

We've concluded another challenging year. COVID-19 continues to threaten public health, hospital services, the education system, our livelihoods, and our everyday lives. The pandemic has hit older Canadians particularly hard, showing that home and community care is vital. It helps older adults stay safe and healthy, live at home in their communities, and enjoy their lives.

During 2021, Care Watch continued to work and meet remotely. We've adjusted the way we work, but not what we are working for – high quality, affordable, and equitable home and community care for older Ontarians.



## **Policy**

We keep a close eye on provincial policy. Our activities have included:

- **Providing input to the policy-making process.** Early in 2021, we made a submission to the province's Pre-Budget Hearings, calling for significantly increased funding for home and community care. We were disappointed that the budget fell well short of the investment needed, and we will continue to respond to further opportunities.

We also made a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy about Bill 283, *Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario's Health System Act, 2021*; provided comments on private members' bills introduced in the Ontario Legislature; and reviewed the Ontario Auditor-General's report on acute care hospital patient safety and drug administration. We will make comments to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts as opportunities arise.

- **Monitoring the home and community care regulations**, which now fall under the *Connecting Care Act, 2019*. We reviewed the regulatory proposals announced in August and then consulted with organizations such as the Ontario Community Support Association and the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. In our submission to the Ministry of Health, we recommended that Ontario:
  - ✚ give priority to not-for-profit agencies
  - ✚ set expectations that all health service providers include existing home and community care agencies when they plan and deliver services
  - ✚ establish provincial eligibility criteria and assessments
  - ✚ clearly define access pathways for community referrals
  - ✚ strengthen and enforce the clients' Bill of Rights
  - ✚ establish workplace safety rights and procedures

The regulations are not yet final, so we continue to monitor the process.

- **Following the development of the new Ontario Health Teams.** So far, there have been few opportunities for public input and only limited provincial-level information. However, 42 teams have been implemented, and the province plans to invest more than \$35 million to support the teams in fiscal year 2021-2022. We've directed questions about home and community care to both the Ministry of Health and the new Ontario Health super agency. This summer, we had a preliminary conversation with Ontario Health representatives, but information remains scarce.

- ***Calling attention to workforce issues.*** There is a growing shortage of personal support workers, particularly those in home and community care. They are already paid less than the ones in long-term care, their working conditions are worse, and home and community agencies are stressed to find and keep them. The COVID-19 pandemic made this shortage even worse. The province's Long-Term Care Staffing Plan, announced in the summer, is geared towards personal support workers for nursing homes, but ignores the shortage of community-based workers. We have communicated our concerns to the Ministries of Health and of Long-Term Care. We continue to advocate for specific strategies to bolster the workforce for home and community care as well as for investments in community-based workers and wages that are equal to those of workers in long-term care.

Care Watch has also been active at the national level. The September 2021 federal election allowed us to highlight four issues: national pharmacare, a national seniors strategy, a workforce strategy, and national standards and accountability. Our bulletin on each topic outlined the issue and suggested questions readers could pose to political candidates. After the election, we communicated with the recently appointed federal Minister of Seniors and Minister of Health to advocate for a national seniors strategy, a national pharmacare strategy, and national standards for home and community care.

We have been following the development of national standards for long-term care, a process being coordinated by the Health Standards Organization. These standards (spurred by tragedies during the pandemic) will apply only to nursing and retirement homes. We hope they will serve as a springboard for developing comparable standards for home and community care.

### **Communications**

Care Watch continues to get the word out through our e-bulletins. In 2021, our topics included: workforce strategy, technology and older adults, Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission report, seniors month, home and community care regulations, and federal election promises. We distribute these bulletins to Care Watch members and supporters; allied organizations; municipal, provincial, and federal politicians; journalists; and interested members of the public.

We have been updating and redesigning our website, which will include both our analysis of issues and some resources to support advocacy. We look forward to sharing it with you in 2022.

### **Other Activities**

- ***2021 Annual General Meeting.*** At our December 14, 2021 Annual General Meeting, Deborah Simon, Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario Community Support Association, spoke on challenges and opportunities facing home and community care. Her presentation combined an overview with specific information that will serve as a backdrop for our activities in 2022.

The annual business meeting included the Chair's Report and Treasurer's Report. We welcomed three new board members – John Bagnall, Ginny Odette, and David Sutton. We also thanked three outgoing members – Pat Armstrong, Jack Harmer, and Kathryn Morgan – for their contributions.

- ***Participation and collaboration.*** Care Watch continues to be represented on the Ontario Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility Seniors Liaison Committee and the Toronto Seniors Strategy Accountability Table. In these forums, we work with other organizations to provide feedback and ideas on government policies, programs, and services that affect older Ontarians. We have also collaborated with various organizations, including Seniors for Social Action Ontario, the Ontario Health Coalition, the Ontario Community Support Association, and the Alzheimer Society of Ontario.

- **Partnership on a major research project.** Care Watch continues as a partner in a seven-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. A team of researchers, led by Dr. Tamara Daly of York University, is examining age-friendly practices in cities in Canada as well as in Norway, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan.

### Looking Ahead

Care Watch will continue to monitor Ontario government policy, provide input to the policy-making process, and advocate for improved home and community care for older Ontarians. We have begun planning our campaign for the upcoming 2022 Ontario election. Older Ontarians are a force for positive change. We will continue to spread the word with our members and supporters.

December 2021 marks the end of my term as chair of Care Watch’s Board of Directors. At its January 2022 meeting, the board will elect new officers. I am honoured to have served as Care Watch’s chair and look forward to the organization’s future accomplishments.

Best wishes for a safe and healthy New Year,

Michèle Harding

We welcome and appreciate donations to support our advocacy work. However, we are not a registered charity, so we can’t issue tax receipts for donations. To donate, please go to: <https://carewatchontario.com/get-involved/donate>.