

GETTING SERIOUS

About the Federal Mandate on Long-Term Care

By March 21, 2022 [37,209 people had died in Canada due to COVID-19](#), of whom [20,466](#) or 55% were long-term care residents. These were largely avoidable deaths, caused by overcrowded and understaffed facilities, with little oversight, or regard for the people providing the care. These tragedies of mismanagement and neglect can be largely addressed through improved public funding, tied to conditions for improvement. It is urgent that the next budget addresses the undeniable fact that too many old and ill people are suffering and dying without adequate care. This can and must be rectified by new federal funding tied to enforceable standards for long-term care, standards in which all jurisdictions have humanitarian and political interest, given population aging.

The next budget must address the following six elements:

1. New Federal Funding

LTC is primarily a provincial responsibility, but a new federal LTC Act that comes with new federal funding must demonstrate how progress is being made towards improvements in care. This was how funding under *the Canada Health Act* was initially developed to produce our best loved social programme. Provinces and territories need additional financial support for the kinds of changes required to meet new standards but, unless funding is conditional, there is no guarantee the money will go to improving long-term care across the country.



2. National Standards

The [2021 mandate letter to the Minister of Health](#) requires the development of “national standards and a Safe Long-Term Care Act to ensure seniors get the care they deserve”. The federal government has tasked the Health Standards Organization with developing and consulting on new standards for long-term care. The proposed standards make clear the need to deal with “the challenges related to legislation, regulations, funding, accountability and determining who can own and/or operate LTC homes” that “are by and large the responsibility of

provincial and territorial governments”.
Tying a new federal program with sufficient funding to make and report on progress towards new standards negotiated with provinces is crucial.

3. Ownership

The evidence is clear. A prohibition against any new funding going to for-profit organizations is needed. The pandemic exposed the long-standing pattern of better care in public and non-profit homes and the waste involved in money going to profit rather than to care. The issue of ownership not only applies to owning the entire home but also to contracted services such as food, cleaning, and management. There is a pattern of lower quality services, fewer resident choices, and less continuity in care with such contracting.

4. Accessibility

Any new legislation should include a standard to ensure access to long-term care. This requires a minimum number of places and admission criteria based on equity. Currently, even among those meeting the strict criteria for admission to long-term care, there are long waiting lists. In parts of the country, there are no care homes and not all care homes are culturally safe.

5. Comprehensiveness

Legislation should include a standard that specifies the range of services each home must provide for residents, families, and staff. It would include a guarantee of sufficient access to a physician or nurse practitioner, therapists, recreational activities and other services critical to care. It should also specify a right to access to family, friends and community.

6. Staffing

Study after study, commission after commission demonstrates the need for a sufficient number and mix of staff with the required skills and appropriate conditions of work. These conditions include but are not limited to equitable pay and benefits, access to full-time employment, paid sick leave, on-site training, influence over scheduling and appropriate equipment. The Prime Minister has acknowledged that the conditions of work are the conditions of care. This reality must be embraced in the new federal Act.

We thank you for your efforts to support and advance these principles.

~ The Care Economy Team

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