

Outdated care homes leave some seniors at disadvantage: Association

By Brock Weir

"Night and day." That is how Candace Chartier of the Ontario Long Term Care Association characterized the two wings of Chartwell Aurora, built some three decades apart.

But the care residents receive in each wing could be described the same way, despite the best efforts of Chartwell, and both the local long-term care residence and the Association (OLTCA) are ramping up efforts for increased Provincial funding to close the care gaps in outdated homes.

"We see homes like Chartwell Aurora where there are stark differences between the old and the new," said Ms. Chartier while visiting Chartwell on Thursday, the latest stop in the OLTCA's tour touting their plan for action, "Better Seniors' Care."

Better Seniors' Care calls for immediate action to improve seniors' care in Ontario through: the implementation of a plan to modernize every long-term care home in Ontario that has been classified as "outdated" by the Province, thus improving the quality of care to 35,000 seniors living in these residences; ensuring seniors outside of urban centres have sufficient access to care close to home; and providing a more predictable approach to funding and ensuring specialized resources are enhanced to support residents with increasing needs.

Contrasting the two wings, Ms. Chartier said residents living in the new wing have semi-private and private accommodation, nursing stations away from rooms and high traffic areas, and more dining areas more practical to access. In the original wing, built in the 1970s, up to four people can share a room, making for a noisy environment that is less than ideal for sleep.

"It is really important for us to get the capital funding right so that more homes can renew and more residents can get the luxury of having that new environment," said Ms. Chartier. "In addition to capital funding, which is huge, we're also looking at more enhanced supports for dementia care. I am not talking about staffing ratios, but specialized staffing that has the experience supporting residents with cognitive impairment and aggressive behaviours and coming up with individualized approaches that enhance the quality of life for those residents and residents around them."

"Homes with specialized dementia support show a significant lower rate of aggressive behaviours, lower rates of restraints and lower rates of psychotropic medications. The OLTCA has done some significant analysis and we found that homes that have in-home supports like Behaviour Supports Ontario (BSO) where you have your own staffs specially trained, you have two to four times more success in dealing with cognitive impairments and better outcomes."

"There are far too many homes across the Province that don't have this in-home support and this home is an example of that. They have a mobile team, which is okay. It is better than not having anything at all, but they didn't receive the dedicated in-home funding. There is actually only 109 homes in the Province that have the dedicated in-home funding. That means this approach is reactive rather than proactive and sometimes residents in this home have to wait days to weeks to get that specialized support that they need and that shouldn't happen."

Speaking to The Auroran following the announcement, Greg Boudreau Administrator at Chartwell Aurora, stressed the importance of having in-house BSO teams.

"We have residents that, when they escalate, we have to call for the resources," said Mr. Boudreau. "Where we see triggers that are happening, we need to be able to help that resident which also helps our other residents who are around them. The redevelopment of the building is hugely important, just the physical space for people to be able to walk around and not be in tight confinement definitely lowers the behaviours as well as it is even better for infection control."

"People aren't near each other, so when someone does get sick it doesn't spread throughout the building, and just the physical environment we have an environment where we don't have dining rooms on every floor, so the residents spend a good deal of time transporting for meals and dining rooms where, instead of that they can be quickly into a dining room which gives them more space, is less crowded, more quiet and just a more civilized environment."

"We are unique where we have both standards. We have the newer building and we can see the difference. As people come into the building, they often want to move to the newer building because there are more private rooms, there's not the four bedroom wards. The physical environment and the experience is better there. However, they still end up staying here because of the care."

"Staff need the resources and help to be able to deal with the residents with the increase in dementia, but we can ensure with how we are able to provide great care by how much better it could be in the [older] side of the building."