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Improving Data in Long-Term Care

The pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy Expert Advisory Group has identified workforce data and long-term care data as two priority areas for improvement. As governments across the country continue to develop major policy reforms for long-term care, in terms of both infrastructure and care, they are doing so with an unclear picture of the sector, residents and the staff who care for them.

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 operators to allocate staff to areas where need is greatest.

Unfortunately, data in long-term care is neither standardized nor consistently collected.

In terms of understanding resident need, 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.

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 particular 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.

In long–term care this is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about the broader operational capacity of homes. Without effective Management Information Systems (MIS), details on the financial, human resources and infrastructure challenges of homes remain limited.

At a government level, understanding the aggregate and average needs of residents, and the operational and staffing needs of homes allows for more effective long–term planning and policy and budget responses. Improving data availability is a vital step in ensuring the long–term care sector is appropriately resourced to provide quality care for all.

interRAI

interRAI is the global gold standard in resident assessment. Regular resident assessments are a vital element in developing care plans and ensuring a resident's needs are met. interRAI is a user–friendly tool that allows staff to conduct quality and comprehensive assessments while also ensuring comparability across sectors, compatibility with other health providers and direct connections with CIHI to improve the aggregate data available to policy makers.

Homes face three major challenges in accessing interRAI: the initial set up costs, which is an acute challenge for smaller homes; the necessary internet and technological infrastructure; and a lack of staff with the required skills and expertise to conduct the assessments and collect the data.

CALTC is proposing the federal government:

- Develop a dedicated funding envelope for long–term care homes to **access interRAI or upgrade existing versions to the LTCF.**

- Develop a dedicated funding envelope for long–term care homes to **upgrade internet infrastructure** to be compatible with the internet connectivity requirements to support reporting to CIHI.

- Improve funding for long–term care homes via the Canada Health Transfer or dedicated bilateral agreements to ensure long–term care homes are funded appropriately to **train staff in resident assessments** and have the time and skills to input the data.

Workforce and Operational Data

Health human resources is the number one issue facing Canada's health and long-term care sectors, yet policy makers are limited in their ability to respond because of the lack of clear data about the existing workforce. Improving workforce data is a fundamental step in addressing both the short and long-term health human resources challenges.

CALTC is proposing the federal government:

- Develop and fund a **pan-Canadian health workforce data strategy**, as identified by the Health Canada Summary Report of the Health Human Resources Symposium.

- Develop **standard national approach** for the collection of health and long-term care workforce data.

- Publish **monthly reports** on the state of health and long-term care workforce in Canada.

- Provide long-term care homes with **funding for an informatics lead** to ensure privacy legislation and policy, data sharing agreements, data collection, submission, findings analysis and reporting can be fully implemented.

- Develop a dedicated funding envelope for long-term care homes to access **Management Information Systems** to improve the availability of operational data.

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.