

UPDATED COMMENTARY – *Self-Directed Personal Support Services Agency*¹

This is a follow-up to our November 17, 2017 commentary on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's creation of a new agency for personal support services – originally called the *Self-Directed Personal Support Services Ontario* – but now re-branded as the “***Self-Directed Care Organization (SDCO)***, which is easier to say.

SDCO is the ministry's response to Commitment #5 of the *Roadmap*, albeit two years late. It was incorporated in August 2017 as a *non-profit corporation* and a *crown agency*, and is intended to “...provide eligible home care clients the *opportunity to select and schedule* their personal support worker...” services. It will be “piloted” in three areas: Toronto Central LHIN; Hamilton Niagara Haldiman Brant LHIN; and North East LHIN.

SDCO will:

- Be a “... ***centralized employer***, taking employment responsibilities and ensuring quality of service;
- ***Directly recruit, screen and employ PSWs*** who will work for the agency²;
- Manage administration of scheduling and eligibility (i.e., clients receiving self-directed funding and the number of hours allocated to them);
- Receive client *referrals* from the LHINs;
- Manage client intake and matching with PSWs; and
- Facilitate client scheduling.

The services to be provided are: Personal Hygiene and Routine Personal Activities of Living within the meaning of the *Home and Community Services Act, 1994*. This is a minor (although very important) component of the range of home care and community support services needed to keep seniors living safely in their homes and community.

The implementation schedule appears rushed. An interim CEO of the agency has been appointed, and assuming that all unfolds as the government hopes, their roll-out schedule is:

- December 2017 – Engagement with key stakeholders including: employee organizations; patients; caregivers and service providers.
- On board Phase 1 LHINs:
 - January 2018 – Finalize board member recruitment;
 - February 2018 – Begin PSW Recruitment;
 - March 2018 – Client intake begins;
 - Spring 2018 – Service delivery begins

The next provincial election is scheduled for June 7, 2018.

¹ Our emphasis in italics or bold.

² This is a throwback given the province's long-standing policy to curb government expenditures by reducing the public service through attrition and contracting-out government services and functions.

Care Watch's Concerns:

- The funding for the new agency (SDCO) will come from existing LHIN budgets, and the services to be provided are already being provided by LHIN designated agencies. SDCO clients will still have to connect and coordinate services with the LHINs and other home care providers to access other services which may be part of a client's plan of service, but not provided by the agency. This means that we are paying for **administrative duplication**, the very issue that brought the CCACs³ down not long ago, and **adding complexity** to the service mix for clients. Difficulty in navigating the complex service systems was the second most mentioned complaint against the CCAC model. It is also an impediment to a team approach to service provision, which the government claims to promote.
- How will reduced budgets affect existing not-for-profit community support agencies? Will they have to reduce the range of services they provide to accommodate SDCO? Will they have fewer and less well-trained PSWs to hire?
- Will the SDCO result in different classes of home care clients? An elite group of self-directing funding recipients, who get priority in services, while the rest get less?
- This initiative does nothing to address the scarcity of qualified PSWs across Ontario. There is no clear plan or strategy to increase the labour pool (especially in the NE LHIN!), other than raising the minimum wage to \$16.50/hour. Care Watch supports better wages for PSWs, but we still need qualified people to do the work. We need to establish consistent training and competency standards for PSWs, and address equivalency and/or upgrading of foreign trained workers (who comprise the vast majority of the labour pool). Perhaps this latter issue will be addressed by a new PSW Registry which is being developed.

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January 5, 2018

³ Community Care Access Centres, which were abolished and subsumed by the LHINs.