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Long-term care residents survey reveals gaps in service, high marks for skill, compassion of staff

BURNABY – BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie has released results from the second provincewide survey of thousands of long-term care residents and their family members.

“In the past six years, funding for long-term care in B.C. has increased more than 45% and staffing has increased more than 10%, but despite these significant investments, we have not seen the amount of progress we hoped for in elevating the quality of life for people who call long-term care home,” stated Mackenzie. “To what degree the pandemic hindered our progress is difficult to quantify but it is reasonable to assume it had an impact.”

The survey covered 297 publicly subsidized care facilities in B.C. and received responses from over 10,000 residents and almost 8,000 family members and close friends. Just over 500 British Columbians volunteered to assist residents to complete the survey. The questions and design parallel the 2016/17 survey allowing reliable comparison to previous results.

Increasing care hours is one of the report’s recommendations. “While B.C. was at one time a leader in the amount of direct care hours residents received with 3.36 hours of care per person per day, we must recognize that changes in room configuration, resident population and expectations have expanded the care needed. National standards now recommend 4.1 hours of care per person per day as the minimum. While this 22% increase may seem daunting, we have achieved as much in the past and we can do so again,” stated Mackenzie

The survey results show there has been little improvement in areas such as frequency of bathing, help at mealtimes, meaningful activities, engagement with staff and other residents and the overall ratings of quality remain relatively unchanged. Despite these shortcomings, residents continue to give high marks to long-term care home staff for their skill, compassion and ability to treat residents with respect.

The report also recommends improving the home support system in B.C. to allow more seniors to delay their move to long term care. “We have 40% of residents who do not want to live in their care home and assessment data tell us that some of these people could continue to live at home with supports. We must ensure all options are exhausted before a person is required to move into long-term care - this will require changes to our home support program including the removal of financial barriers,” continued Mackenzie.

“While this report has not provided us with evidence of the improvements we had hoped to see, it is important to recognize long-term care is working well for some people and the goal is to raise the quality of life for all residents. The support for seniors remains strong and we need to look no further than the hundreds of British Columbians who stepped up to volunteer almost 20,000 hours of their time. This alone gives me hope for the future,” concluded Mackenzie.

Highlights from the survey include:

- 54% rated the overall quality of the care and services received in the home as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’
- Almost 80% of residents felt they could express their opinions ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’
- 81% of residents decide how to spend their time
- 85% of residents felt their privacy was respected during care ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’
- 95% of residents reported they have never been treated unfairly by staff due to their race or cultural background, and 97% reported they have never been treated unfairly due to their sexual orientation
- 88% of residents feel safe when they are alone ‘almost’ or ‘most of the time’
- 87% of residents reported they trust staff to take good care of them and staff treat them like a whole person ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’
- 48% of residents feel their care home ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ feels like home
- 51% of residents said staff only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ make time for a friendly conversation or ask how to meet their needs
- 50% of residents reported they ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ had the same care aide most weekdays
- 33% of residents report that they only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ get help to eat when needed
- One-third of residents only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ get to decide when to get up
- 29% of residents only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ get help right away if needed although 79% report they could get the services they need ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’
- Almost two-thirds of residents only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ find enjoyable things to do on evenings and weekends, or find opportunities to explore new skills or interests

The report includes the following 8 recommendations:

1. Increase staffing levels in all care facilities to the nationally recommended 4.1 hours of direct care per resident per day.
2. Increase flexibility of scheduling.
3. Increase social connections for residents by creating more meaningful activities to improve resident engagement.
4. Improve food and mealtime experience to meet residents’ preferences, including nutritional and culturally-specific dietary needs.
5. Implement compulsory professional education for all care home staff in cultural safety and emotional health and well-being of residents.
6. Allow all residents (or substitute decision maker, if appropriate) to name their “essential visitor”.
7. Work closely with the Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC to raise awareness and increase the function of resident and family councils at all long-term care facilities in B.C.
8. Improve community-based services, in particular home support, to ensure seniors are not required to seek long-term care unless their care needs cannot be met in the community.

Learn More:

‘Every Voice Counts-Long-Term Care Resident and Visitor Survey Results–2023’:

<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/reports/>.

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