
REPORT TITLE: **Advocating to Strengthen Long Term Care and Seniors Services in Peel**

FROM: Cathy Granger, Acting Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Region of Peel Chair write, on behalf of Regional Council, a letter to the Minister of Long-Term Care to support the Province's commitment to complete an independent commission into Ontario's long term care system to identify improvements that better protect residents and staff across the long term care sector including enhanced requirements for appropriate staffing models, emotionally focused patient-centered care, and increased funding;

And further, that the letter be forwarded to the local MPs, MPPs, Advantage Ontario and the Ministry of Health.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- As the population of seniors continues to grow in Peel and across Ontario, protecting the most vulnerable seniors including those living the Region of Peel's five long term care homes, is the foremost priority.
 - The *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* mandates municipalities to operate at least one long term care home. As a municipal long term care operator, the Region of Peel (Region) operates five long term care homes and fills gaps in service to address important community needs including emotional based person-centered care for residents with complex conditions such as Dementia.
 - The Region's own long term care homes continue to exceed provincial performance indicators for quality and service (as reported in the June 11, 2020 Council report titled *Seniors' Services 2019 Annual Report*).
 - The Region is committed to continuous quality improvement and working with the broader long term care sector to advocate for improvements to enhance the quality of care and availability of services for all seniors in Peel long term care homes.
 - In addition to the responsive measures implemented for COVID-19, the Region will continue to advocate to all levels of government to propose targeted investments and strategic recommendations to address immediate challenges in the system while balancing the need for more sustainable solutions to support the transformation of long term care and senior services in Ontario and for Peel.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Seniors (individuals aged 65 and older) continue to be the fastest growing age group in Peel and across Canada. The rapid rise and growth of the aging population creates increasing pressures across the seniors' services sector, including all levels of government. That is why protecting the most vulnerable seniors, including those living in the Region's five long term care homes (accounting for 17 per cent of the total number of long term care beds in Peel) and the 23 additional homes within Peel, is a foremost priority.

The *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* mandates municipalities to operate at least one long term care home. As a municipal long term care operator, the Region of Peel cares for people with complex care needs, they fill gaps in service to address community need and, as a decided leader in the sector, is transforming care through an emotionally based person-centred approach. Moreover, the Region's term of council priority to ensure seniors have access to the services they need, responds to health system demands for enhanced community and home care services that support seniors across a continuum of care needs.

Over the past several years, the Region has engaged with broader sector partners and the provincial government on advocacy issues related to improving the quality and sustainability of long term care and seniors' supports in Peel. Key advocacy foci for the Region have included the redevelopment of older long term care homes, dementia supports in long term care, staffing needs and workforce capacity, integrated care models, as well as funding for home and community care and seniors' service hubs. While the province has made some small commitments to support seniors including adding and redeveloping beds to the system, many of the Region's own long term care homes remain ineligible despite the many requests for consideration.

2. Impacts of COVID-19

In recent months, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing pressures in Ontario's long term care system and shed light on ongoing challenges as well as many disturbing trends in certain long term care homes not operated by the Region. As an initial response, the Province released a COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People and guidelines to help support the seniors living in long term care and retirement homes.

Through the evolution of the pandemic, residents within long term care homes were the greatest victims to COVID-19 revealing devastating gaps and challenges within the sector. On May 19, 2020, Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care, announced that the Province will be conducting an independent commission into Ontario's long term care system beginning in July 2020 to identify improvements that better protect residents and staff.

On May 26, 2020 the Premier of Ontario shared troubling details on the technical and medical issues present in the five long term care homes in Ontario that were being supported by the Canadian Armed Forces. The findings in the report further highlighted challenges in the current long term care system and stressed the urgent need for increased investments and improvements to the long term care sector.

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3. Municipal Role in Long Term Care and Service Delivery

While the Region's own long term care homes have and continue to exceed provincial performance indicators for quality and service (as reported in the Seniors' Services 2019 Annual Report, June 11, 2020), the Region is committed to continuous quality improvement and working with the broader long term care sector to improve the quality of care. Municipally operated homes in Peel play a unique role in long term care and often accept people with higher complexity of care needs. The Region's five long term care homes tailor services to meet local needs to provide a level of care that has demonstrated to have both a high satisfaction rate and high-quality outcomes for residents and their families.

a) Emergency Response to COVID-19

Since early March, the Region has implemented solutions to mitigate risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in all Regional long term care homes. Regional homes reacted quickly to adopt several measures including:

- **Staffing:** The emergency order for long term care staff to limit work locations to one long term care home, retirement home or any health service provider came into effect April 22. Since April 3, the Region asked staff to choose to work at only one location. This resulted in 190 people selecting other work locations. The Region offered part-time staff full-time hours before this emergency order resulting in 990 staff available to work and over 150 staff hired or redeployed from other parts of the Region to address increased staffing needs related to the pandemic.
- **Supportive Care Units:** Regional Adult Day Services spaces that were temporarily closed due to COVID-19 were transformed into Supportive Care Units to cohort and isolate COVID-19 positive residents. All staff working with COVID-19 positive residents are provided the option of temporary isolation housing.
- **Infection Prevention and Control:** The Long Term Care Division has continuously been reviewing the new Provincial Directives and Guidelines to ensure necessary information and training is disseminated to front-line staff at Regional long term care homes to support processes including the effective use and stewardship of personal protective equipment.
- **Communication:** While visitors have been restricted in Regional long term care homes, social connections for people living in the homes has been maintained. Virtual visits are facilitated through reconfigured iPads and window visits are enabled through phones. It has been critical to maintain connections with families. This has included ongoing communication through weekly virtual townhalls, as well as setting up a Long Term Care Family Support Team who provides timely responses to emails and phone calls.

b) Partnering for Improvements in the Long Term Care Sector

The Region continues to work closely with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), and AdvantAge Ontario to provide advice to the Provincial Government on improving quality of care, models of care, and rebuilding infrastructure. These collaborations will support sector transformation and collective sector response to COVID-19.

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Municipal homes set the standard for quality by investing in enhanced aspects of care and service. The Butterfly Model of Care is an example of sector innovation driven by the need to improve the quality of care for the people living in the Region's long term care homes. The redevelopment of Peel Manor, the Region's oldest long term care home, into a Senior's Health and Wellness Village is transforming integrated care in our community.

Through meetings and ongoing engagement with the Ministries of Long-Term Care, Seniors, and Health, the Region continues to advocate for improvements to the sector that will demonstrate measurable impacts for residents, families, caregivers, and the health system.

Most recently, on May 27, 2020, the Region's Chief Administrative Officer provided a submission to the Federal Standing Committee on Health Studies (HESA) issues to speak to the municipal response to support vulnerable residents including seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Region's advocacy to HESA underscored the importance for targeted investment and strategic direction to support:

The redevelopment of infrastructure to enhance infection prevention measures, accessibility, and expansion of necessary health and social services for seniors and their caregivers.

- Enhanced guidelines for specialized support programs (i.e. to build capacity within long term care homes to provide person-centred, emotionally focused care).
- Improving funding to ensure adequate workforce training and capacity (i.e. staffing ratios and ability to provide care to patients with complex conditions such as Dementia).

4. Ongoing Advocacy to Strengthen Long Term Care and Seniors Services

In addition to the responsive measures implemented for COVID-19, the Region will continue to advocate to all levels of government to propose targeted investments and strategic direction to address immediate challenges while ensuring more sustainable solutions for the future of long term care and senior services in Peel. Previous council-endorsed advocacy aligns both local and broader sector priorities, including:

- **Investments in structural and physical design of long term care homes:** While long term care home redevelopment is an opportunity to meet the changing needs of residents, many older buildings are not eligible for funding. Peel Manor has yet to qualify for any financial assistance from the province despite its age and deteriorating condition. This has also been a challenge impacting surge capacity during outbreaks.
- **Funding to meet community needs and client complexity:** Current funding formulas do not accurately account for high-growth and high-demand communities. Lower per resident funding limits the types of support (including home and community care services) available to Peel's residents resulting in unmet demands and waitlists for long term care homes as well as home and community care services, which are increasingly more difficult to access.

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- **Supporting the mental health of seniors:** Along with dementia care, supports that address the broader mental health needs of seniors remains a gap in available services. Data collected by AdvantAge Ontario demonstrates that an increasing proportion of long-term care residents (over 40 per cent) are experiencing a range of mental health illnesses including anxiety, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. At this time, Peel is also looking for the province to ensure supports for seniors' mental health are available (in addition to those provided for dementia) in a provincial mental health strategy.
- **Person-Centered Care and Specialized Dementia Supports:** The changing needs of seniors across Ontario must be reflected in the level and type of care provided. Dementia rates are on the rise in Peel and across Ontario, and the needs of individuals living with dementia can be quite complex and require extensive supports. When it comes to long term care homes, the municipal sector often fills in gaps the private and non-profit providers are unable to accommodate, including specialized supports across the system to meet the complex medical needs of seniors. The Region has been a sector leader in adopting a person-centred care model which has help to provide more emotion- and compassion-based care for the residents.
- **Creating a Stable and Sustainable Workforce Strategy:** The Province should work with system partners to develop and implement a long term, integrated health human resources strategy to meet the demands on the long term care workforce. This issue has been of particular importance during COVID-19 and will continue to be a priority as the needs and demands on long term care and seniors services continues to grow. The Region is committed to providing input to the Province to guide efforts to build workforce capacity through short, medium- and long-term tactics focusing on education and training, recruitment, retention, and remuneration for staff.

5. Next Steps

Going forward, the Region will continue to work in partnership with sector partners along with the Provincial government to strengthen the long term care sector in Ontario and for all seniors who live in Peel long term care homes.

As the Province embarks on an important review of the system, staff will prioritize immediate action by:

- Preparing a letter from the Regional Chair to the Provincial Government and the Ministry of Long-Term Care to advocate for enhancements to the long term care sector, highlighting specific priority areas for immediate action and longer term innovations in Peel.
- Looking for opportunities to participate in the Province's independent commission into the Ontario's long term care system beginning in July 2020.
- Working with all level of governments to ensure adequate governance, accountability and funding to address immediate and urgent needs along with more sustainable investments to strengthen and transform long term care service delivery in Ontario while focusing on providing high quality and person-centered care.

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For further information regarding this report, please contact Susan Griffin Thomas, Director of Long Term Care, Ext. 2000, Susan.GriffinThomas@peelregion.ca.

Kassandra Masley, Research and Policy Analyst and Niyati Salker, Advisor, Strategic Policy and Performance

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Polsinelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N' and a long, sweeping tail.

N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer