



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

ACTION ALERT!

May 6, 2024

On May 4, 2024 the Toronto Star published this letter to the editor from a resident in one of Doug Ford's newly built long-term care institutions in Owen Sound. Hers is a poignant call to action for all of us.

It proves that this is not about new buildings, it is about the need to keep people at home and in their own communities if they require residential care.

Institutions cannot be fixed. The Inspection Branch is helpless against the corporate power of the long-term care industry.

It is time to dismantle this institutional system once and for all and start redirecting the billions in funding to Home Care; to bringing services to where elders live; to Paid Family Caregivers; to intensive in-home support through hospital at home programs; to PACE (Programs of All Inclusive Care of the Elderly); to eliminating the age-based discriminatory criteria in the direct funding Family Managed Home Care Program so that families can organize their own home care when, where and provided by whoever they choose.

SSAO has been telling the government this for four years now, but it has turned a deaf ear and continued wasting taxpayer funding by building even more institutions to benefit the long-term care companies, especially those with terrible track records like this one, instead of benefitting older adults, their families, and younger people with disabilities.

Enough is enough!

It is time to write to your MPP's - list found here -

<https://www.ola.org/en/members/current>

and to write a letter to the editor of the Toronto Star lettertoed@thestar.ca calling for an end to Ford's destructive policy of mass institutionalization of older adults. It is dehumanizing, discriminatory, and dangerous.

People like Deb Boekestein deserve better!

Also included below this letter is an Op Ed piece that the Chair of SSAO submitted to the Toronto Star. Please feel free to borrow wording from it in your own letters to MPPs and to the editor of the Toronto Star.

Letter to the Editor of the Toronto Star, May 4, 2024:

A year of despair living in LTC

As I sit here trapped in bed, no bell, dependent on a random mix of impersonal staff and new staff - a strange situation for all - I am on my own for the night.

My nursing home move caused disappointment despite the desire to be closer to town and have more social interaction. A surprise admission call arrived Friday evening, a prank I thought, setting a move date for the following Wednesday. Management unavailable, due to the Family Day long weekend, leaving no one to show the room before arrival.

I had five days to clear my old room while downsizing to the new.

I hurriedly packed to move to a new place. The initial month was delightful, but the staff quality deteriorated over a couple of weeks. I faced language barriers, inconsistent care, and a lack of reassurance. Many residents longed to return to their previous homes, as the situation became increasingly chaotic and disheartening.

Staff changes were frequent, complaints were ignored. After many complaints, the ministry investigated. We held our breath as they paused admissions while listening to residents and families; management scrambled to fix issues, promises were made, and admissions reopened a few months later.

Broken promises and unfulfilled resolutions led to more disappointment.

Decorations were beautiful in the lobby but lacked on higher floors. I've been here for almost a year without vitamins or fresh fruit. The ministry is not helpful. Lunch is forgotten while supper is poor. My spirit is broken. I am on every crisis list to get out, even willing to move away from family for proper care.

High rent has reduced my children's inheritance. I've written 1,700 words condensed down to this. Staff misunderstandings and disagreements are common. I've grown accustomed to hunger and despair.

Deb Boekestein, Owen Sound

Op Ed by Dr. Patricia Spindel, Chair of Seniors for Social Action Ontario
submitted to the Toronto Star on May 5, 2024:

Institutions are No Place for Elders

Deb Boekstein's recently published letter to the editor is a courageous treatise on the neglect and mistreatment of far too many residents in Ontario's long-term care facilities. It can also be read as a statement of the Ontario's government's failed public policies in long-term care that rely on mass institutionalization of elders rather than a more humane and progressive approach to caring for them.

Deb lives in one of those brand new corporate-owned facilities on which the government has spent billions in taxpayer funding. A short time after this institution opened, the Long-Term Care Inspection Branch stopped admissions because of care-related concerns. That, as so many other attempted inspection actions over the past four decades had little to no effect. Too many of these facilities have failed to meet legislated care standards for decades.

Institutions have closed for every other disability group in Ontario except elders, in some cases, as in provincially operated facilities for people with developmental disabilities, resulting in successful class action lawsuits. Now long-term care facilities also face class action lawsuits for gross negligence, brought by the families of the thousands who died there.

When will the Ontario government recognize that institutions - new or old - are no place for people who require care? Decades of history have shown that congregating so many vulnerable people together provides fertile ground for abuse, neglect, and the spread of deadly infections.

69% of residents in long-term care facilities have "no significant disabilities" according to the Ministry of Health's own data. Deb Boekstein and thousands like her belong in their own homes and communities with the services and supports that they require.

The continuing belief that there are some who will need an institution is utterly false when you consider that modern OECD countries like Denmark have not built any nursing homes since 1988. Early on they shifted their legislation and funding into social care under the responsibility of municipal councils that provide intensive in-home care and assisted living - elder apartments with care built in.

Some are not waiting for the Ontario government to change its archaic long-term care policy.

The City of Burlington is expanding its PACE (Program of All Inclusive Care of the Elderly) program that brings services to where people live in rent-geared-to-income community housing buildings. That program is keeping people out of hospitals and institutions.

In Toronto the University Health Network has been assisting elders in naturally occurring retirement communities to remain in their own homes and communities.

Hospital at Home programs are maintaining individuals with complex health needs in their own homes. This program should be expanded, and continue over the longer term.

Intensive in-home support along with funding for services where people already live is what the Ontario government should be funding as an alternative to costly, dehumanizing institutions with poor track records.

Paid Family Caregiver programs like the one already in place in Newfoundland and Labrador would help ease the staffing shortage, build family care giving capacity with support from paramedicine programs, and ease the financial burden for the high percentage of people already caring for their loved ones.

Removing the age restrictive criteria in the Family Managed Home Care direct funding program would empower many more families, especially those in rural and remote areas of Ontario, to organize their own supports and services delivered where, when, and by whom they choose.

Elders and prisoners are currently the only people in Ontario still mass institutionalized. It is time this changed. Aging is not a crime and elders like Deb deserve better.

Patricia Spindel Ed.D. is the Chair of Seniors for Social Action Ontario and a retired former Associate Dean of Health Sciences at Humber College.

References

Care in Denmark - "Denmark now provides 80% of its aged care services in the home after the Danish Government passed legislation in 1988 to put a brake on the construction of new aged care homes."

<https://www.theweeklysource.com.au/topic-aged-care/denmark-limited-construction-of-nursing-homes-in-1988-leading-to-30-drop-in-aged-care-beds>

LTC Residents with no significant disability - attached

PACE Community Hub, Burlington - <https://alzda.ca/pace-wellness-hub/> and <https://rotaryburlingtonnorth.com/documents/en-ca/15979414-ef6e-44c6-aacc-5e7a478b421a/1/>

UHN supporting elders in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) <https://thewalrus.ca/you-dont-have-to-nursing-home/> and your article by Moira Welsh - https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/almost-like-part-of-the-family-how-susans-community-keeps-her-out-of-hospital-and/article_59e04646-fcc9-11ee-84e0-afc9860384e8.html

Hospital at Home program - https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/new-st-marys-program-helps-patients-recover-at-home/article_0aac608b-a002-5843-ace8-3edd025ffada.html