

Chair's Annual Report – 2023

Looking Back

In 2023, with most of the elections behind us, Care Watch concentrated on communicating with decision makers and the public about the specific issues that remain important to older adults. The backdrop for all our communications has been the strong wish of an overwhelming number of older Canadians to stay in their own homes and communities for as long as they can. We continue to advocate for the policies and services that keep them where they want to be.

We have underlined the importance of not-for-profit, government funded community agencies as the entry to providing services – for example, transportation, meals, adult day programs, or personal care - to older adults. Older Ontarians can feel secure when they know these services are available and accessible regardless of where in the province they live. However, services depend on people to provide them, so we have continued to call attention to the need for personal support workers to earn as much and receive benefits comparable to workers in hospitals and long-term care homes. There are already too few personal support workers in the community, and without wage equality there will be even fewer.

In March 2023, we launched our new website. The content is showcased and the navigation is user-friendly. We are very pleased with the results and invite members of the Care Watch community to check in often.

Communicating

Throughout the year, we advocated for older adults in a series of submissions to decision makers.

- ***Our January 2023 letter to the City of Toronto Budget Committee*** noted the importance of municipal governments to public health, transportation, housing, and recreational opportunities – the conditions that keep older adults in their homes and communities. We asked the mayor and the budget committee to invest in housing for older adults and in the local community agencies that deliver home care and personal services. We also urged Toronto to advocate to the provincial government for wage equality so that the workers who deliver these community services earn as much as those who work in institutions.
- ***The February 2023 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission*** called for Ontario to invest enough in home and community services so that 2.7 million hours could be added to meet the growing needs of Ontario's older population. We also asked the government to give priority to services from community-based non-profit agencies, hire and retain community-based personal support workers, and pay those workers as much as those in long-term care homes and hospitals.
- ***In our March 2023 submission to the Standing Committee on Bill 60: Your Health Act, 2023***, we opposed the Bill, which transfers many surgical and diagnostic procedures to private (often for-profit) clinics. We believe this will result in service barriers, higher costs, weaker standards, and greater pressures on public hospitals. We recommended withdrawing the bill and concentrating instead on recruiting and retaining the health professionals the system sorely needs.
- ***Our September 2023 response to the federal Safe Long-Term Care Act*** recognized that the Act is an important step, but only a step. The federal government needs to adopt and enforce consistent national standards for care in long-term care homes and also in homes and communities. Along with standards, Care Watch signalled that home and community care needs a significant increase in funding.



Federal action is needed to establish a national system of care for older adults that responds to their needs and preferences, operates smoothly and effectively, and is sustainable on a long-term basis.

- ***In November 2023, we addressed Bill 135, the Convenient Care at Home Act, 2023.*** The legislation aims to make access to home care simpler and better coordinated. We are concerned, however, that it emphasizes patients returning home from hospitals. We recommended clear pathways to home care for older adults who want to remain in their homes. We also recommended that non-profit agencies be given priority when contracts are awarded, that all organizations be held accountable for care, and that steps be taken to attract and retain a strong home and community care workforce.

Our communications also included e-bulletins to Care Watch supporters and other organizations as well as to politicians in all parties. Topics covered included ageism, a summary of recent Care Watch activities, the Ontario budget, Seniors Month, and GivingTuesday.

Partnerships and Collaborations

We continue our partnership with *Imagining Age-Friendly “Communities Within Communities”*: *International Promising Practices*, led by York University. We have also begun participating in a CIHR-funded study: “A comparative analysis of regulatory approaches to the assisted living/retirement home sector in Ontario and British Columbia.”

Care Watch continues to have a seat on the Seniors Liaison Committee under the auspices of the Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. Given the shortage of personal support workers in home and community care, we have been looking at other effective ways to deliver home and community services. One example is supportive housing within Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), which can be a model for cluster-care services. The Liaison Committee has provided a good forum for this discussion. We have also been talking with UHN Open Lab about opportunities to contribute to their NORC project.

The Ontario Community Support Association and the Alzheimer Society continue to be rich sources of information and collaboration.

Looking Ahead

In the 2023 budget, the government outlined a plan to invest \$1 billion over three years to expand home care services. It mentions “accelerating” investments “up to” \$569 million in 2023/2024. This funding includes \$300 million for rate increases to “stabilize the home and community care workforce” and to promote personal support work in the “long-term care sector.” We still have many questions about how this funding will be allocated, who will control it, and exactly how it will translate into the services that are greatly needed.

The Ontario government also recently announced a new program to attract personal support worker students and recent graduates by investing more than \$300 million over three years “to help thousands of people launch careers as personal support workers in long-term care homes and in the home and community care sector.” There are various financial incentives to students and recent graduates who are completing clinical placements or who commit to working in a long-term care home or with a home and community care service provider for 12 months. There is also relocation funding for graduates who commit to working in rural, remote, or northern communities for 12 months.

This is a strong initiative to attract workers, but it still misses the mark. There is no wage parity for workers in home and community care, so we ask you to ask yourself.... “Where would you work? In the community or in a long-term care home where you can make at least \$4 more per hour?” Treating home and community care workers equitably has been a constant theme throughout 2023 and one we expect to continue in the coming year. Care Watch’s work is far from done...