



WHAT IS LONG-TERM CARE?

AN OVERVIEW OF ONTARIO'S LONG-TERM CARE SECTOR



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WHAT IS LONG-TERM CARE IN ONTARIO?

Long-term care (LTC) homes are places where anyone aged 18 or older lives for support with activities, such as eating and getting around, and access to daily 24-hour nursing, personal care and other services because their care needs cannot be safely met through community-based services and other care-giving support.¹ Government agencies determine who is eligible to be admitted to long-term care, and manage the wait lists of people needing care.

People who live in LTC homes are typically known as “residents” and tend to be individuals aged 75 or older who experience cognitive and physical changes that can affect how they think, feel and act.¹ Data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information² summarized by the Ontario Long-Term Care Association (OLTCA)³ provides the following profile of residents living in LTC:

- 90% have some form of cognitive impairment²
- 86% need extensive help with activities such as eating or using the washroom²
- 80% have neurological diseases²
- 76% have heart/circulation diseases²
- 64% have a diagnosis of dementia²
- 62% have musculoskeletal diseases such as arthritis and osteoporosis²
- 61% take 10 or more prescription medications⁴
- 40% need monitoring for an acute medical condition²
- 21% have experienced a stroke²

In Ontario there are more than 620 LTC homes with an average of 126 residents per home.⁵ On average, most residents live in LTC homes for two and a half years during the final stage of their lives. Some temporarily stay in LTC homes for up to two weeks for respite care while the family member they live with is away and up to two months for convalescent care to recover from an illness or surgery.⁶

Ontario LTC homes are regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Long-Term Care as per the Long-Term Care Homes Act. The Act outlines policies and procedures LTC homes must follow to support the health, wellbeing and safety of residents. The Act also includes the Residents’ Bill of Rights to ensure LTC homes constantly strive to provide individualized care and support services to each person living there. Services that residents receive in LTC include:

- Social, recreational and physical activity programs¹
- Meals, drinks and snacks¹
- Spiritual and religious services¹
- Medical and rehabilitation services¹
- Laundry and housekeeping¹
- Personal and medical supplies¹
- End-of-life and palliative care¹

Roles in Long-Term Care

There are many different health care professionals working together in long-term care homes. In each home, frontline staff (referred to as team members) working directly with residents include registered nurses, personal support workers, dietary and food services workers, social workers, recreation and kinesiology staff. Brief descriptions of these roles are provided below. Please note that roles and titles may vary between LTC homes, and that all roles contribute to the quality of life and care for those living in LTC by using a person-centred approach.

Nurse: deliver curative, supportive, rehabilitative and palliative nursing services. They develop and provide health promotion and prevention services, document and assess changes in health, and contribute to individualized care plans.

Personal support worker: enhance resident quality of life and care by helping them to live with comfort, safety and dignity. They support residents' personal care, dining, and mobility-related needs and are often a source of friendship and emotional support for those they provide care to.

Food services/dietary/nutrition: support resident nutrition and dining experience. They may perform responsibilities related to meal planning and preparation, serving, food safety and sanitation, dining room atmosphere, catering, and documentation of nutrition intake.

Recreation/programming/life enrichment: plan, implement and evaluate meaningful activities and programs based on the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual strengths of residents.

Social worker/ Social Service Worker: provide psychosocial, emotional and practical support to residents and family members. They support residents and their families through aspects such as transition into long-term care, through end-of-life care, and with complex emotions such as guilt, anger and fear. They provide counselling, emotional support, connections to community resources and conduct psychosocial assessments.

Kinesiology/physiotherapy: promote physical health, active living, and support residents in maintaining or enhancing their physical abilities. They may lead group fitness activities, complete assessments and provide coaching on an individual basis.

Homes also have staff working on site in administration and environmental roles. Administration roles typically manage responsibilities related to human resources, financial management, internal and external communication, scheduling, and measuring performance. Those working in environmental services ensure that the LTC home is maintained and safe for residents and team members.

Aside from team members, there are many family members, friends, and volunteers who regularly visit and work collaboratively in LTC homes

Resident and Family Councils

In addition to team members working in LTC, each home also has a resident and family council that supports those living in LTC and their families. Provincial level councils provide guidance for all LTC home councils with the objective of improving the quality of life in LTC.

The **Ontario Association of Residents' Councils (OARC)** is a non-profit organization funded by the Ontario government that provides a supportive network for residents' councils in LTC homes. The OARC is comprised of people living in LTC and their vision is that every resident living in LTC plays a role in shaping the place they call home.⁷ Through education, resources and collaboration, the OARC works to educate stakeholders and long-term care residents to understand their rights, and build a collective voice to create positive culture change for LTC.

Family Councils of Ontario (FCO) is a registered non-profit corporation, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care that supports families in improving quality of life in LTC. FCO provides a variety of services to homes including consultations, support to address challenges within a home, online and print resources, and presentations with the goals of cultivating effective family councils, advancing public policy and mobilizing knowledge exchange.⁸

References

- ¹ Government of Ontario. (2019). Long-term care overview. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/about-long-term-care>
- ² Canadian Institute for Health Information (2018). Continuing Care Reporting System: Profile of Residents in Continuing Care Facilities 2017–2018. Ottawa: CIHI
- ³ Ontario Long Term Care Association. (2019). This is long-term care 2019 [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://www.oltca.com/OLTCA/Documents/Reports/TILTC2019web.pdf>
- ⁴ Canadian Institute for Health Information (2014). Drug Use Among Seniors on Public Drug Programs in Canada, 2012. Ottawa: CIHI
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- ⁷ Ontario Association of Residents' Council. (2020). For Residents, by Residents. Retrieved from <http://www.ontarc.com/>
- ⁸ Family Councils of Ontario. (2020). About Us. Retrieved from <https://fco.ngo/>

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