

Chair's Annual Report – 2024

Taking a step back

Care Watch has used much of 2024 to clarify and strengthen its mandate. When we sent our January 2024 bulletin, *Convenient Care At Home Act, 2023. What Disaster Could Look Like*, to the Ministry of Long-Term Care, we were informed that home care was outside this ministry's purview, and we were referred to the Ministry of Health. This was a sharp reminder, almost a rebuke, which we took to mean that Ontario's government views long-term care as limited to long-term care homes. Therefore, any long-term care funding announcements would probably refer solely to these institutions. The idea of even a range, let alone a continuum, of care seemed no longer part of the government's vocabulary.

We needed to frame our communications accordingly. Any mention of long-term care, even in a larger sense, would risk being misunderstood. Since then, we have referred specifically and consistently to "home and community care" and "home and community services."

Communicating and advocating

We continue to communicate to government and to our communities about topics of concern to older Ontarians.

- ***Our 2024 pre-budget submission*** urged government to: 1) increase investment in home and community services; 2) close the wage gap between personal support workers in the community and those in hospitals and long-term care homes; and 3) investigate models of cluster care designed to bring services to settings with high concentrations of older adults. We are encouraged that government has budgeted for an additional \$2 billion investment in home and community service. In addition, the proposed *Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act* includes a further injection of funds, though it doesn't yet address the glaring wage inequities.
- ***Input to the proposed regulation under the Seniors Active Living Centres Act, 2017*** recommended including Indigenous Friendship Centres as Prescribed Entities and also advocated for stronger participation of municipalities (whose role in health services is often overlooked).
- ***A letter to the Auditor General of Ontario about prequalification of home care providers*** <https://carewatchontario.com/home-community-care/submissions/service-provider-prequalification/> called for transparency, clear criteria, and public accountability, which had not been evident in the current prequalifications. We also recommended that non-profit home care providers be given priority in bidding and contracting processes.
- ***An examination of privatization*** described the threats to clients, workers, and communities when large for-profit corporations overtake smaller community-based

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agencies. Care Watch recommended that standards be established, that compliance with standards be publicly reported, and that future contracts prioritize non-profit delivery. Our past and current work on privatization and profit is at <https://carewatchontario.com/home-community-care/services/>.

- **Resistance to ageism**, which drives inadequate home and community services and disregard for the people who provide those services. Our first Seniors Month bulletin challenged government to ask, not tell, older adults what they need and to work with them rather than for them. The second bulletin told government that, instead of awards and congratulations, older adults want stable funding for home and community services, support for paid and unpaid caregivers, accessible buildings, and protection from scams.
- **A position paper – Ageing in Place: Using Evidence to Support Older Adults and Their Caregivers.** <https://carewatchontario.com/home-community-care/organizing-the-system/ageing-in-place-position-statement/> calls on policy makers to establish guidelines, prioritize non-profit providers, and establish and support a home care workforce. It will be a foundation for our work in 2025.
- **Expansion of our reach.** In January, we struck a social media committee, and we have launched or relaunched social media platforms. We encourage you to visit us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [X](#) (previously Twitter).

Partnerships and collaborations

Participation in research allows us both to contribute and to learn from the experience of others. Care Watch is currently a research partner on:

- Imagining Age-friendly “Communities within Communities” (SSHRC)
- A comparative analysis of regulatory approaches to the assisted living/retirement home sector in Ontario and British Columbia (CIHR)
- Developing an evidence-base to inform retirement home policy development using an equity and diversity lens: A mixed methods study (CIHR)

We continue to be represented on the Ontario Seniors Liaison Committee. We value our ties with the Accessible Housing Network, Alzheimer Society of Ontario, Ontario Caregiver Coalition, and Ontario Community Support Association. Care Watch has also contributed to the Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) project at UHN’s Open Lab.

Looking ahead

As we reported at the December 2023 Annual General Meeting, Care Watch’s financial resources are dwindling. At that point, we projected that our funds would last until July 2025. We have been looking for ways to continue as long as possible, and have identified and carried out several cost reductions.

- With the agreement (and blessing) of our administrator, we negotiated a cutback in hours.

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- In October, we were able to cancel our internet and telephone contract at no penalty, and SPRINT generously offered to set up a telephone extension for us.
- Directors insurance continues to be a large, but necessary, expense. However, through Volunteer Canada, we were able to obtain coverage at a lower cost, so we have changed our insurance provider.

At the August board meeting Care Watch embarked on a “soul-searching’ exercise to confirm that our mandate remains relevant and to begin developing a roadmap for the organization. In October, we sent a bulletin including a survey to ask members and stakeholders what issues they believed Care Watch should address going forward. Our constituency named access to services and also accountability as top concerns. We continue to advocate for accountability, and access, which also encompasses wage compensation and the management of human resources. These are the issues that will be at the forefront of our advocacy as we move forward.

With best wishes for 2025,

Fiona Green

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