

February 2023

Written Submission for the Ministry of Finance's Pre-Budget Consultations

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the government follow through on its commitment to invest \$9 billion over 5 years into the long-term care sector.

Recommendation 2: That the government develop and fund a comprehensive health workforce data study.

Recommendation 3: That the government invest in the development and implementation of a national Health Human Resources strategy.

Recommendation 4: That the government develop a funding envelope of \$10,000 per person to support identification and relocation costs for internationally educated health care professionals who qualify for the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP).

Recommendation 5: That the government further invest in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada initiatives to reduce processing times for qualified health professionals applying for work visas and other migration visas in Canada.

Recommendation 6: That the government provide dedicated funding to rollout CIHI-supported interRAI resident assessment tools to every long-term care home in Canada.

Recommendation 7: That the government develop an additional long-term care green infrastructure fund.

The State of Long-Term Care in Canada

Long-term care in Canada remains under extreme pressure. The COVID-19 pandemic, sector-wide staffing shortages and historical and chronic underfunding continue to present obstacles to long-term care homes in providing the quality care that Canadians expect and the quality of care that all governments and homes should strive to deliver. Addressing these challenges remains an urgent priority and the combined and coordinated efforts of the federal and provincial governments will be required to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector and to guarantee equitable and quality care for all Canadians.

During the federal election in 2021, the government made the largest commitment to long-term care funding in Canada's history, promising \$9 billion over 5 years starting in FY2022-23. This funding would support homes in delivering higher quality care, making critical infrastructure upgrades, hiring new staff, improving food and nutrition options, and investing in wide-ranging care and operational improvements. Despite the government's commitment and the critical need for more funding, Budget 2022 offered no new funding for the long-term care sector.

This broken promise has real consequences and has led to another year of challenge for long-term care homes. Despite the extraordinary efforts of staff across the sector, they are limited by the resources available. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges the sector faces and they have been made more acute through record inflation levels. An urgent injection of funding is required to begin to address these problems and a long-term funding plan is needed to ensure the sector can begin planning for the future.

As the federal government finalizes negotiations with the provinces on future health transfers, there is an opportunity to deliver on their promise and increase funding to long-term care homes with the commitment of \$9 billion over 5 years.

Addressing Health Human Resources Shortages

The health human resources crisis is not new. Staffing shortages have been pervasive since before the pandemic, with Statistics Canada data showing more than 17,000 job vacancies in the sector in the second quarter of 2019.¹ However, these problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In a report released in September 2022, Statistics Canada reported that more than 50% of all long-term care homes in Canada reported a critical staffing shortage in 2021.² Additionally, more than 70% of homes reported an increase in overtime hours provided by direct care staff. Even as homes sought to address the situation, the number of vacancies grew. Data shows vacancies grew by more than 18,000 over 2020 and 2021, more than doubling the pre-pandemic vacancy rate, with high attrition and burnout following the extraordinary demands of the early waves of the pandemic.³

These challenges represent an existential threat to the long-term sustainability of the long-term care system. Without staff to care for residents, homes are unable to operate effectively and Canadians will not be able to access the care they need. Waitlists for long-term care beds in some provinces stretch into the tens of thousands and that demand is only likely to grow as the Canadian population ages.

Statistics Canada projects the proportion of the Canadian population aged 65 and older will grow to 1 in 4 by 2051.⁴ Currently 1 in 20 Canadians aged 65 and older living in congregate care, with 1 in 4 over the age of 85.⁵ The aging population will inevitably lead to higher demand for long-term care, yet there are few plans in place to deal with this longer-term challenge.

There are no easy solutions to addressing this crisis and developing a pipeline of health professionals will take time. We acknowledge the work that has already been accomplished, with Health Canada conducting initial Health Human Resources strategy work conducted in Spring 2022 and the government launching the Coalition for Action for Health Workers, which CALTC is proud to contribute to. However, while this work remains in the initial stages, it is clear that Canada needs to start investing in a long-term plan to educate and train personal support workers, allied health professionals, nurses and doctors to ensure this crisis is not repeated. Investments need to be made now to build a plan for the future.

¹ "Table 14-10-0326-02 Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by industry sub-sector, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality," Statistics Canada, <https://doi.org/10.25318/1410032601-eng1>

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2022001/article/00011-eng.pdf?st=ZUJq7czL>

³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/220603/dq220603a-eng.pdf?st=MoRPSxwz>

⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220427/dq220427a-eng.htm>

⁵ Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0045-01 Type of collective dwelling, age and gender for the population in collective dwellings: Canada, provinces and territories

Encouraging Immigration of Health Care Professionals

Even as long-term plans are made, action needs to be taken to address the current crisis. In the short-term, addressing barriers to immigration must be a focus. Canada competes with several countries on attracting available talent and visa processing times remain a barrier. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada have taken steps to reduce these barriers, but additional investments will be crucial to improving processing times and increasing Canada's competitiveness. Shorter processing times will enable health care employers to compete for international talent while the domestic workforce is developed through the collective efforts of the federal government, provincial governments and health stakeholders.

The government has also committed to developing the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP), a specialized immigration program for skilled refugees with the intent of giving employers access to a new source of skilled candidates. The long-term care sector is uniquely placed to support health care professionals and their families with stable jobs, however the financial burden of relocation remains a challenge for most homes. While efforts are being made to support vulnerable populations with loans, a dedicated funding envelope to support these costs will enable long-term care homes to actively recruit international talent to fill staffing vacancies and provide critical additional support for the vulnerable population that meets the criteria of the EMPP. The funding could take the form of a grant to employers who recruit a refugee through the program, covering the costs of visa processing, transportation to Canada and initial settlement costs.

Improving Data in Long-Term Care

The government has committed to creating a world class health data system in Canada and is currently finalizing the pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy. The Expert Advisory Group developing the strategy has identified the lack of workforce data and the limited data available in long-term care as major gaps that need to be addressed. Quality data is critical in ensuring policy responses are evidence-based.

Access to reliable, validated, and standardized resident data is instrumental as the foundation for effective care. Data is used at the home level for activities such as creating person-centered care plans, understanding the preferences and strengths of the individual residents, and ensuring that the specific needs of the resident are being met. At the organizational level, long-term care operators can assess the aggregate acuity and needs of the residents by unit or by facility and compare with the national benchmark. This information allows homes to allocate staff to areas where the need is greatest. At a government level, improved resident data can help policy makers develop more appropriate funding and resource allocation which ensures the most appropriate and highest quality care for residents.

Unfortunately, data in long-term care is neither standardized nor consistently collected. Only two-thirds of Canadian long-term care homes use interRAI, a tool that is the gold standard in

resident assessments. Of those homes, many are not using the long-term care specific version of the tool (LTCF), which is specifically developed to support the needs of the resident experiencing dementia.

interRAI is exceptionally useful for policy makers as data is transferred directly to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) in near real time. This enables policy to be developed based on current information and need. Currently, homes are unable to access the tool due to lack of dedicated funding and appropriate IT infrastructure. Prioritising data collection and ensuring dedicated funding will enable homes to improve care in the home, and contribute to a greater understanding of the long-term care sector at provincial and national levels.

Similarly, workforce and operational data remains a challenge for long-term care homes. Workforce data has been identified as a major gap across all health sectors, presenting unique challenges for addressing the health and human resources crisis. Understanding the aggregate staffing make up in long-term care, the demographics of the workforce, where the gaps are, whether there are geographic challenges in rural and remote areas and a myriad of other factors that weigh into policy making requires clear data. This does not currently exist.

As Health Canada develops a national Health Human Resources strategy supported by the work of the Coalition for Action for Health Workers, this must be underpinned by robust data and an understanding of the health workforce in Canada. Funding the tools necessary to collect and report this data will be critical to developing an effective plan for building the health workforce.

Investing in a Carbon Neutral Long-Term Care Sector

A significant challenge facing long-term care homes during the pandemic was outdated infrastructure. Whether small hallways, poor ventilation or multi-occupancy rooms, older homes faced greater challenges in controlling the spread of COVID-19 compared to more modern homes. The new national standard for long-term care released by the CSA in December last year highlights the important role that the design of homes plays in the provision of quality care and addressing infection prevention and control. More modern homes are also generally more energy efficient, reducing the impact on the environment. With more than 2,000 long-term care homes of varying sizes in Canada, the cumulative effect of poor energy efficiency is significant and needs to be addressed. Currently, however, long-term care homes are not eligible for the Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Program nor other federal energy efficiency programs.

A green long-term care infrastructure fund targeted at upgrading outdated infrastructure to meet modern energy efficiency will ensure long-term care homes can target a carbon neutral future. Through a targeted grant program, homes could apply for funding to develop projects specially designed for the unique circumstances of the home.

Conclusion

Canada’s long-term care sector remains under tremendous pressure. There is a clear role the federal government can play in addressing some of the core challenges faced by the sector and support homes in delivering the quality care that Canadians expect and deserve. A long-term plan for the financial sustainability of the sector is necessary to ensure homes are able to hire the staff they need to care for residents, upgrade infrastructure to meet modern infection prevention and control standards, and provide high quality resident-centred care. This will require the coordinated efforts from the federal and provincial governments – the emergency situation faced by homes demands action.

An urgent injection of funding, short-term efforts to address staffing shortages and a long-term plan for health human resources are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector across Canada.

The government must deliver on its promised funding to the sector to ensure Canadians are able to access quality care, no matter where they live.

About CALTC

The Canadian Association for Long Term Care (CALTC) is the national voice of long-term care, delivering resident-centred care services to seniors across Canada when they can no longer live at home. Since its inception in 2002, CALTC has been working together to share information, best practices, and evidence to improve the quality of care provided to residents in long-term care, no matter where they live.

