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Canada Needs a Paradigm Shift to Transform its Long-Term Care Systems

Third and final report in NIA series outlines road map for a more sustainable, affordable and equitable LTC system

TORONTO, June 29, 2023 — Faced with a rapidly ageing population, staffing challenges and decades of funding shortfalls, long-term care systems in Canada require nothing less than a paradigm shift to remain viable into the future, a new report from the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) warns.

[*Enabling a More Promising Future for Long-Term Care in Canada*](#) is the third and final report in the NIA's **Future of Long-Term Care Policy Series**. The first two reports, published in 2019, warned that if nothing changed, Canada's long-term care (LTC) systems were on an untenable and unsustainable path. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many of the systemic issues plaguing the sector, such as workforce shortages and an over-reliance on institutional care when most Canadians would prefer to age at home. Families seeking LTC services today are faced with mounting costs, long waitlists, inconsistent quality levels, and the expectation that they will have to provide at least some unpaid care whether they can afford to or not.

However, Canada also has an opportunity to transform LTC to make it more sustainable, affordable and equitable. This report draws on what we have learned over the last three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, including expertise in financial and health policy, to create a feasible and fiscally responsible road map to ensure all older Canadians have access to high-quality LTC services.

“While the COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the cracks within Canada's LTC systems, it has also spurred efforts toward system transformation,” said **Dr. Samir Sinha**, Director of Health Policy Research at the National Institute on Ageing. “It is critical to find and implement workable solutions quickly that will transform the organization, delivery and affordability of LTC services, while also prioritizing the goal of enabling older Canadians to [Age in the Right Place](#).”

The NIA's proposed road map toward an improved LTC system includes four main components:

- Delivery of LTC services, with a focus on:
 - Enabling integrated and holistic LTC that is primarily community-based, and institutional by exception;
 - Enabling evidence-informed, person-centred care that is equitable, accessible and aims to meet not just *needs* but *goals* of care; and
 - Enabling technologies to support Ageing in the *Right Place*.
- Workforce recruitment and retention, with a focus on enabling a LTC workforce that is appropriately supported and recognized.
- Affordability and sustainability, with a focus on enabling system sustainability and stewardship through more effective, efficient and sustainable financing arrangements.
- Data collection and monitoring, with a focus on enabling evidence-based decision making through data.

The pandemic's lessons about health equity also underscore the importance of a person-centred approach to care that takes a broader look at care recipients' circumstances and needs.

"A person-centred approach to LTC should be holistic, in order to appropriately understand and respond not only people's physical health, but also consider mental health and social determinants of health," said **Dr. Ashley Flanagan**, NIA Health Research and Policy Manager and lead author of the report. "It should consider the goals, circumstances and specific health and social needs of each person to provide them with more tailored and appropriate supports — which often results in better outcomes."

Key facts and figures:

- Within the next few years, Canada will join the ranks of other super-aged nations, with at least 21 per cent of our population aged 65 years and older. By 2046, the population aged 85 years and older is projected to almost triple.
- In an NIA survey conducted in late 2020, 96 per cent of Canadians aged 65 years and older said that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, they would do everything they can to avoid going into an LTC home.
- As of 2019, 64 per cent of Canada's LTC expenditures were allocated to care in institutional settings such as nursing homes or LTC homes, and 18 per cent went to home and community-based care, compared to the more balanced OECD average of 52 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively.

- In 2019, Canadian households spent an additional \$9.4 billion out of their own pockets to access LTC health services, on top of Canada's governments spending \$38 billion in providing LTC health services.
- In a 2015 national survey, 63 per cent of respondents said that their family was not in a good position, financially or otherwise, to care for older family members if they needed long-term health care and it worried them greatly.
- In 2021, more than 52,000 Canadians were on waiting lists for placement in an LTC home, while about 167,000 Canadians aged 65 years and older were estimated to have unmet home care needs. Higher unmet care needs were reported in households in lower socioeconomic status areas.
- In the second quarter of 2022, the job vacancy rate for workers in LTC homes and retirement homes was 6.8 per cent, up more than threefold from 1.9 per cent in the second quarter of 2015. For all industries, the job vacancy rate grew to 5.9 per cent from 2.9 per cent in the same period.
- The number of Canadians who are going to require the support of unpaid caregivers is projected to increase from 345,000 to 770,000 by 2050, an increase of 120 per cent; however, due to declining birth rates, there will be 30 per cent fewer family members and friends to provide unpaid care in 2050 than there are today.
- Approximately 35 per cent of working Canadians balance paid work with unpaid caregiving duties; as of 2020, one-third of unpaid caregivers reported experiencing distress, up from 16 per cent in 2010.

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About The National Institute on Ageing

The [National Institute on Ageing](#) is a think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) focused on the realities of Canada's ageing population. Follow us on Twitter [@NIAgeing](#) and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy [@NSS Now](#).

About the Ageing in the Right Place Research Series

Supporting more older Canadians to age in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, commonly referred to as "ageing in place," will be essential to better caring for Canada's ageing population. Yet doing so effectively requires more responsive systems and services that allow for what the National Institute on Ageing calls Ageing in the Right Place: "The process of enabling healthy ageing in the most appropriate setting based on an older person's personal preferences, circumstances and care needs." This [ground-breaking research series](#) presents a practical framework to understand the concept of Ageing in the Right Place (AIRP) and what is required to make it work,



and highlights existing best practices and new opportunities that can reduce unnecessary long-term care home admissions and better support the implementation of successful AIRP policies and programs across Canada and beyond.

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