

New Report Shows that Reforming Long-term Care Could Be Hampered by Lack of Data on Vulnerable Residents and Workers

TORONTO, June 22, 2021 — The devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada’s long-term care homes, with the deaths of more than 15,000 residents and workers, has instigated a national discussion around the urgent need for reform. However, the significant lack of data on those living and working in Canada’s long-term care homes, is another major gap that could limit the effectiveness of policies and programs meant to improve systems of care for older adults.

A new report from the National Institute on Ageing and Wellesley Institute — [Leaving No One Behind in Long-term Care: Enhancing Socio-demographic Data Collection in Long-term Care Settings](#) — shows that, due to a lack of data, we still do not have a full picture of the impacts of the pandemic in Canada’s long-term care homes.

While COVID-19 has taken a disproportionate toll on Canada’s most vulnerable populations, a long-standing failure to collect socio-demographic data in LTC settings, means that inequitable effects of the pandemic on residents and workers may remain unaccounted for and, as a result, inadequately addressed. Without effective solutions, vulnerable populations within long-term care systems could continue to be at risk of inequitable health outcomes and access to care issues.

“This has implications beyond the pandemic as well,” says Dr. Ashley Flanagan, a Research Fellow at the NIA. “In Canada, health outcomes differ based on factors such as sexual orientation, gender identity, language, race, immigration status, and ethnicity, as well as access to affordable housing, adequate income and social inclusion. Policies, programs and resources cannot effectively close gaps in care or improve health outcomes without a better understanding of the diverse needs of residents and workers in long-term care.”

Canada continues to lag behind other countries like the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States in collecting socio-demographic data in long-term care settings.

“With growing diversity in Canada’s aging population, it is crucial that services and programs provided in long-term care settings reflect residents’ language, culture, and other diverse needs,” says Dr. Seong-gee Um, a Researcher at Wellesley Institute. “Enhanced collection and utilization of socio-demographic data can be a powerful tool to provide a more complete picture of who is living and working in long-term care settings. With this information, we will be better positioned to identify and address health inequities experienced by current and future populations in need of long-term care.”

To facilitate enhanced data collection in long-term care settings, the report provides five recommendations:

1. Ensure clarity exists amongst individuals living and working in long-term care settings about the purposes of socio-demographic data collection.
2. Build trust through community engagement in the design and implementation of socio-demographic data collection initiatives.
3. Ensure standardized socio-demographic data is collected across Canada's long-term care settings.
4. Ensure appropriate skills, training and understanding are established for those collecting socio-demographic data.
5. Ensure a commitment is developed to effectively and appropriately use the socio-demographic data being collected.

As Canada begins the process of improving long-term care, including through the development of new National Long-Term Care Standards, the more comprehensive collection and analysis of socio-demographic data will be vital to informing policy solutions that can close equity gaps and enhance the health and well-being of residents and workers in long-term care settings.

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The National Institute on Ageing is a Ryerson University think tank focused on the realities of Canada's ageing population. Follow us on Twitter [@RyersonNIA](https://twitter.com/RyersonNIA) and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy [@NSS_Now](https://twitter.com/NSS_Now).

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