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## Unifor in the Health Care Sector

Unifor is Canada's largest private sector union, with more than 315,000 members across the country working in every major sector of the Canadian economy.

In Ontario, Unifor represents 160,000 active members, including more than 29,000 health care workers, 15,000 of whom work in long-term care.

Among Unifor's broader membership and the thousands of Unifor retirees who are active across the province, many members have direct experiences with long-term care through their own families.



The union advocates for all working people and their rights, fights for equality and social justice in Canada and abroad, and strives to create progressive change for a better future. Unifor believes that every person of working age in Canada has a right to a good job, the benefits of economic progress and a strong social safety net.

## The state of long-term care in Ontario

### A crisis of care

Unifor believes the long-term care system in Ontario is in crisis. Approximately 78,000 Ontarians live in long-term care homes, most of who are over 85 years old and have mobility issues, dementia, and complex medical needs.

Existing laws and regulations do not address the care needs of long-term care residents and do

not adequately hold long-term care operators accountable for providing proper care.



For example, in long-term care facilities, personal support workers (PSWs) have only six minutes in the morning to prepare residents for breakfast. Unifor has found that the ratio of residents to PSWs in a home typically reaches as high as 12 to 1 on a regular day shift. These ratios are even higher on evening and night shifts. The daily reality of “working short” in long-term care homes puts residents at risk and makes these ratios dangerously high. In fact, a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Compliance Officers Report from July 2019 investigated conditions at Brucelea Haven – and linked two deaths at the home for the aged to chronic understaffing.



Meanwhile, despite the crisis of care within homes, there are approximately 33,000 people on wait lists for accessing long-term care beds. The median wait time for a bed is 5 months – and can often be longer depending on a resident's acuity and/or their ethno-cultural needs.



## ***A widespread staffing shortage***

The crisis of care is a reflection of the widespread staffing shortage in the long-term care sector. Unifor members, employers, the Ontario Long-Term Care Association and the Government of Ontario have all acknowledged that there is a system-wide shortage of Personal Support Workers (PSWs) in the province.



This staffing crisis has contributed to the problem of regular understaffing in long-term care homes. These shortages lead to: increased workloads, increased overtime hours, increased tendency to skip meals or breaks to ensure residents are taken care of, higher likelihood of performing physical tasks alone and diminished ability to deal with workplace violence. The bottom line is that these shortages take a mental and physical toll on workers in these homes.

These working conditions, combined with low compensation for the services that these workers provide, have exacerbated the system-wide problem. A recent report on long-term care staffing by Cardus (a non-partisan faith-based think tank), *People Over Paperwork*, summarized that PSWs are worse off financially today than they were a decade ago, which leads to a high turnover rate of workers as their salaries fall behind the rate of inflation. The report also concluded that working conditions matter: “LTC workers report lower job satisfaction when they feel they are unable to provide quality care to residents, something that has become more challenging as limited staff are stretched thin trying to meet the demands of rising resident acuity.”

## **Unifor priorities for the long-term care sector**

### **1. Establishing a Standard of Resident Care**

The union is advocating for an evidence-based, minimum, measurable and enforceable standard of care within long-term care homes. Currently, there is no minimum standard of daily care.

MPPs voted unanimously in favour Bill 33, Time to Care Act, second reading on November 2, 2017, which would have provided the standard of 4 hours of care for nursing home residents. Unifor is calling on MPPs to make this a reality.

### **Recommendations:**

- Amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act to establish a minimum standard of daily care of four (4) hours per resident each day, which can be adjusted (increased if prescribed).
  - The standard would comprise of direct nursing and personal support services in particular.



## 2. Strengthening Ministry Oversight

The maintenance of appropriate staffing levels in long-term care homes should be vigorously monitored in order to ensure that residents are receiving the proper care they need. This requires regular, mandatory and transparent reporting of staffing levels by long-term care homes to the Ministry.

In addition to regularly measuring staffing levels, long-term care homes must be held accountable when they fall short of care standards. The Long-Term Care Home Quality Inspection Program provides this oversight and should be strongly resourced in order to ensure that homes are providing proper resident care.

### **Recommendations:**

- Staff level reporting must be transparent and measured across long-term care homes in the sector.
- An established standard of care must be vigorously enforced by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.



## 3. Long-Term Care Funding

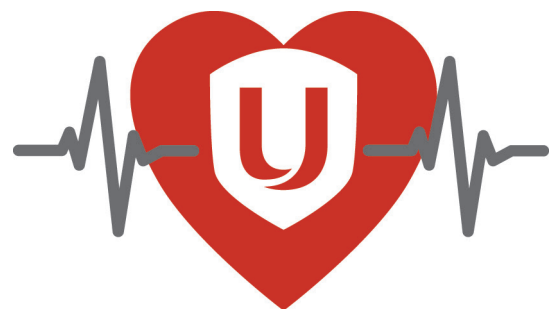
In May 2019, the Minister of Health announced a funding increase for the Nursing and Personal Care envelope of 1% for the following year. This amount is a well below the increase from previous years (2%) and is a funding decrease in real dollars, when incorporating the higher demands of the system and inflationary costs.

The province needs to provide the funding to support a standard of resident care and proper oversight over long-term care homes to maintain proper staffing levels.

Only then will we be able to address the crisis of care and staffingshortages that are plaguing the system, in addition to increasing the number of long-term care beds for the thousands of Ontarians who are waiting for care.

### **Recommendations:**

- The provincial government must increase funding in order for long-term care homes to achieve a staffing and care standard.
- Public funding for long-term care homes should be tied to the provision of quality care and staffing levels that meeting a legislated minimum care standard of 4 hours.
- Ontario must invest more in long-term care homes provided by municipalities and
- charitable organizations – versus for-profit corporations – which would ensure that
- funding dollars go to resident care instead of shareholders.



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