

CONCERNED

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A VOICE FOR QUALITY  
IN LONG-TERM CARE

## 2024-25 Budget Consultations

Submission by:

Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities

January 15, 2024

### Introduction

Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities (Concerned Friends) is pleased to take this opportunity to contribute to the Ontario 2024-25 Budget process.

For more than 40 years, Concerned Friends has been advocating for a system where all Long-Term Care (LTC) residents have access to services that meet their diverse medical, mental health, social and emotional needs. They must be safe, cared for, and part of a vibrant community.

We appreciate that important investments were announced by the current government in 2023 to improve long-term care homes. However, the long-term care system itself has long-standing challenges; significant attention and investment is required to bring it up to the high quality, safe and stable standard its residents require.

Our Budget Recommendations fall into three categories:

- Increase Accountability and Enforcement
- Advance Quality and Safety of Care
- Expand not-for profit and municipal LTC to Meet the Growing Need

### Direct Funding to Increase Accountability and Enforcement

At the end of 2023, the plan to restore proactive annual inspections of long-term care homes was still not fully implemented. Furthermore, homes continued to lack the funding, staffing and resources to fully meet all regulatory standards. For example, some of the 2023 inspection reports we have reviewed note neglect of residents resulting from inadequate staffing.

**Recommendation 1.** Allocate funding to address barriers impeding the **full implementation of annual, *unscheduled, comprehensive quality inspections* and rigorous follow-up and enforcement to ensure compliance.**

**Recommendation 2. Increase Long- Term Care Homes (LTCH) operating funding to enable compliance** with all regulatory standards. Enhanced funding levels must address the higher costs associated with new regulatory standards and inflationary pressures.

**Recommendation 3. Recognize the connection between positive resident outcomes and working conditions.** Increase funding to address recruitment, retention, and competency challenges that are prevalent in LTCHs. Salary and benefits must be competitive (see more detailed human resource recommendations below).

**Recommendation 4. Provide financial incentives for homes that receive national accreditation.** Accreditation is an acknowledged standard of service and governance that align with well-researched criteria. Therefore, the government should use the budget to incentivize LTCHs to pursue accreditation. The result would be improved accountability and service.

## Advance Quality and Safety of Care

The following budgetary commitments are urgently needed to advance quality and safety practices in LTCHs.

**Recommendation 5. Increase funding to address LTC Human Resources Challenges** (Staffing Levels and Working Conditions), including salaries that match or exceed those for the same positions in acute care. Since homes are chronically understaffed, budgets should increase to improve ratios, enhance staff development, and attract qualified staff **with specialized training in older adults.**

Concerned Friends’ members are regularly in LTCHs and observe, firsthand, how staffing shortages and poor working conditions compromise resident care.

Funding must support the staff mix and staffing levels needed for an aging and changing resident population.

Given staffing shortages, Long-Term Care Homes rely heavily on casual, agency or part-time staff, leading to high staff turnover and detracting from continuity of care.

### Specific Recommendations:

**5a. Increase direct care staffing.** Implement in 2024-25 a new funding formula enabling the Ministry to replace the “four hours average care” with a staff-per-resident ratio that recognizes the advanced medical and care needs of residents.

**5b. Fund enhanced staffing models.** From 2020-2022, government announced specific funding increases to enhance LTCH access to social work and behavioral support resources. Given the complex medical and mental health needs of LTCH residents, a fuller range of professional

specialized staff must be funded with strict guidelines on how the funding is to be used. In addition, staffing models must be enhanced to ensure each home can provide programming and social opportunities integral to quality of life.

Funding should be expanded to include:

- designated funding for a leadership position responsible for the implementation of patient/resident-centred care by all departments and positions in a LTCH.
- a permanent Attending Physician or Nurse Practitioner (ratio based on the number of residents) to manage and coordinate resident care in their respective LTCH.
- improved access to allied professionals, including activation specialists, dementia care professionals, physio and occupational therapists, social work etc.
- enhanced access to BSO supports and education opportunities available in all homes.

**5c. Provide ongoing funding for recruitment.** Shortages of qualified, well-trained staff undermine the government's goal of quality long-term care and impedes efforts to deal adequately with the pandemic and infection control in general.

**5d. Increase compensation (benefits and wages)** for LTC staff comparable to that in the hospital sector for comparable positions. Include funding to enable **full-time employment** and **expand benefits** to part-time staff. These measures are essential to improve retention and stabilize long-term care.

**5e. Fund enhanced in-service professional development.** Holistic and patient-centred care are essential; staff must be appropriately trained and supported to meet the complex health, mental health, and emotional needs of residents. Enhanced funding formulas should enable LTC facilities to provide a well-developed, on-going development program for all staff.

**5f. Fund enhanced infection control measures.** COVID-19 prevention and containment funding must continue and be maintained. Each home must have a permanent, dedicated IPAC human resource i.e. a specially trained infections control Registered Nurse.

**5g. Recognize inflationary pressures on food services.** Good nutrition is a key contributor to health and an area that some LTCHs are cutting back on due to increased costs. Previous increases are not sufficient. Funding must be enhanced to ensure both quality food and adequately trained staff.

## Expand Not-for-profit and Municipal LTC as well as Home and Community-based options to Meet a Growing Need

There is currently a LTC waitlist of 43,000 seniors. This waitlist will only increase as Ontario's population ages. The solution must be multi-faceted.

Specifically, the 2024-25 budget should:

**Recommendation 6.** Create a special funding stream specifically to ensure the development of evidence-based, non-institutional LTCH models, i.e. clusters of **small homes for about six residents**, to promote a sense of family and improve resident-centred care.

**Recommendation 7. Maximize the use of public dollars by prioritizing the not-for-profit and municipal sectors for growth.** Current waitlist data shows that 68% of those on the waitlist indicated a not-for-profit/charitable or municipal/public LTCH as their first choice. Specific funding should target not-for-profits with the goal of increasing their overall proportion of LTCHs.

**Recommendation 8. Increase funding to support the “Aging Continuum of Care,” including home-based health care and support services and affordable seniors housing options.**

Ontario’s investment in new LTCHs must be accountable and guided by evidence. A broader focus on home-based and community care options will alleviate the waiting list for LTCH and help to rationalize the long-term care system, making sure that individuals get *the right level of care at the right time in their life*. It will facilitate individuals’ rights to choose and will help meet the anticipated growth in demand as Ontario’s population ages.

**Recommendation 9. Increase life cycle funding** to ensure LTC homes are continuously updated and maintained in a state of good repair, comparable to funding and standards set out for other public sector buildings, e.g. hospitals, schools, courthouses, etc. This must be sufficient to enable renovations to ventilation and air conditioning systems that directly impact resident health.

## Conclusion

Despite recent investments and regulatory changes, there continue to be serious system flaws in Ontario’s LTCHs. Concerned Friends understands that these deficiencies are the result of a succession of governments having failed to hold operators to account for protecting those in their care. The public is now watching and expecting substantial improvement. Vulnerable seniors need our care.

**The 2024-25 Budget must enable significant advancements in the long-term care sector as a whole, and in LTCHs specifically.** Many of these improvements are included in the recent legislation. Full enforcement and accountability are key.

Increased and targeted funding in the 2024-25 Budget is required to translate improved standards and targets into a reality.

## About Concerned Friends

For more than 40 years, Concerned Friends has assisted individuals to navigate the Long-Term Care system. We have engaged the community, raised awareness, and advocated for system improvements that would directly improve the well-being of residents.

### **Concerned Friends Mission**

To advance the health and well-being and enrich the experiences of those living in long-term care homes across Ontario.

### **Concerned Friends Vision**

A system where individuals living in long-term care homes have access to health and support services that best meet their diverse needs; where every person has a voice that is heard, and rights that are respected. Those being served feel safe, cared for, and part of a vibrant inclusive community.