

June is seniors month in Ontario. Our government tells us it is celebrating Ontario's older adults and their contributions. It suggests ways to promote the month, recognize outstanding individuals, and request congratulatory messages from government officials and royalty.



Government is telling us quite a bit, but has it been listening?

Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission says we must reimagine care for older adults, and it recommends exploring a range of options. Canada spends less on home care than many other jurisdictions, some with populations older than ours. COVID showed us that care can be delivered safely at home. Equally important, most older adults want to remain in their homes whenever possible.

If Ontario's government is listening to older adults, it will:

- ***Give home and community care enough funding so that all older Ontarians have the services they need.***
- ***Consider reallocating some long-term care funding from institutions to home and community supports.***
- ***Investigate promising ideas in Ontario and elsewhere for keeping older adults out of institutions.***

Some people may need care in a residential setting, but during COVID, some long-term care homes failed the people who lived and worked there. Deaths came from COVID, but also from neglect – the result of conditions that had gone on for a long time. To serve those who need congregate residential care safely, we need to fix what's wrong.

If Ontario's government is listening to older adults, it will:

- ***Accept, adopt, and act on the recommendations of the COVID-19 Long-Term Care Commission.***
- ***Hold long-term care operators to account, with inspections, serious consequences for non-compliance, and adherence to standards as conditions for funding.***

Valuing older adults means valuing those who provide care – both paid and unpaid. There aren't enough personal support workers now, and the gap is growing. Those working in the community will leave unless they have decent pay, benefits, and working conditions. The unpaid workers who provide care at home bear much of the pressure. They – like personal support workers – are often women and often overlooked. Both groups need support.

If Ontario's government is listening to older adults, it will:

- ***In the immediate short term, give personal support workers across health care – in hospitals, long-term care homes, and communities – comparable and greatly improved pay, benefits, and working conditions.***
- ***Work across departments, ministries, and levels of government to establish a strategy for getting and keeping a strong workforce.***
- ***Investigate further supports for unpaid caregivers.***

What can you do?

We judge a government's priorities not by what it says, but by what it spends. Also, elections aren't too far away. Don't rely on broad promises. You need to hold government and candidates to account. You can ask:

- How will you and your party keep people at home and out of institutions unless they need to be there?
- How will you and your party improve pay, benefits, working conditions, and training for personal support workers so they will want to enter and remain in the profession?
- How will you and your party support unpaid caregivers?

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