



National Association
of Federal Retirees

Association nationale
des retraités fédéraux

August 17, 2020

Dear Minister XX,

The National Association of Federal Retirees is the largest advocacy organization representing active and retired members of the federal public service, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their spouses and survivors.

With 176,000 members nationally, including more than 60,000 veterans and their families, the Association has advocated for improvements to the financial security, health and well-being of our members and all Canadians for more than 50 years.

I am writing to share my concerns about the state of older adult care in Canada, and to ask you and your government to commit to working with provincial and territorial governments to improve older adult care for all Canadians.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, we can no longer afford to ignore the issues that have long-existed in long-term and home care. These health services are crucial in helping older Canadians remain active and engaged in society and live with dignity.

The pandemic has exposed the unacceptable conditions in many long-term care homes across the country, issues which experts and advocacy organizations – Federal Retirees included – have been raising for years. People with serious health conditions have been required to live in these deplorable conditions for decades, and governments at all levels have done little to address it. We must do better.

While the situation for home care clients may not be as dire, during the pandemic many clients were left without basic personal care services, like bathing and laundry, as they were deemed non-essential. These decisions were made because home care staff did not have enough personal protective equipment to safely provide services to clients. This is reflective of the larger issue with home care in Canada: its capacity to improve health and reduce costs continuously fails to be recognized and properly funded by governments.

We know that older adults would rather receive care at home than in an institution, that home care is less costly to provide than institutional care, and that home care results in better health outcomes and quality of life. However, governments continue to focus attention and investments on institutional care. This results in inequitable and inconsistent home care across the country, including differing care standards and hours of care; insufficient staffing levels; poor pay and working conditions for staff; and overall, not enough quality home care to meet the needs of Canadians.

When long-term and home care fail our older adults, family and friends step in – if people have them. Informal caregivers provide an estimated 80 per cent of community care and 30 per cent of care in institutions. Over 8 million Canadians provide informal care, and as Canada's population ages, the number



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of informal caregivers will only rise. Relying on informal caregivers to bolster the health and social systems is not a sustainable model. If we continue on this path, there will be huge ramifications for our society and our economy, as more people – mostly women – are forced to shoulder additional costs, stress, and personal and professional sacrifices to take care of our aging population.

Now is the time to implement national standards for long-term and home care. Canada needs a national framework for long-term and home care, like that for hospitals and physicians outlined in the Canada Health Act. The framework must specify conditions and criteria the provinces and territories must meet to receive federal health and social transfer payments, with repercussions for failing to meet the outlined conditions and criteria. This will ensure a standard level of quality care, the availability of equitable and consistent services across the country, and adequate levels of funding for these types of care. It will also ensure greater public accountability of government decisions related to long-term and home care.

For decades, research has shown that our global counterparts that have national standards for long-term and home care have better health outcomes and quality of life for their older populations. Research conducted during the pandemic has only reaffirmed this, demonstrating that countries with national standards experienced drastically lower numbers of COVID-19 cases and fatalities tied to long-term and home care. In Canada, more than 80 per cent of COVID-19 deaths occurred in long-term care facilities. We cannot let this trend continue and we cannot let it happen again in the future.

I applaud the federal government for all it has done for older Canadians during the pandemic, and for its continued dedication to working with provinces and territories to help address the health care needs of Canadians during the pandemic and as we move toward recovery.

I urge you to continue to take a leadership role and work with provincial and territorial governments to implement national standards for long-term and home care. We must use the opportunity the pandemic has afforded us to reimagine older adult care and fix the long-standing issues with these types of care once and for all. To do otherwise would be a disservice to all Canadians.

Your timely attention to this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jean-Guy Soulière
President, National Association of Federal Retirees