

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Senior Care

Stop Rationing Care for Seniors

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Stop rationing care for seniors? was the headline of the first media release I issued when the legislature resumed sitting this past week.

Why?

The emails, letters and phone calls were mounting. They were coming from seniors, their families and advocates who had heard that the way essential care services were being provided to seniors was about to change. And what they were hearing was unsettling at best.

Here is an example of one of those emails. Cathie writes, ?.....my mother lives in the ACL Heritage East. It is Alternative Care for Seniors. They provide personal support services and essential homemaking to seniors and adults with disabilities in designated supportive housing apartments, so that they can stay in the community and remain independent. Services provided are tailored to each individual's needs and can include personal care such as dressing assistance, medication reminders, bathing, meal preparation, security checks, laundry and housework.

?The seniors are devastated because they recently found out that the province is de-funding the ACL and transferring responsibilities to CHATS [Community and Home Assistance to Seniors]. They have learned that CHATS will not be available seven days a week 24 hours a day. How is it possible to have these disabled seniors lose their services??

Here's how...

More than 80% of current applicants for seniors care services will not qualify

In a memorandum dated June 19, 2013 the Community and Health Services Department of York Region announced that a new Ministry of Health policy would have serious implications to the Region's Community Living Program.

Not only would the level of service be reduced, but the memo warned that more than 80% of current applicants would not qualify under the new rules.

The new policy, the Assisted Living for High Risk Seniors Policy, was announced by the Minister of Health with great fanfare.

The spin was that it would give more seniors access to assisted living services, but what the minister did not say was that the new eligibility criteria would disqualify many seniors from getting any services at all.

I questioned why essential services to seniors were being put on the chopping block and why a program that was serving our seniors so well would be decimated. Here is what I was given in writing by the Central Local Health Integration Network:

?Every client currently receiving assisted living services will continue to do so under the new model - there will be no reduction in service.?

Over the next few weeks, CHATS will be contacting residents who have been receiving services through York Region's Alternative Community Living Program to arrange personal meetings with them and their family members to discuss the transition to the new program.

In a memo to ACL clients this past week, CHATS committed to ensure that each client's care plan is tailored to meet their personal needs.

I will remain optimistic that the promise that there will be no reduction in service will be honoured by both the Region and the Ministry of Health. Will the concerns expressed by Olive, on behalf of her brother and sister, in this email be addressed?

?My brother, age 78 is visually impaired and is battling cancer. My sister, age 80, has multiple medical problems including a bad heart. At age 75, I am their sole caregiver and this news is putting added stress on me and my family. The hard working and caring women of ACL have been the lifeline for me and my siblings in several emergencies. Over the last three years, they have been resident at Hadley Grange and I have seen firsthand how a program like this could keep high risk seniors out of costly long-term care homes.?

Honour our commitment to seniors and their families

Given the fears that many have expressed concerning the potential loss or reduction of services, I will be interested to know the

outcome of those CHATS meetings.

I have already committed to meet with the residents of the Heritage East Seniors Residence after they have concluded their private consultations.

I will be inviting a representative of CHATS and the Region to attend that meeting to ensure that any concerns that residents may have will be addressed. I will make myself available for similar meetings at other residences if necessary.

The Ministry of Health and its agency, the Central Local Health Integration Network and the Region of York have a responsibility to honour their commitment to our seniors and their families that there will be no reduction in service.

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