

TAKE PROFIT OUT OF LONG-TERM CARE

FEBRUARY 4, 2021



Every day we see the shocking loss of life and neglect in long-term care in Ontario. Last spring, Doug Ford called for an “iron ring” to protect LTC residents and workers but did nothing. The reality is Ford has failed - our elderly are neglected, suffering and dying; families are ignored; and workers abandoned.

Austerity

The pandemic exposed – and exacerbated – the chasms in our LTC system. LTC is not adequately funded. With inflation, population growth, and successive governments committed to austerity-based budgeting, provincial funding has not kept pace with need. Long before COVID-19 some seniors died alone because of staffing shortages.

Mike Harris Made Long-Term Care “Open for Business”

Funding shortfalls are just the beginning of the problem. Doug Ford’s Conservative predecessor Mike Harris deliberately shaped the approach that resulted in the slow decay and now horrific situation in LTC.

- As part of his Common Sense Revolution in the 1990s Harris repealed long-term care standards and staffing ratios
- Harris Conservatives allocated precious provincial long-term care capital funding to their political contributors to build more for-profit facilities
- For-profit homes render fewer hours and lower quality of care, lower wages and heavier workloads for staff, and more medical transfers to hospital than either municipal and non-profit homes.
- In 2020, three big private LTC chains paid out more than \$171 million in dividends to Shareholders.
- As part time chair of Chartwell Homes’ Board, Harris earns \$237,000 a year
- Earlier this year, Harris was rewarded with the Order of Ontario

The Link Between Harris and Ford

At present, over half of Ontario’s 630 LTC homes are for-profit, while 16% are public, and 27% are non-profit. The for-profit sector is increasingly “financialized”, meaning chain homes are treated more like stock market commodities than care homes. Yet Ford continues in his determination to mirror Harris and grow the for-profit footprint in LTC.

- In November 2020, the Conservatives awarded a number of contracts to private LTC corporations, many of which have roots in the development industry, to expand the number of for-profit beds.
- Ford curtailed the legal liability of operators for negligence that results in harm or death of residents.

Ford’s Failure

Ford and his Long-Term Care Minister Merilee Fullerton have utterly failed in dealing with the fatal damage COVID has inflicted on LTC residents and workers.

- Unlike Quebec which recruited and paid for three months’ training of PSWs between the two COVID waves, Ontario did nothing to prepare for the second wave

- The roll-out of a recent government-funded wage top-up for LTC was flawed, as private owners Chartwell and Extencicare took more than five weeks this winter to pass along the \$3 an hour pay enhancement for PSWs
- The Ford government continues its appeal of a pay equity ruling in the sector
- Ford's promise to require an average (not minimum) four hours of daily care is postponed until 2025
- Ford resists shifting LTC to the Canada Health Act so it becomes part of the health care system - instead called for no-strings federal funding

Today, the situation is disastrous. The LTC system is in trouble. But it is clear there is a particular problem in the for-profit sector: with double the number of COVID outbreaks, 78% more resident deaths have happened in for-profit homes than elsewhere. Apologists have tried to argue that the key issue is the age of buildings, or how many four-bed rooms a facility has, not the dynamics of profit-taking. The new common sense is that profit has no place in long-term care. Even some pension plans are pulling their investments for ethical reasons.

Private Profit at Public Expense Creates Multiple Crises

Thanks to the Toronto Star's investigative and journalism team a key mechanism by which for-profit LTC chains extract their profit from the system has been made clear. Along with a health crisis, we have a gender crisis, a racism crisis, and a working class crisis. In long-term care, women represent more than two-thirds of residents and 90 % of paid staff (in the GTA, most staff are also racialized). More than 80 percent of unpaid family caregivers are women. We see disrespect for workers and the working class, as we watch private profit grow at public expense.

On February 4, 2021, the Labour Council resolved to:

1. Call on the Ontario government to:
 - Immediately prioritize staffing through recruitment and intensive training
 - Adequately fund long-term care and shift as quickly as possible to a minimum four hours of care per resident (not average across residents)
 - Regulate long-term care, ensuring accountability, enforcement and penalties for noncompliance
 - Ensure adequate wages for staff and 70% full-time jobs and provide mental health supports
 - Prioritize vaccinations for all LTC residents, staff and essential caregivers
 - Support shut down measures to reduce community transmission
 - Agree to negotiate inclusion of long-term care as part of our health care system under a parallel to the Canada Health Act
 - Stop development of new private long-term care facilities and provide that funding to municipalities
 - Transition away from current private ownership of long-term care by revoking licences when chains are found to be negligent and not renewing others
 - Provide and fund adequate home care support so seniors can stay at home safely if they wish to, for as long as possible
2. Call on municipalities to apply for funding to build LTC homes
3. Call on the federal government to make LTC part of our health care system under a parallel to the Canada Health Act
4. Continue to shine a light on the horrible situation in LTC, and its effects on residents, families, workers and communities
5. Call on our affiliates to join our allies, including the Ontario Health Coalition and Decent Work and Health Network, to demand immediate action

