



AGING AT HOME (AGING IN PLACE) INITIATIVES

© Seniors for Social Action Ontario (SSAO)

Aging in place refers to “having access to services and the health and social supports you need to live safely and independently in your home or your community for as long as you wish or are able” (Government of Canada, 2018).

There is now broad recognition that the old institutional long term care model has outlived its usefulness. It is an antiquated system that is dehumanizing, subjects residents to undue risk of infection, requires that staff provide assembly line care, and is an impossible model in which to ensure standards and legislation are adequately met (Spindel, 2020).

Seniors do not want to be warehoused in long term care institutions after living life in the community with their family and friends. They want to age in place where they are familiar and comfortable as long as physically possible. People who are 65+ are the fastest growing age group in the province. By 2041 they are projected to comprise 25% of Ontario’s population – almost 4.6 million people (Government of Ontario, 2017:9). Is the government’s only plan to institutionalize those who require personal care and support? Why is the Ford government continuing to support and fund the status quo, building 8000 new beds and 12,000 renovated beds in institutions when other, much better alternatives are available? (Jeffords, July 15, 2020).

Ontario does have aging at home initiatives currently in place that are keeping older adults out of institutions. Unfortunately this government is not investing in expanding these non-profit, community-based options, choosing instead to provide funding to warehouse older adults in long term care institutions, 57% of them operated for-profit. These facilities were found to have more deaths during the pandemic (Perkel, July 22, 2020).

Ontario previously had an Aging In Place strategy that now appears to have been archived (Government of Ontario, 2017). It’s guiding principles of inclusion, choice and self-determination, diversity, safety and security were exactly the principles that underscore Aging At Home initiatives. Investments in active living centers were part of this strategy (Government of Ontario, April 17, 2018).

It makes sense that instead of building facilities, increasing supports to older adults where they live is a way of quickly ensuring a reduction in admission to long term care facilities.

What Do Older Adults Require To Successfully Age At Home?

They need:

- Communities that are accessible (Peterborough's Age Friendly Community Business program includes "wide and clutter-free aisles, large print signs, accessible washrooms, good lighting, and respectful staff to assist seniors" (Ontario Government, 2017:16).
- A home that is also accessible where care can be provided if required and universal design principles are employed.
- A social network of family, friends, and neighbors.
- Active living centres that provide the opportunity for older adults to pursue their interests in the company of others (arts and cultural programs, fitness centre, health and wellness, lifelong learning, social groups, short outings etc.) (North York Seniors Centre, 2020).
- Provision of in-home care and support (funding for home care had more than doubled from 2003/04 to 2017/18 from \$1.2 billion to almost \$3 billion, but still falls well short of what is needed to help people to age at home and avoid institutionalization (Government of Ontario, November, 2017:23).
- Provision of nutritional support and home delivery of meals.
- Increased physician house call services.
- Expanded house call services to include registered nurses, nurse practitioners, rehabilitation specialists, social workers and other allied health professionals.
- Paid family caregivers to provide support at home with the assistance of home care staff rather than forcing people into institutions. This is especially important considering the PSW shortage in the province.
- Legal and financial arrangements including substitute decision makers and powers of attorney for personal care and financial matters.

This kind of assistance can be provided where people live by non-profit community organizations, religious and cultural groups, and/or municipalities.

Examples of Aging At Home Initiatives

Neighborhood Link, Toronto

This non-profit organization provides a full range of services and supports to older adults in the Beaches community. It offers a day program for older adults with dementia. Its Akwasti Program is also unique in that for 9 weeks during the summer, students work on contract to assist vulnerable and isolated older adults to live in their own homes as a supplement to regular

staff support. They work with a convener to escort people to medical and non-medical appointments, conduct home visits, provide shopping assistance and other help as required. This is open to students pursuing education in a field related to aging at the post-secondary level. Crisis intervention and counselling, relief for caregivers, security checks for seniors living on their own, in-home assistance and engagement in recreational activities outside the home, congregate dining, and transportation are all provided to help people continue to live at home.

Neighborhood Link also provides supportive housing for older adults and family members through:

Jean Dudley House

This is a 10 bed rent geared to income housing program for seniors who may have some form of cognitive disability. Personal care and help with activities of daily living, home cooked meals, and a wide array of recreational activities that promote socialization and well-being are offered.



O'Connor House

This is also a 10 bed rent geared to income home for older adults with 24 hour non-medical support provided by both Community Care East York and Woodgreen Community Services. Residents receive personal care support with activities of daily living, home cooked meals, and take part in an array of recreational activities.



Community Link House

This is a 25 unit transitional apartment building that helps homeless older adults to integrate into the community and live independently. Social and recreational programs are provided.



The Norm Haughton Complex

This provides rent geared to income and market rent units to older adults in 22 one bedroom and 22 bachelor units. Support services are provided to tenants as needed. Family units are also available at the same site.

Cecilia Murphy Building

This is a 174 unit apartment building with 2 and 4 bedroom rent geared to income units for older adults as well as market rent units. Residents of this building have access to services and supports provided by Neighborhood Link such as personal care, crisis intervention and assistance, friendly visiting, security checks, transportation services with escorts, congregate dining and other social and recreational activities on-site (Neighborhood Link, 2020).



ON LOK Lifeways PACE Program, San Francisco

This program provides intensive supports to assist over 1400 older adults in the San Francisco Bay area who are ill or disabled to live in their own homes, apartments, retirement villages, or hotel rooms. This is done through the provision of:

- In-home primary medical and specialty care as required

- Social services assistance
- Transportation and emergency medical transport
- Rehabilitative and recreational therapy (speech, occupations, physical therapy)
- Home and personal care
- Nutrition services and meals delivered
- Audiology, optometry, podiatry and dentistry
- Nursing care and monitoring services
- Adult day programs to promote social inclusion and activities (Institute on Aging, 2020)

Each participant directs their own care so that it reflects their habits and routines. Case assistants are kept to 2-3 people that the person comes to know well and they provide assistance with activities of daily living (On Lok, 2020). On Lok has its own home health care service.

On Lok also provides supportive housing through the PACE Centre¹ in partnership with Eden Housing. The Peralta Center is located with Eden's 98 unit low income senior housing project that contains 25% of units designated for frail seniors.

It also operates the 30th Street Seniors Centre offering fitness, health and wellness, congregate dining and home delivered meals among other activities (On Lok, 2020).



Pace Centre, San Francisco

¹ PACE programs are Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) that provide “comprehensive medical and social services to certain frail, community-dwelling elderly individuals, most of whom are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid benefits.” These individuals are considered “nursing home eligible.”

<https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/long-term-services-supports/program-all-inclusive-care-elderly/index.html>

Summary

Aging at Home initiatives can take many different forms and are generally tied to the identified needs of the older adults that use them. They can incorporate all or some of the components mentioned earlier. The important aspect of Aging At Home initiatives is that they are person-directed. Older adults or their substitute decision makers are in charge of the services and supports that are provided and these are individualized to support the needs and preferences of the individual being served. If government wants to support the choice, independence, and dignity of older adults, it needs to have an Aging At Home (Aging In Place) strategy.

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