf) <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/2015-08/6959-report.pdf>
3. [HOME CARE ONTARIO PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY, JULY 2020](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ed5ba488f3def4cae17ed81/t/5f2c7b3ba3553d76af3a0b9a/1596750653006/Home+Care+Study+July+25th+2020+for+Media+Release+%28Final%29.pdf) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ed5ba488f3def4cae17ed81/t/5f2c7b3ba3553d76af3a0b9a/1596750653006/Home+Care+Study+July+25th+2020+for+Media+Release+%28Final%29.pdf>

About Home Care Ontario: The Voice of Home Care in Ontario™

Home Care Ontario is a member-based organization with a mandate to promote growth and development of the home care sector through advocacy, knowledge transfer, and member service. Home Care Ontario members include those engaged in and/or supportive of home-based health care. In Ontario, Home Care Providers are responsible for delivering nursing care, home support services, personal care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, dietetics, respiratory therapy, infusion therapy, speech language therapy and medical equipment and supplies to individuals of all ages. An estimated 59 million hours of publicly and family-funded home care service is provided annually across the province.

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