

## Home Care - The Key to True System Integration

Home is generally the best place for people of all ages to recuperate from an illness, manage a long term care condition or to live out their final days. Simply put, Ontarians want to remain in their homes for as long as possible and as a 2005 survey showed, 88% of surveyed Ontarians prefer home care. Additionally, issues of an aging population, health human resource shortages and a need to address and manage the escalating incidence of chronic disease are driving wide-scale health system reform and redesign.

The Ontario government knows that home care is the key to true system integration and has committed to helping “more Ontarians receive care closer to home...” and to doing “...more to help seniors who want to stay in their own homes” (Throne Speech, 2007). These government promises demonstrate a commitment to the growth of a well resourced and effective home and community care system. The Ontario Home Care Association (OHCA) believes that this means a system where:

- ✓ Services are integrated and coordinated.
- ✓ Provider skills and knowledge are respected and optimized.
- ✓ Clients and their families express confidence in their care team and their ability to manage at home.

Understanding the needs of individuals and tipping the balance of care provision in favour of the community must be adopted and maintained so that Ontarians of all ages who are ‘on the fringe’ of admission to a facility, or who turn to acute care for primary care support can stay at home with confidence.

This requires:

- Adoption of proactive home care support in order to prevent or delay crises or loss of independence.
- An increase of home care service maximums and introduction of greater flexibility to the service allocations in order to provide enhanced care to those ‘at risk’ of admission to an institution.
- Expansion and redefinition of the meaning of ‘respite care’ so that it responds more appropriately to the expressed needs of families and caregivers that have exhausted their physical and emotional ability to care for their loved ones.
- Provision of more meals, transportation and social supports as part of the formal structure of care offered within the home and community care and administered through the Community Care Access Centres.

*Investing in home-based care can save money, improve care and improve quality of life for people who would otherwise be hospitalized or institutionalized.*  
(Chappell and Hollander, 2002)

Integration of health system providers is the most effective way to address the needs of all those whose health needs necessitate more frequent interactions with the health care system. Individuals typically manage their way through the system coordinating and communicating with their various care providers. Children are represented and supported by their families who advocate and coordinate care for them. Seniors, who are often not used to relying on others to manage their needs, are particularly vulnerable to the lack of coordination and communication between different sectors in the health care system (McWilliams, 1993). Recent hospitalization and poor transition planning following discharge from acute care is a known precursor of loss of independent living for seniors. (Hollander, Chappell, 2002). This occurs because appropriate supports to enable durable discharges from acute care are not systemically planned and communicated to the family and the next formal caregiver. An

integrated and effective health system addresses the transition points of care and works seamlessly to ensure safe and consistent bridging of services and/or sectors for the at-risk senior (VanderBent, 2004).

*Integrated systems of care for the elderly are both appropriate and effective....the focus of policy on care delivery for the elderly should be on integrated models of care delivery. (Hollander, 2007)*

Home care plays a vital role in supporting an integrated system. Improved outcomes for clients/patients have been realized through the integration of home care in emergency departments, primary care and palliative care to name a few examples. Key to the success of this integration at the provider level is improved coordination of care, elimination of duplication, and the recognition and optimization of the contributions of team

members. This includes the involvement of clients and their family caregivers to undertake a key role in the management of their health care.

OHCA believes that the mandate and funding for home care in Ontario needs to be expanded to achieve better integration with system partners so that the health system provides Ontarians with “the right care at the right place”. This takes leadership to stay the course and continue to invest in home care refraining from the old habits of seeking savings through service reductions in the publicly funded home care sector. Since 1990 the number of hospital beds available has decreased by 45% and Ontario’s population has increased by 25% (Closson, 2008). The percentage of elderly in Ontario has steadily grown and yet the rate of government funded home care remains at 4 to 5% of the total health expenditure per annum (CHCA, 2008). This situation runs counter to the needed transformation of care to the home and community and does not support the system integration efforts required to support a growing senior population.

*Funding for home care services needs to get ahead of the wave in order to truly achieve the transformation to community based care.*

Respected Canadian research has demonstrated that even a small investment in home care can keep people at risk of institutionalization at home and that home care is a cost effective option supporting true system integration. Notwithstanding the current economic challenges facing Ontario, it is vital that the government continue to invest in client care and build continuously on levels of service provided through the Community Care Access Centres. This is the promise made to those in need, and to the millions of family caregivers selflessly contributing to the wellbeing of their loved ones that must be honoured. In the spirit of true system transformation, the OHCA stands ready to provide support and advice to achieve this goal.

The Ontario Home Care Association (OHCA), *the voice of home care in Ontario*, is an organization of home health and social care service providers. Association members deliver nursing care, home support services, personal care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, dietetics, speech language therapy and medical equipment and supplies in the home. Ontario Home Care Association members are contracted by all three levels of government, Community Care Access Centres, insurance companies, institutions, corporations and private individuals. OHCA members are accredited by Accreditation Canada and/or the International Standards Association (ISO).

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For the latest in news and information about the home care sector in Ontario, subscribe to the Ontario Home Care Association’s “House Call” at [www.homecareontario.ca](http://www.homecareontario.ca).

Prepared by the Ontario Home Care Association.

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