

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought some new (or at least different) ways to learn. Teaching moves online. Parents struggle as they learn to appreciate – or at least we hope they do - what their children's teachers do every day.

It's too soon to know which learning approaches will stay with us, but COVID-19 itself has already taught us a great deal. Each day, we learn more, but COVID-19 has already brought some unsettling truths to the surface.



- ***We haven't valued senior citizens.*** By now, most of us know that more than 80% of the people who died from COVID-19 either lived or worked in long-term care homes. When we add seniors living in the community, the total will be even higher. Some people felt, some even said, that those people were old, probably going to die soon anyway, and even largely useless. Yet their obituaries describe unique, accomplished individuals and cherished family members, neighbours, and friends. Their work and taxes built the privileges we all enjoy, and many continued to contribute until they died.
- ***We haven't valued the people who care for seniors.*** They rushed frantically from one location to another, potentially carrying infection with them, because they couldn't earn a living wage from one employer. Some employers didn't give them enough protective equipment or training to ward off infection and not pass it to others, including their families. Many of these workers were women, racialized, and relatively new to Canada, and they were treated as replaceable and even dispensable.
- ***We have entrusted the care of vulnerable people to profit-making organizations.*** By definition, these organizations must compensate their shareholders. For-profit homes have seen many more infections and deaths from COVID-19 than non-profit and municipally run homes. We recognize that many factors contributed to those deaths. There is no simple answer, but we need to examine and scrutinize the role of for-profit organizations in caring for vulnerable people.

Care Watch advocates for home and community care for Ontario's seniors. Long-term care and community care complement each other. The people who work in the community have jobs similar to those who work in long-term care – often with even worse working conditions. Data on home and community care are lacking, but we have no reason to think the situation is any better.

It's ironic that June is Seniors' Month in Ontario. Our province, and it's not alone, has failed seniors, and we need to do better. If we didn't already know how deplorably we treat seniors, we need only to read what Canada's military (not easily shocked) found when they entered long-term care homes - conditions that probably existed long before this pandemic. Those homes were among the worst, but they were not necessarily the only ones.

We need to combine immediate action with thoughtful inquiry. Ontario's proposed public inquiry should build on what we already know and highlight the next set of improvements. Its results should not compete with other pressing matters. These are the pressing matters.

What can you do?

Keep applying the pressure. Advocacy takes many forms, all of them valuable.

- Talk to people – family members, friends, neighbours, and colleagues, and don't forget the politicians.
- Don't be satisfied with what is not satisfactory. Speak up and speak out.

Our government has shown it can take immediate action when it sees danger. Keep that momentum going.