

Care Watch's Activities and Achievements in 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic and the restructuring of Ontario's home and community care services made 2020 an eventful year for Care Watch.

Like most organizations, we closed our office in March 2020. Board members, volunteers, and administrative staff worked from home, and we held meetings by telephone and video conferencing. Although our locations changed, our focus didn't. We continued to advocate for high-quality, affordable, and equitable home and community care for Ontario's older adults.



Tragically, the pandemic has hit vulnerable older adults especially hard and exposed many long-standing deficiencies and gaps in long-term care services. At Care Watch, we believe a stronger home and community care system will help seniors continue to live safely in their own homes and communities. It will also reduce the risks arising from future epidemics and pandemics.

Monitoring Ontario Government Policy

A large priority was monitoring of the many provincial policy developments, notably the restructuring of both our health system and home and community care services system. There is a new super agency - Ontario Health. The Local Health Integration Networks are being eliminated, and new Ontario Health Teams will deliver services, including home and community care, within defined geographic regions. These health teams comprise various non-profit and for-profit providers; some teams have been launched, and others are under development. From Care Watch's perspective, this restructuring has lacked transparency and clarity. We don't yet know how, or whether, the changes will improve health services generally and especially services for seniors.

Restructuring home and community care services started in early 2020 with the omnibus *Bill 175 – the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act* – which, unfortunately, was passed without amendment in July 2020. Our submission to the Legislature's Standing Committee on Social Policy identified several deficiencies, including elimination of public accountability and government oversight of providers, lack of service delivery standards, reduction of client protections, and failure to address long-standing issues such as access to care, equity, quality of service, and staffing shortages.

Legislative and general policy authority for home and community care services was transferred to the *Connecting Care Act, 2019* and Ontario Health, with further delegation of the planning,

funding, and delivery of home and community care services to Ontario Health Teams. Specifics lacking in the legislation will be spelled out in regulations, and we don't know yet what those regulations will look like. The client Bill of Rights, for example, is to be recreated as regulation, and Care Watch proposed updated wording for such a bill. We will continue to monitor implementation of the legislation and development of the regulations. It is crucial that we and others ask questions and demand answers.

Care Watch has also been active on several other policy-related fronts. We supported Bill 196, a private member's bill that would establish a Seniors Advocate for Ontario as a Legislative Officer, and we reiterated support for a national seniors strategy and a national pharmacare strategy. We also made a submission to the Nursing Home Commission - set up to again review the numerous problems exposed during COVID – to bring to the Commission's and government's attention the issues that home care and nursing homes share. When long-term care services are being reformed, home care must be part of the conversation.

Communications

To get the word out on issues, we increased the use of e-bulletins and web postings. In 2020, e-bulletin topics included: funding home and community care; labour shortages; Bill 175; lessons learned from COVID-19; ageism; home care and the LGBTQ2S+ community; and home care in a pandemic. We have distributed the e-bulletins to Care Watch members and supporters; other organizations; politicians at the municipal, provincial, and federal government levels; and journalists.

To expand our communications, we are redesigning our website and will continue to add new content.

Other Activities

- **Input to Federal Government:** Care Watch provided input to the National Advisory Council on Seniors regarding development of a national seniors strategy and a national pharmacare programme, both of which we believe would benefit all Canadian seniors.
- **Letter-writing to Ontario MPPs:** This past year, board members wrote to their local MPPs to inform them about Care Watch and our advocacy issues. To support this campaign, we did demographic research on members' individual ridings so we could address our comments more specifically to the needs and challenges in their communities.
- **Participating on Seniors Liaison Committees:** During 2020, the Care Watch Chair participated on the Seniors Liaison Committee of the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility and on the Toronto Seniors' Strategy Accountability Table.
- **Speaking Engagements:** Care Watch's Chair was a featured speaker for two online conferences. The first, for students in the Social Services Worker - Gerontology Program at Sheridan College, addressed seniors' advocacy, policy advocacy, and Care Watch's specific focus on home care and ageism. The second was a panel discussion sponsored by the Ontario Council of the Federation of University Women, which also focused on ageism and issues and challenges in home and community care.

- **Research Partners:** We continue to be a partner in a 7-year research project, “Imagining Age-Friendly ‘Communities within Communities’: International Promising Practices,” which was launched in June 2018 and is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The research team, led by Dr. Tamara Daly of York University, is examining age-friendly practices in multiple cities in Canada and cities in Norway, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan.
- **Collaboration with Other Organizations:** Over the past year, Care Watch has reached out to and supported initiatives undertaken by various organizations, including Seniors for Social Action Ontario, the Ontario Health Coalition, Senior Pride networks in Toronto and Niagara, the Toronto Council on Aging, and the Alzheimer Society of Toronto.

Annual General Meeting: On December 9, 2020, Care Watch held its Annual General Meeting. In addition to conducting statutory business, we recognized the outstanding contributions of retiring board members Anita Dressler and Josephine Grayson. We also welcomed three new board members and confirmed our 2021 Board of Directors. Continuing members are: Nazrawit Gebeto, Michèle Harding, Shamim Hawthorne, M. A. Masoodi, Kathryn Morgan, Robert Schenk, Grace Sun, and Gail Thompson. New members are: Pat Armstrong, Fiona Green, and Jack Harmer.

Our keynote speaker was Michael Nicin, executive director of the National Institute of Ageing at Ryerson University. Mr. Nicin spoke about the current nursing home experience and options for increasing virtual home and community care services within a restructured long-term care system.

Looking Forward

We are hopeful that, sometime during 2021, COVID will be sufficiently under control to allow us to resume in-person events. Given the dire consequences of the pandemic for many seniors, we strongly believe that new thinking and new approaches are needed and that now is an opportune time to initiate change. We therefore intend to promote alternative models of care that are consistent with our principles. Further, we will remain focused on monitoring Ontario government policy, providing our input to the decision-making process, and advocating for improved home and community care for seniors.

We wish you and yours a safe and healthy New Year,

Michèle Harding, Chair
For the Board of Directors