

Special Delivery: How Canadian Postal Workers Could Better Enable Ageing in the *Right* Place



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National Institute on Ageing



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The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is a public policy and research centre based at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). The NIA is dedicated to enhancing successful ageing across the life course. It is unique in its mandate to consider ageing issues from a broad range of perspectives, including those of financial, psychological, and social well-being.

The NIA is focused on leading cross-disciplinary, evidence-based, and actionable research to provide a blueprint for better public policy and practices needed to address the multiple challenges and opportunities presented by Canada's ageing population.

The NIA is committed to providing national leadership and public education to productively and collaboratively work with all levels of government, private and public sector partners, academic institutions, ageing related organizations, and Canadians.

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The Current Challenges Facing Canada Post

The Canada Post Corporation is a federal Crown corporation that provides postal services across Canada. Over the past few decades, Canada Post has undergone substantial changes in its operations. Though the corporation retains exclusive privilege on the delivery of letter mail as set out by Section 14 of the Canada Post Corporation Act, mail delivery has gone from being the largest, most stable segment of revenue for the corporation to a much smaller proportion of it. Parcel delivery now makes up the largest portion of the corporation's revenue structure, but the market for parcels has become very competitive, with the corporation losing substantial market share to a host of private-sector competitors. Despite this, the reach of Canada Post remains significant— as of 2021, it served approximately 17 million addresses in urban, rural and remote locations across the country, up from 16.7 million addresses the previous year.

In 2016, Canada's Minister of Public Services and Procurement set up a task force to conduct a review of Canada Post. The Minister subsequently asked the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to study the results of the review and consult the Canadian public on the corporation's future.

One of the recommendations that emerged from this review and consultation was that the corporation explore additional sources of revenue within its competencies (Lukiwski, 2016). An analysis of Canada Post's current and future

finances, undertaken by Ernst & Young as part of the review, found that the corporation was not likely to be financially viable over the long-term. It projected annual losses of \$700 million by 2026, due in part to increasing costs associated with the more than 170,000 new addresses being added to its delivery network each year (Lukiwski, 2016).

Despite the report's recommendations for reform — as well as those included in previous reports from the Fraser Institute (Adie, 1990), C.D. Howe Institute (Iacobucci et al., 2007) and Macdonald-Laurier Institute (Lee, 2015)

Canada Post's operations have remained largely unchanged since 2014. The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted Canada Post's finances, with the corporation posting before-tax losses of \$779 million and \$490 million for the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years, respectively.

The purpose of this paper is to build on the recommendation from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates' (2016) report that Canada Post "look to other industry leaders that have successfully adopted innovative service models, to develop a more innovative growth agenda to expand its services" (Lukiwski, 2016). One such service model involves the leveraging of postal workers to provide scheduled home visits to older Canadians. In addition to providing a new and innovative source of revenue for Canada Post, such a program could also help to improve that ability of an increasing growing number of older Canadians to age in the right place.

This report will highlight the potential opportunities that could be offered by this approach specifically by describing similar programs that are currently operating in Japan, France and Jersey, a British Crown Dependency in the Channel Islands; and outline key takeaways and policy recommendations for further consideration in Canada.

The Potential Benefits of involving Postal Workers in the Community Support Services Sector

Postal workers are uniquely suited to participate in the delivery of community support services. A 2015 Leger poll found 87 per cent of Canadians said they trusted their mail carriers, making them the eighth most trusted profession behind fire fighters, various hospital workers and farmers (Leger, 2015).

In addition to being trusted community members, postal workers already conduct daily visits to residences in even the most rural communities, making them well positioned to potentially integrate other community support services into their work routines.

Postal workers could also act as overseers of vulnerable populations through the unique knowledge of their customers they naturally accumulate on their regular delivery routes. Though the oversight they provide is primarily informal — for instance, postal workers generally know to knock on someone's front door if their mail hasn't been picked up for several days — there have been efforts to formalize and expand on it.

The Letter Carrier Alert program, operating in Prince Edward County, Ontario, since the 1980s, provides a more established version of this service to older adults and other vulnerable populations. Established by the Letter Carriers Union of Canada (LCUC, now merged into the Canadian Union of Postal Workers [CUPW]) in collaboration with the Canadian Labour Congress and the United Way of Canada, the program allows local non-profit or volunteer organizations¹ to respond to reports from postal workers about unusual activity from residents that they observe in the course of their regular mail routes (Canadian Union of Postal Workers, 2016). Similar programs exist in other postal services internationally — most notably the United States Postal Service, whose Carrier Alert program served as the model for Prince Edward County's program.²

Currently, the Letter Carrier Alert program in Prince Edward County only operates on a voluntary basis by postal workers in partnership with the Community Care Association for Seniors, and the postal workers do not receive any additional compensation for providing this service. Furthermore, because Canada Post itself is not formally involved with the program, its ability to expand the program to other jurisdictions has remained limited.

Successful postal service-led community support programs in other countries could also serve as future models for Canada Post.

From a financial standpoint, incorporating home support services would give Canada Post a new revenue stream that could help offset its recent and projected losses. From a health standpoint, such programs could also offer a more efficient means of enabling older adults to age in the right place, particularly in more rapidly ageing rural and remote communities.

In 2014, Canada Post ended home delivery to 74,000 home addresses and installed Community Mailboxes in affected communities (CBC, 2014). At the same time, the corporation has also allowed residents of these communities to apply for delivery accommodation(s), which can include solutions ranging from sliding mail trays, braille markings on mailboxes, or weekly home delivery. The population who would be eligible for such examples of delivery accommodations also represent potentially ideal candidates for the sort of check-in services

under consideration in this paper. Therefore, by especially considering those clients requiring a delivery accommodation as potential beneficiaries for a check-in service, even communities with Community Mailboxes in lieu of traditional home delivery services could also benefit from such a program.

Canada Post workers also appear to be keen to incorporate such services into their organizational structure. Indeed, CUPW recently began a new campaign, dubbed “Delivering Community Power,” that promotes the re-imagining of Canada Post services to incorporate check-ins for older Canadians and people with mobility issues, along with low-fee postal banking services, affordable food delivery services, electric vehicle charging stations, high-speed internet infrastructure.

A Leger public opinion poll conducted in November 2021 found that 74 per cent of respondents, and 85 per cent of respondents aged 55 years and older, supported the provision of wellness checks by postal workers for older adults living at home, with 48 per cent of respondents interested in utilizing such services, and 52 per cent interested in affordable food delivery services offered by Canada Post (Bastedo & Clarke, 2021).

Rural communities across Canada face additional challenges of having limited home and community-based services and personnel, along with high travel costs for those providing these services (Canadian Home Care Association, 2006; F/P/T Ministers Responsible for Seniors, 2007).

Canada Post boasts the largest fleet of vehicles in the country (almost 14,000) and a workforce that already conducts daily home visits in most communities. The workforce and vehicle infrastructure of Canada Post could therefore be ideal resources to incorporate into a broader, national strategy to enable older adults to age in the right place, and could represent a significant opportunity to improve population health, particularly in rural and remote communities across Canada.

¹In the case of Prince Edward County, the partner organization is the county's Community Care Association for Seniors.

²Confirmed by CUPW representatives in discussion with NIA researchers, August 5th, 2022.

Case Studies of prominent International Postal Worker Led community Support Services

“Watch Over” Services in Japan

In October 2013, Japan Post began offering its “Watch Over” service to better support the ability of older adults to age in place. This service allows clients to have post office employees visit the homes of their older relatives once a month to check on their living conditions and report back. The program has since expanded to every prefecture in Japan. In 2015, Japan Post collaborated with IBM and Apple to experiment with incorporating tablets and other devices into the Watch Over service model to allow for a 24-hour electronic monitoring option.

According to the Japan Post website, there are two core services offered as part of its Watch Over program. The first is the visitation service, available for approximately \$26 per month (all figures converted from JPY to CAD values as of January 2023), which has postal workers visit the home of the older adult once per month. That employee will then contact whoever the client has designated as the older adult’s guardian to report on their living conditions.

The second option is a telephone monitoring service, available for approximately \$11.15 per month, which sends a daily automated voice message to the older adult to check on their health condition. After the automated check-in is completed, the individual can hear a personalized message from the client. The results of the check-in are emailed to the designated guardian immediately upon completion.

There is also an optional “rush” service add-on, available for approximately \$9.20 per month. This service allows a security company to be on call to respond to an individual’s home in the event of an emergency, upon request from the client or family members of the individual. This service involves a separate contract with the security company, along with a fee of approximately \$57.40 per visit. The rush service also offers a dedicated equipment service to the older adult for an additional monthly fee starting at approximately \$19.50 as another optional add-on (Japan Post, 2022).



The Watch Over service has evolved alongside other efforts to provide free family monitoring services. The most widespread of these is the “Co-Op,” which launched in 2007 and has since expanded to 976 municipalities as of March 2017, representing 56.1 per cent of Japan’s municipalities (Motoda, 2018). In addition to home visitation, these programs provide delivery services and 24-hour access to groceries. Life insurance companies with nationwide sales staff channels, such as Dai-ichi Mutual Life Insurance and Nippon Life Insurance, have also developed similar programs in collaboration with local governments.

The broad range of Watch Over services, technologies and providers available in Japan can be divided into two types. The first is non-interactive, and includes a broad range of regionally specific technologies available through the dedicated equipment service mentioned above. These technologies range in availability across prefectures and municipalities, and can include on-call emergency buttons and wearable, automated alert devices, cameras, smartphone apps, and a variety of sensor devices, such as sensor mats or proximity and motion sensors which can open or close doors or monitor abnormal activities or conditions in the home. The second is interactive, and includes visitation services and phone or video check-in calls that involve a more human service element.

The wide variety of technologies and services allows clients to choose from a range of options. However, this has also made Watch Over services expensive to provide, while some potential clients are reluctant to pay monthly fees for technologies and services that they would only

use in an emergency. As a result, consumer uptake has been limited which has made it difficult for service providers to build profitable business models around their services. Thus, many providers primarily sell their products to hospitals and long-term care & retirement homes, with individual home use positioned more as a potential future market.

Japan Post’s Watch Over service has also become one part of a broader national strategy to prevent kodokushi or lonely deaths – which refers to a Japanese phenomenon of people dying alone and remaining undiscovered for a long period of time – among older adults (Hata, 2017).

In 2009, Japan’s public broadcaster NHK reported that 32,000 older people nationwide died alone (Allison, 2014). The average size of the Japanese household has halved from five members in the 1950s to 2.5 in 2013, and more older adults are living alone due to a transition away from multi-generational housing out of an increasing desire for privacy.

As government concern for these societal changes and their undesirable consequences has also grown, so too has the budget for services aimed at addressing them. The Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s (2022) proposed budget for the Regional Support program included a combined budget for Watch Over services of approximately \$2.75 billion.

For private companies, this funding represents an opportunity to receive government subsidies, either for integrating new technology into their existing services, or for providing the service themselves. Additionally, Japan's market for Watch Over and other emergency alert services is expected to grow to approximately \$215 million by 2025 (Uematsu, 2015).

The biggest barriers to the success of Japan's Watch Over services appear to be a general lack of awareness among the population and the reluctance of potential beneficiaries of the services to sign up for them. One survey of more than 10,000 individuals (30 per cent of whom were in their 60s and 70s) conducted over March and April 2019 found that 53.3 per cent of respondents had never used Watch Over services or were not even aware of them (MyVoice, 2019). Among those who do use the services, many remain hesitant to give their house keys to strangers or to have cameras and other sensory devices set up in their home to monitor them.

Clearly, there are many challenges for Watch Over service providers in Japan to overcome as they look to expand their services. However, the willingness of the Japanese government to fund the experimental interventions necessary to discover what works, as part of its efforts to prevent isolated or lonely deaths, is a positive development.

“Veiller Sur Mes Parents” (Watch Over My Parents) Program in France

France's Veiller Sur Mes Parents (VSMP) program originated in 2013, when local post offices were engaged to conduct check-ins on vulnerable and older residents during a major heat wave. Though the French postal service, La Poste, initially provided these services for free as a response to the heat emergency, it later proposed a paid version of the program, known as “Cohésio.” This program was initially offered through insurance companies and municipal governments before eventually being offered to all French residents via La Poste in 2017, at which point it was renamed VSMP (Poll, 2019).

The VSMP program includes three core services which clients can sign up for individually or packaged together: remote assistance (with both at-home and mobile options available), postal worker visits (from one to six days a week), and medicine delivery. More recently, COVID-19 protective equipment delivery was added as a service option.

La Poste's foray into providing services tailored to better meeting the needs of older adults has been part of a larger effort by the company to adapt to an overall declining demand for mail delivery services, which accounted for less than a quarter of La Poste's consolidated revenue in 2021.

Its focus on services for older adults was formalized with the creation of its “Silver & Healthcare” division in 2016, part of the company’s stated ambition to “contribute to the challenges related to the demographic transition in France and the necessary transformation of health care provision” (La Poste Group, 2022). The division prioritizes individual services, home care and other health supports in order to help older adults maintain their autonomy.

VSMP started as a program mostly focused on home visits and monitoring but has since expanded to incorporate meal and grocery delivery, housekeeping and gardening services. All of these services are eligible for a 50 per cent tax credit for those deemed in need of them.

VSMP has also recently begun offering technological devices, such as tablets with simplified user interfaces that allow for digital connection with family and friends, as well as health and life insurance plans. The Silver & Healthcare division’s medium-term goals include developing new home care services for those struggling with cancer, diabetes and poor nutrition, and further integrating postal workers into the delivery of preventive health initiatives.

In sum, La Poste’s VSMP program — much like Japan’s Watch Over service — has become part of a broad effort by the postal service to provide more community services to older adults, both as a means of tapping into the growing “silver economy” and to better address the unmet needs of this demographic.

“Call&Check” Service in Jersey

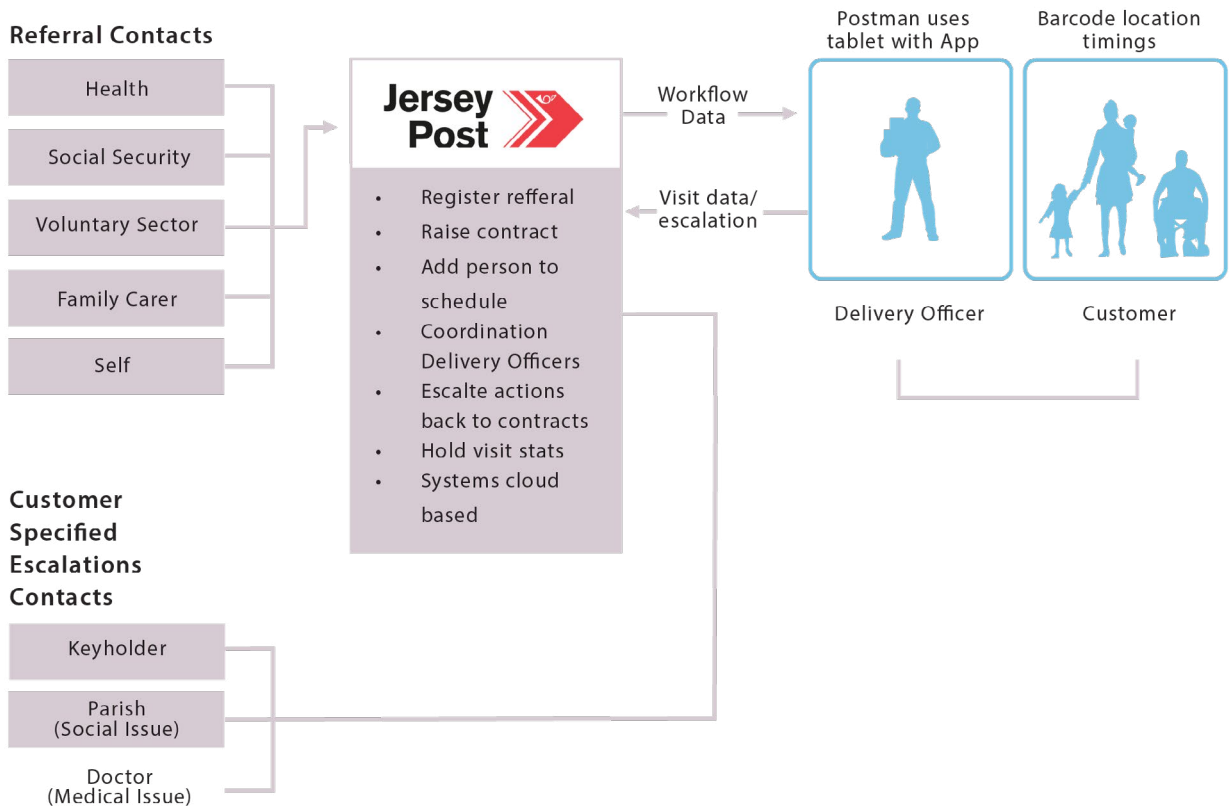
The Call&Check service originated as a trial project in 2013 across several parishes of the United Kingdom (UK). Channel Island of Jersey. It has received substantial international acclaim and spurred similar programs in other countries. In 2018, the Call&Check service was formally included in the State of Jersey’s long-term care strategy.

Call&Check service visits last up to five minutes, during which postal workers deliver prescriptions, remind clients of any upcoming medical appointments (as well as arranging transportation if required), and inquire about their health and well-being via five short questions (See Box 1).

Postal workers who provide Call&Check services are not intended to replace any aspects of a client’s health care team and do not even enter their client’s home to deliver them (Hindmarsh, 2017).

Call&Check recipients are also invited to regular social events to meet with friends — and make new ones — over tea and cake. More recently, the program also worked with the Government of Jersey vaccination team, along with a few local non-profit organizations, to help people book vaccination appointments and co-ordinate transportation to vaccination centres (Call&Check, 2021). For a visual breakdown of how the model works, see Figure 1 below.⁴

Figure 1: Overview of how Call&Check Functions



³Canadian law stipulates that postal workers cannot enter a client’s home. Similar expectations of postal workers in Jersey make Call&Check considerably more feasible for the Canadian context than the French and Japanese models service which can involve far more intrusion on a client’s property.

⁴Diagram sourced from (Dickinson, 2019).

BOX 1. Call&Check Visit Questions

- 1) How are you today? OK? [Yes/No, Remarks]
- 2) Are you taking your medication as prescribed? [Yes/No, Remarks]
Is your medication supply OK? [Yes/No, Remarks]
- 3) Do you have any important upcoming appointments? [Note appointment location(s), date(s), time(s)]
- 4) Any medical issues you want us to pass on? [Yes/No, Remarks]
- 5) Any community issues you want us to pass on? [Yes/No, Remarks]

What makes Call&Check unique in comparison to the services that have been developed in Japan and France is that its services are being offered to residents free of charge, for up to 2 visits per week, via the Jersey Department of Health and Community Services. Enrolment in the service is straightforward and requires only the recipient's consent. Unlike Watch Over and VSMP services, potential clients can also either enrol themselves in the service or be enrolled by their social worker or family members. While those who need to make additional use of the service beyond two weekly visits must pay the equivalent of \$11.10 per visit out of pocket (all figures converted from GBP to CAD values as of January 2023). This service appears to be the only known postal worker-led service for supporting older adults that is fully subsidized by the state. This may be at least a partial reflection of the fact that Jersey is a relatively small, wealthy state, with an estimated population of 103,267 in 2021 and a GDP per capita of approximately \$74,540 in 2019 (Statistics Jersey, 2020).

With its simple service provision structure, effective integration into existing health infrastructure and broad stakeholder support, it is not surprising that Call&Check has become a model program. In 2018, a similar service in the UK called "Safe and Connected," in conjunction with the Royal Mail, local authorities, and private-sector and volunteer organizations began pilot testing (Jersey Post, 2018). Early results demonstrated positive impacts on client well-being and social connectivity despite recruiting fewer recipients than desired (UK Home Office, 2019). Finland, Iceland and Ireland have also trialled implementing check-in services based on this model (Dickinson, 2019).

Key Takeaways for Canada

The three programs discussed in this report have demonstrated substantial success in pursuit of their goals of better enabling ageing in the right place and integrating the provision of community support services, while also developing new revenue streams for the postal services involved. Each has also differed in the range of services being offered and their relative balance of public, private and non-profit sector involvement.

When it comes to the range of services offered, France's VSMP program is a clear frontrunner, offering a wide variety of options, from scheduled visits to property maintenance. It also integrates the use of technology that is user-friendly for older adults by providing tablets with specially designed applications. Japan's Watch Over program, with its huge range of stakeholders and providers, also offers an impressive range of services, and is notable in its integration of technology into its home support services, from tablets and apps to motion and temperature sensors. Jersey's Call&Check service is comparably limited on this metric, as the services it offers are encapsulated within the provision of a five-minute visit. However, this has also served as a strength of the Call&Check model, as the ability to combine prescription delivery, assistance with planning doctor's visits and a health and well-being check-in within a single five-minute visit has allowed the service to remain highly efficient. Call&Check's founder has also noted there are plans to expand the

program to include other services or "living packs," such as household task assistance and home maintenance, to add more potential revenue streams⁵.

When considering which services could be included in a Canadian postal worker-driven support service for older adults, it is important to consider the overall goals of such a program. If the goal is to incorporate it within a broader, societal-wide effort to address the existing lack of social supports for older adults, then the French and Japanese programs serve as strong models to emulate. The support programs being offered in France and Japan were developed thanks to substantial investments in research and financing from a wide variety of stakeholders, most importantly the federal governments of each country. Without a comparable degree of investment and dedication to a nationwide strategy to promote and facilitate ageing in place initiatives, it is unlikely that Canada would be able to develop a postal worker-led check-in service comparable to those being offered in France and Japan.

However, if the goal of the program is instead to supplement the provision of existing services in Canada by incorporating postal workers into service-delivery roles they are already well-equipped to provide, then a Call&Check program model could represent a more realistic option. Limiting postal workers to deliver certain services with a five-minute visit would allow Canada Post to maximize the number of clients and households being served in a workday without radically altering their human resource structure.

⁵Joe Dickinson, founder of Call&Check, in conversation with the author, August 15th, 2022.

In addition, the Call&Check program would be relatively straightforward to implement in the Canadian context, as postal workers would not be required to receive a substantial amount of additional training to provide these additional services. Policymakers interested in mobilizing postal workers for the delivery of community support services should also ensure that the long-term goals of their community support sectors are clearly established to ensure that they are appropriately reflected in the approach they choose.

The Call&Check program could therefore be an ideal model to serve as a starting point for designing a Canadian program due to the limited degree of infrastructure expansion required to support it and the similarities between Canada’s and Jersey’s postal service models.

The Call&Check service — though originally intended to support lonely or socially isolated people over 65 years of age — has also been extended to include those living with disability or health issues, patients in need of community supports following a recent hospitalization, and anyone who finds themselves living alone or away from family and friends (Dickinson, 2019). Another potential demographic that could benefit from postal worker check-ins are new mothers and mothers-to-be, particularly those who might lack an informal support network of friends or family.

All of the programs investigated in this report are being funded by a mix of public, private and volunteer/non-profit resources. However, the range and balance of these stakeholders in terms of funding and integration with the program’s administrative structure varies substantially. Each program incorporates some degree of municipal, regional and/or state government funding, ranging from basic service subsidization schemes (i.e., a 50 per cent rebate in France and two fully subsidized visits per week in Jersey) to a complex mix of research grants, pilot program development and other forms of subsidization, in the case of Japan’s Watch Over program. Each also incorporates local non-profit and/or volunteer organizations as sponsors, consultants or service providers. Similar arrangements have also been made with some private-sector companies.

The main considerations associated with stakeholder involvement in the development of such programs have principally revolved around administrative co-ordination and the integration of care and support.



The more stakeholders participating in delivering a program, the more complicated it can be to administer and integrate with other programs. The Call&Check program model has been the most compelling option from an administrative standpoint due to the relative simplicity of its structure. However, its general implementation has reportedly struggled to overcome a silo mentality within some of the health, social and voluntary organizations it has been involved with, when different partners have failed to share valuable information with each other⁶.

Call&Check's founder acknowledges the importance of effectively balancing public and private funding to ensure that a sustainable, ongoing service can be delivered (Dickinson, 2019). This will surely be a challenge for the development of a Canadian check-in service model, as it will likely need to rely on a variety of stakeholders across the country operating within different provinces and territories that have jurisdictional responsibility for the delivery of health and social care services.

In summary, policymakers interested in developing a Canadian model of community support services delivery that incorporates postal workers will need to consider existing models of home and community-based care and their providers. While there could be ways to engage private and voluntary sector partners, such a program in Canada would likely need substantial commitment from federal or provincial and territorial home and community-based care and support providers.

⁶Joe Dickinson, founder of Call&Check, in conversation with the author, August 15th, 2022.

Conclusion

Establishing check-in services provided by Canadian postal workers primarily for older Canadians could not only create a new revenue stream for Canada Post but also bolster the community support services infrastructure that will be needed to better meet the needs of Canada's ageing population. With current growing of health care worker and volunteer shortages and a predicted decline in the availability of family members and friends to provide unpaid care and support for older Canadians over the coming decades, a postal-worker led-service could become a key preventive and supportive measure to better enable ageing in the right place. Indeed, a service that could allow for the early identification of health issues and more rapidly facilitate the necessary care and support could also help reduce the unnecessary use of more costly emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

Similar to Prince Edward County's Letter Carrier Alert program, the Call&Check model's relative simplicity could allow it to be more easily developed, spread and scaled across Canada. The models that have emerged in Japan and France demonstrate that additional services could also be integrated to allow for more robust service delivery and revenue options.

In light of the emerging success of postal-worker led programs elsewhere, it would be prudent for Canada Post to give serious consideration to implementing programs of this nature, given their dual potential to both create a more financially viable postal service and to better enable more Canadians to age in the right place for as long as possible.

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