



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

Editorial

FIRST COMPREHENSIVE MEDIA SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVES TO INSTITUTIONS

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On December 24, 2024, the eve of Christmas, the Toronto Star's Moira Welsh delivered an early gift of support for alternatives to institutions. In a [wide ranging article](#) she laid out the issues facing older women with inadequate pensions and their high risk for institutionalization.

As well as making the case that many women have completely inadequate pensions to support them in later life, she also included some interesting facts that support what Seniors for Social Action Ontario has been saying for five years now – invest in Home Care instead of institutions and watch the wait lists for long-term care facilities drop if not disappear.

This is a precis of that article, including many important facts supporting the alternatives that SSAO has long advocated.

Supported Subsidized Housing as an Alternative to Institutions

The article features [St. Matthews Bracondale House in Toronto](#) – a non-profit that not only offers affordable housing, but also a range of support services from social programs to home care. Bracondale was built in the 1980's when federal and provincial governments routinely subsidized construction of affordable housing for older adults and people of all ages." (Welsh, 2024)

One wonders why such a successful policy was stopped, and why now, in the face of the housing crisis and high rates of institutionalization and high death rates in long-term care institutions during the pandemic, the Federal and Provincial governments have not simply re-instated the policy of funding subsidized housing with supports? It is residential supportive housing options like Bracondale House that keep people out of institutions.

Ontario's Expensive, Antiquated, and Dehumanizing Approach to Aging Demographics Versus Changes in the U.S. Approach to Funding Long-Term Care

Rather than invest in Home Care and community-based supportive housing and assisted living services, Ontario has spent \$6.4 billion on long-term care institutions (Ontario Government, 2022).

In 2024/25 Ontario will spend \$9.2 billion on nursing homes - more than double the \$4.3 billion it gives to home care for all ages. Another \$2 billion is promised for Home Care over the next three years (Welsh, 2024).

That is not enough. Ontario needs to close the funding gap between what it spends on institutions and what it spends on Home Care and it needs to do so quickly.

Even the U.S. has stopped funding institutions more than Home Care - its approach diametrically opposed to Ontario's. "But in America, governments are taking the opposite approach - and the budget decisions made by officials there increasingly provide low-income earners with home care such as housekeeping, grocery shopping, meal preparation, or transportation. These are the types of services that, in Ontario, could help women like Gurhtrie who don't need a nursing home." (Welsh, 2024)

Professor Robert Applebaum, a Senior Research Scholar with the Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University in Ohio makes the case that significantly increased investments in Home Care have greatly reduced the need for long-term care institutions. "In 2001, Medicaid spent 71 per cent of its long-term care funds on nursing homes and two decades later, in 2021, that number had declined to 37 per cent, Applebaum said....In the same period, Medicaid funding to home and community services jumped from 29 per cent to 63 per cent, he said....In some states, nursing homes have empty beds as older Americans get the support they need - and repeatedly say they want - in the community, he said. Nursing homes increasingly care for residents who have no family caregivers and need 24 hour a day support or have significant dementia, Applebaum said." (Welsh, 2024)

PACE is an Alternative to Hospitalization and Institutionalization

PACE (Program of All Inclusive Care of the Elderly) has been promoted by Seniors for Social Action Ontario for years now as an alternative to the institutionalization of older adults. The PACE wellness hub in Burlington has proven its effectiveness, and it is time it was significantly expanded in Ontario. There is now research on the PACE Wellness Hub in Burlington showing that residents in PACE programs there experienced 14% fewer non-urgent hospital emergency visits and fewer and shorter hospitalizations for chronic conditions (Welsh, 2024).

The PACE program is also being adopted in Durham Region and [a recent presentation by CEO James Meloche of Community Care Durham](#) showed clearly how PACE can, and should, be a significant part of the health care system.

Similar models like the [Hub and Spoke program](#) offered by Senior Link in Peel Region have demonstrated similar results. See also video of Zoom session for SSAO by CEO Ray Applebaum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wMf-ApnVZw&t=615s>

NORC-SSPs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities with Supportive Services) Also Address Wait Lists for Institutions

Dr. Paula Rochon, founder of Women's Age Lab at Women's College Hospital has called for "a re-evaluation of traditional housing models to address the poverty and loneliness of older adults, particularly women, citing the benefits of subsidized housing, shared housing,

or Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) all with the built-in supports." (Welsh, 2024)

In a June, 2024 article for the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, she and a team of other researchers concluded that "NORC supportive service programs can be tailored to account for the factors associated with NH wait-list status, allowing NORC residents who are living in the community to age in their desired place and achieve optimal health outcomes." (Sheth et al, 2024)

An excellent [presentation for SSAO on the NORC at 100 Upper Madison by Gerry Gryba](#) demonstrates how important social support can be in helping people to age in place.

How Much More Proof Do the Ontario and Federal Governments Need?

The research is piling up, showing that PACE, Hub and Spoke, Supportive Housing, and NORC-SSPs work. How much more do governments need to recognize that investment in bricks and mortar institutions is not only dehumanizing to older adults and people with disabilities, ignoring their wishes to continue to live in their own homes and communities, but it is an expensive waste of taxpayer's money? It is time to shift funding to non-profit residences with care built in like St. Matthews Bracondale House. The predominantly for-profit long-term care system has failed to deliver safe, humane care while non-profit assisted living residences have proven their worth as have integrated services and supports in the home delivered by non-profit community agencies.

The time is now to do what the U.S. has done – shift funding from institutions to non-profit, community based in-home and residential options.

Many thanks to reporters like Moira Welsh at the Toronto Star for highlighting these alternatives.

Dr. Patricia Spindel is the Chair of Seniors for Social Action Ontario

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