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**Subject:** Seniors Services Quality Improvement Report: April-June 2024

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, September 10, 2024

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## Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with highlights of quality initiatives for Seniors Services.
- Areas of focus in this report are:
  - Provincial Long-Term Care Staffing Plan: Year Four of a Four Year Plan
  - Supporting Staff Wellness: Your Health Space
  - Fostering Enhanced Communication and Collaboration: Partners in Caregiving (PIC) Program

## Financial Considerations

The Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) and Ontario Health West are the primary sources of funding for the Seniors Services division. Other funding sources include user fees and levy.

## Analysis

### Provincial Long-Term Care Staffing Plan: Year Four of a Four Year Plan

The provincial government released, “A Better Place to Live, A Better Place to Work: Ontario’s Long-Term Care Staffing Plan” in December 2020 with a commitment to improve Ontario’s long-term care sector by increasing staffing levels to an average of four hours of care per resident per day. On October 15, 2021, the MLTC released updates to the LTC Home Funding Policy detailing funding investments to support the staffing increases committed to in the Staffing Plan. Investments were rolled-out in year-over-year increases from 2021-2022 to 2024-2025 with the first wave of funding issued in 2021 and the final wave of funding issued on April 1, 2024. The details of the fourth and final year of funding levels were shared with the LTC sector on Thursday, March 28, 2024, for implementation on April 1, 2024.

The implementation of a four-hour direct care per day requirement in Ontario's long-term care sector supports a pivotal shift toward a more person-centered care model. By mandating increased staff presence, this policy aims to address longstanding concerns about the quality of care that can be delivered given staffing constraints. This heightened level of care is anticipated to yield tangible benefits, including improved resident outcomes, such as reduced rates of falls, pressure ulcers, and hospitalizations. Moreover, it is expected to foster a more responsive and compassionate care environment, enhancing residents' overall quality of life. In April 2024, the final tranche of funding provided by the Ministry of Long-Term Care enabled Niagara Region to meet the mandated four-hour direct care requirement by adding 49.2 full-time equivalent positions.

This policy change has the potential to reshape the role of care providers, empowering employees to engage in more meaningful interactions with residents. By increasing direct care hours, employees are afforded greater opportunities to build rapport with residents, understand their individual needs, and deliver more personalized care. Ultimately, this could also lead to increased job satisfaction and retention among care staff.

While the implementation of a four-hour direct care standard represents a significant step forward, it's essential to acknowledge that the underlying research underpinning this policy direction is outdated<sup>1</sup>. The complex and evolving needs of long-term care residents necessitate a more contemporary approach to care delivery. To ensure that funding aligns with current resident needs, a comprehensive and ongoing review of care requirements across the sector is imperative at the Ministry level. This assessment should inform future policy decisions and resource allocation to better address the challenges and opportunities within long-term care.

### **Supporting Staff Wellness: Your Health Space**

Staff in health care, including long-term care, often grapple with high levels of stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue. Given the high prevalence and impact of these

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care appointed Shirlee Sharkey to lead an independent review of staffing and standards for Long-Term Care in Ontario in 2007. The resultant report, "People Caring for People: Impacting the Quality of Life and Care of Residents in Long-Term Care Homes," recommended increasing direct care per resident per day, year over year to achieve 4.0 hours of direct care by 2012.

concerns in the long-term care sector, the Public Services Health and Safety Association recently commissioned a root cause analysis study of the psychological demands of working in the LTC sector. The resultant report, Preventing Psychological Harm in Long-Term Care was issued May 30, 2024.

The Niagara Region 2023-2026 People Plan also recognizes the importance of employee wellness. The People Plan is anchored in four themes that reflect what is important to employees, leaders and the organization and one of the four themes is “healthy and well employees and workplaces” with a commitment to create and support healthy and safe workplaces, and overall positive health and well-being for employees.

To ensure we are meeting our People Plan commitments and effectively supporting employees, Niagara Region Seniors Services partnered with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) to deliver a new workplace mental health program to Seniors Services staff and leaders. Specifically designed for healthcare workers, it offers a comprehensive approach to address the unique challenges faced by staff in demanding environments like long-term care.

The Your Health Space Program provides essential tools and resources to help employees build resilience, manage stress, and prioritize their mental well-being. By fostering a supportive workplace culture and equipping staff with necessary skills, this program not only enhances employee wellness but also in turn contributes to improved staff retention, reduced absenteeism, and ultimately, enhanced quality of care for residents. Your Health Space is an important component of a holistic approach to staff well-being in long-term care, recognizing that healthy staff are essential for delivering optimal care to residents.

### **Fostering Enhanced Communication and Collaboration: Partners in Caregiving (PIC) Program**

Over the last few years Seniors Services has embraced a person-centred care approach. Working in collaboration with residents and families to ensure that care and services are aligned with each resident’s respective needs and wishes.

To continue to strengthen the person-centered care approach, Niagara Region Seniors Services is introducing the Partners in Caregiving Program. This is a pioneering initiative and program developed by Cornell University aimed at enhancing communication and collaboration between long-term care staff and residents' family members. This program recognizes the critical role families play in resident care and seeks to empower them as partners in the care process.

By providing training in communication and conflict resolution skills with both staff and family members, PIC fosters a more cooperative and respectful environment in support of ensuring the best possible experience and quality of life for the residents of our long-term care homes.

The program emphasizes mutual respect and understanding, with families contributing their intimate knowledge of the resident and staff offering their expertise in care delivery. This initiative has proven positive and sustained outcomes in improving resident care indicators and enhancing satisfaction among residents, families, and staff in long-term care homes.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Quarterly quality improvement reports provide committee and council with important information, supporting accountability, transparency and a culture of best practice and continuous quality improvement. As the governing body for the Region's LTC Homes, it is important that Council receives these reports to ensure high quality of care, understand the successes, challenges and opportunities experienced in these facilities and meet legislative accountability requirements of LTC.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Effective Region – Implement continuous improvement and modernized processes to ensure value for money in regional services and programs.

Effective Region – Deliver fiscally-responsible and sustainable core services.

Effective Region – Invest and support a skilled and aligned workforce at Niagara Region.

Prosperous Region – Attract and retain businesses, create jobs and support a skilled workforce in Niagara.

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

COM 2-2018 Direct Resident Care Staffing Levels in Long-Term Care  
(Copy available upon request)

[COM 26-2021, Long-Term Care Home Funding Policy Update](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19585)

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This report was prepared in consultation with Jordan Gamble Program Financial Analyst and reviewed by Henri Koning, Director, Seniors Services.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1          Annual Report