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## Home Care Crisis in Ontario

Home care is an essential part of elder care and is a critically important approach to allowing people to age in place. Most elders expect to and hope to remain at home as they age. And home care is a good investment for governments because it is far less costly than hospitalization or long-term care.

Unfortunately, home care in Ontario is in crisis. The Ford government is so intent on pouring money into long-term care institutions that the quality and quantity of home care is in dire straits.

Vulnerable people in Ontario are the ones suffering.

Here we highlight the major issues with the current home care crisis.

- *Home care is safer.* Throughout the pandemic, the infection rate for those receiving home care was significantly lower than for those living in long-term care institutions. Nevertheless, it is the long-term care institutions, with their outrageously high infection rates and deaths, that are being expanded, not the home care sector. This is a cruel irony
- *Home care workers are underpaid.* During the pandemic, long-term care institutions have been receiving additional funds for staffing while home care providers have been largely left out. In fact, home care has only received one increase in wages in the last thirteen years
- *Huge wage disparity between home care and other sectors of health care.* This disparity has resulted in many home care workers leaving the field for other areas, such as hospitals, long-term care facilities, and public health, where the pay is much better. Home care workers who opt to go elsewhere can earn between \$6 and \$15 more an hour. During the pandemic, 3,000 home care nurses have left the sector for better paid jobs.

- *Serious shortage of home care workers.* These shortages are now significantly impacting the availability of home care services in Ontario. Provincial nursing visit acceptance rates, which measure whether home care service providers fulfill an urgent request for care have dropped from 95% pre-pandemic to 60% in August 2021. This means home care providers are not able to effectively fulfill 4 out of every 10 requests for Ontarians needing nursing visits, resulting in many patients seeking care in emergency departments, or having to pay for their own home care.
- *Home care is seriously underfunded in Canada and Ontario.* Only 0.2 per cent of GDP is being spent on home care in Canada, lowest among OECD countries. As a result of significant under-funding, there are currently long waiting lists and the time needed to deal with referrals has been increasing dramatically. Canadian provinces spend anywhere from 20 to 40% of eldercare budgets on home care and other community supports. Denmark, on the other hand, spends 60%.
- *The elder care system is unbalanced, seriously impacting home care.* About 700,000 people in Ontario are recipients of home care, while about 70,000 people reside in long-term care institutions. Despite these numbers, only 13% of funds in Canada are for home care while 87% of government funding goes to nursing homes. And home care is much less costly. It costs about \$183 per day to house a high-needs person in a long-term care home compared to just over \$100 a day to provide home care.
- *Emergency home care funding needed now.* The home care sector has been asking the government for \$600 million in emergency funding to address the current crisis and to ensure that wages in the sector are comparable to those in related areas of health care. The current annual allocation for home care in Ontario is approximately \$3 billion.

Like many of the home care organizations, SSAO is deeply concerned with the growing crisis in the home care sector. It is past time to address these issues. We need the government to recognize the crisis and invest resources in the sector. The Ontario government must also stop investing in new long-term care buildings and shift those resources to home care and community support organizations. With over 90% of Canadians not wanting to go to a long-term care institution, and with people over 65 expected to double in the next decade, we desperately need to enhance home care and other community supports.

Below please find the SSAO *Enhancing Home Care* paper that was originally published about a year ago. It outlines SSAO's position on home care. We believe it is more relevant than ever.

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*We urge SSAO readers to reach out to their elected MPP's to advocate for enhanced home care. Find your MPP here: <https://www.ola.org/en/members/current>.*

*Thanks to some home care organizations who provided updated information for this editorial.*