



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

February 17, 2021

Long term care – we must act on lessons learned

We are in the midst of the most serious public health crisis Canada has ever faced. There has been much suffering and we all mourn those who have passed.

The devastating and heartbreaking outbreaks in long-term care homes across the country have highlighted the gaps in standards and care for our most vulnerable loved ones. But what of the legacy of their suffering and that of their families? What of our debt to the dedication and sacrifice of front-line workers? Do we come out of this stronger, or do we paper over the cracks that the crisis has exposed? A failure to learn from this crisis does a moral disservice to those currently suffering as a result of long-standing systemic issues.

It was on Sunday March 8th of last year, that a man in his 80's became Canada's first victim of COVID19. He lived at the Lynn Valley Care Centre. Since then, the pandemic has exposed serious problems in several care homes - overcrowded conditions, underpaid staff with high turnover, staff levels too low to provide adequate care and limited infection control.

In the first wave of the pandemic, long-term-care residents accounted for about 20 per cent of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Canada — and 80 per cent of the deaths - double the OECD average. Some particularly impacted care homes saw more than one-third of their residents die. Most of the systemic issues identified are not new and have been raised in numerous reports and inquiries over the years.

Much study – now time for action

A report for a special task force of Canada's Chief Science Officer rightly asks an obvious question: "Why has so much been examined and reported on and so little done to fundamentally redesign the system or clarify the continuum of services to support older adults and their families?"

The report goes on to observe: "In recent years, long-term care did not seem to be a priority for Canadians. Is it ageism? Maybe Canadians are

looking away, not wanting to face their own future as older adults. Canada is about to be a super-aged society. More than 20% of our population will be 65 years of age or older within the next five years. Yet, very little priority has been given to this sector of our health and social systems, making it vulnerable to the crisis."

Once and for all

It is long past time for a broad national dialogue that leads to lasting systemic change once and for all.

Though the Canada Health Act does not govern long-term-care homes, and their existence and operation are entirely up to each province, the federal government is anxious to work with the provinces and territories to find ways to ensure that new minimum standards exist for long-term care. Vulnerable senior should be protected and well cared for no matter where they live in Canada.

Throughout the pandemic, Ottawa has been there to provide provinces and territories with resources – both financial and practical – to protect residents and front-line workers in long term care homes. That support includes \$1 billion under the Safe Long-term Care Fund to stem the spread of COVID-19 by improving ventilation, undertaking infection prevention assessments, hiring more staff or increasing the staff levels of existing employees.

Ultimately, though, we must also focus on the post-pandemic long term. In addition to working with the provinces and territories to establish enhanced standards for long-term care, the federal government is committed to taking additional action to help people stay in their homes longer.

One of the greatest tragedies of this pandemic is the lives lost in long-term care homes. Our elders deserve to be safe, respected, and live in dignity.

The moment has never been more ripe. As someone once said, "If not us who, if not now when?"

Office now open by appointment at

604-775-6333 / Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca

JonathanWilkinson.libparl.ca