



Health and Long-Term Care



Health care workers have stepped up in a big way throughout the pandemic. Workers in long-term care homes have carried the heavy burden of dealing with outbreaks, working long hours, and many other challenges that have come with working in a demanding and fast-changing environment. Long-term care workers answered the call and without their dedication to residents, the results could have been far worse.

Unifor provided recommendations to the Minister's Expert Panel on Long-Term Care, which issued its recommendations to the government in December 2018. However, some of the needed structural changes in the long-term care system were not initiated by the government before the pandemic, resulting in an even more urgent need for systemic changes.

In its December 2020 report, the Northwood Quality-Improvement Review Committee established several recommendations that would better support and enhance the capacity of the long-term care sector. One of these important recommendations was to set and fund standard minimum care hours based on resident complexity across all facilities. A care standard was announced in 2020 in Ontario, for example, which would establish a standard of care of four hours of direct care for each resident per day (to be achieved by 2024-2025).

Throughout the last few years, the Minister's Expert Panel and the government have heard that long-term care facilities are consistently dealing with short-staffing and that workers are over-worked. There is no doubt that the pandemic has exacerbated this problem. In order to support and maintain an established care standard, the system must be able to train, recruit and retain qualified care workers.

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FACT:

In 2015, the provincial Liberal government slashed funding to long-term care homes, despite the need for more funding to support seniors in care. In real dollars, long-term care funding did not catch up to 2015 levels until the pandemic.

FACT:

Funding for long-term care only got a significant boost because of the emergency response to COVID-19. In real dollars, the original (pre-pandemic) budgeted funding for long-term care in 2020 was still lower than 2015 levels.

FACT:

Nova Scotia does not have a minimum standard of care for long-term care residents. Ontario, for example, established in a minimum standard of four hours of daily care per resident.

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This requires a holistic approach that includes improving working conditions for staff, establishing more full-time and permanent work, and increasing measures for training and recruiting personal support staff into the system.

Unifor calls for:



The establishment and funding of standard minimum care hours based on resident needs across all long-term care facilities in the province. This standard should be four hours of direct care for each resident per day.



Government support to expand bed capacity and establish a provincial staffing strategy that includes increasing staff levels to support a new long-term care standard of care, improving working conditions, ensuring more full-time and permanent work, and adding measures for training and recruiting care staff into the system.

