



INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS

OPTIONS TO KEEP SENIORS AT HOME

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There is now broad recognition that the old institutional long term care model has outlived its usefulness. It is an antiquated system that is dehumanizing, subjects residents to undue risk of infection, requires that staff provide assembly line care, and is an impossible model in which to ensure standards and legislation are even adequately met (Spindel, 2020).

Seniors do not want to be warehoused in long term care institutions after living life in the community with their family and friends. Seniors want to age in place where they are familiar and comfortable as long as physically possible. So why does the Ford government continue to support and fund the status quo, building 8000 new beds and 12,000 renovated beds in institutions? (Jeffords, July 15, 2020).

Developing alternatives in senior care take dedication, creativity, and a commitment to move away from the big business of supporting the for-profit long term care industry. Alternatives would take a shift in thinking from the government, but now is the time. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the current system is inadequate and needs to be revamped to move away from the institutional model for Ontario's elders.

The government closed institutions for people with disabilities due to years of abuse and a recognition that people deserve better. It is time to do the same for seniors. Why is the government not considering alternatives to long term care institutions?

Two independent living options that could keep seniors supported at home are already in place and successful for other Ontario citizens.

The Supportive Independent Living Model (SIL) is a program that was developed and implemented for people with developmental disabilities under the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services (2008). Many of the people with disabilities who were institutionalized in large government facilities are now enjoying the support of the SIL program, living, working, and participating in their communities.

A similar option **Centres for Independent Living (CIL)** currently exists for people with physical disabilities. Multiple locations throughout the province offer independent living opportunities supported by **Direct Funding** to the individual who requires assistance (Centres

for Independent Living - CIL, 2018). CIL initiatives are operated on a non-profit basis and are funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health.

SIL workers would provide support where seniors live. The support can be provided in their own home, with family, or living with friends. SIL tailors the supports and services to the person's needs so the older adult can continue to participate in a familiar environment and with normal routines. SIL, operated by a non-profit community agency, ensures the funding goes to seniors not to profit margins.

A feature of SIL is that the hours of support a senior receives would be personalized to their individual needs and can be adjusted as requirements change.

SIL support workers:

- Support and provide advocacy with medical appointments;
- Monitor medications;
- Provide personal care such as bathing, showering, and personal hygiene;
- Build and/or maintain community resources;
- Help with grocery shopping, menu planning, and meal preparation;
- Assist with banking;
- Can work in collaboration with family according to the senior's wishes.

Benefits Of SIL:

1. Families and friends can visit comfortably – it is the older adult who decides on visitors at times convenient to them and not based on staffing availability and schedules.
2. Seniors can maintain their independence. Since SIL workers are assisting seniors in their own place of residence, the worker supports the senior's routines and life choices instead of the senior needing to adapt to the routines of a long term care institution.
3. More dignified and compassionate care – it is the senior's own space, where privacy is optimized.
4. Seniors will feel empowered through a person directed approach where seniors are the key decision makers and their choices and wishes are valued and respected. They are seen as a person rather than an institutional resident.
5. Seniors will be introduced to new, enriched and enhanced opportunities that can be introduced and supported by the SIL worker.

The main focus of SIL allows seniors to continue to enjoy the quality of life they deserve while receiving the supports and services needed to remain in their communities.

The SIL worker works collaboratively with the senior and their family while the senior maintains control as the ultimate decision maker in their life.

Institutional care stigmatizes seniors and gives the impression that seniors no longer have value or can contribute to their communities. SIL support can help to change those stereotypes by supporting people where they belong.

The **CIL Direct Funding models** offer very similar positive effects for people: they enable individuals to live in the community setting of their choice, and to select and schedule their own supports in whatever way is best for their needs. Thus a highly personalized support system can be implemented. This model is highly effective for those who are able to manage their own supports.

In summary, benefits of the CIL model include:

- Self-governance
- Self-help
- Self-determination
- Community (grass roots based)
- Choice
- Control
- Autonomy
- Empowerment
- Dignity.

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