

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Ontario investing in palliative care and Alzheimer's support

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

As someone who has watched loved ones struggle with dementia, witnessed other family members benefit from excellent palliative care, and watched first-hand as a loved one's final days were made worse with no end-of-life care ? I am pleased with two government funding initiatives highlighted this week.

In our 2016 budget, Ontario is proposing to invest an additional \$75 million over three years to provide patients with more options and access to palliative and end-of-life care.

This investment would improve community-based hospice and palliative care services including supporting up to 20 new hospices across Ontario, and increasing the funding for existing facilities; increasing supports for caregivers that will help families and loved ones support palliative patients at home and in the community; promoting advance care planning so that families and health care providers understand patients' wishes for end-of-life care; and, establishing the Ontario Palliative Care Network, a new body to advance patient-centred care and develop provincial standards to strengthen services.

The province is also partnering with Hospice Palliative Care Ontario to provide training and support to new hospice volunteers each year. A new online training system will give volunteers throughout Ontario better access to standardized training and tools, which will be especially beneficial for rural and remote communities.

Ontario is also releasing the Palliative and End-of-Life Care Provincial Roundtable Report that will help Ontario develop a comprehensive strategy on palliative and end-of-life care. The strategy will focus on supporting families and caregivers, and ensuring access to coordinated quality care where patients want it.

Improving palliative care is part of the government's plan to build a better Ontario through its Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care, which is providing patients with faster access to the right care, better home and community care, the information they need to stay healthy and a health care system that's sustainable for generations to come. It is also part of Ontario's Patients First: Roadmap to Strengthen Home and Community Care, which is the government's plan to improve and expand home and community care over the next three years.

With the 2016 Ontario Budget investment of \$75 million over three years, the province will invest a total of \$155 million in hospice and palliative care over the next three years.

Ontario currently provides funding for 34 hospices across the province and is committed to supporting up to 20 additional hospices. Ensuring patients and families across the province have access to compassionate and high-quality palliative care is critical at this very important and challenging time of their lives. Our goal is to build on Ontario's strong network of providers and volunteers who make an enormous difference to the palliative care patients receive.

Last year, 13,500 hospice volunteers supported more than 17,000 in-home clients and 4,000 people near the end of their lives. On average, for each hospice client served, five family members are also supported.

I'm also pleased to report that Ontario is investing \$761,500 in the Alzheimer Society of Ontario's Finding Your Way program to help improve training and reach more people who come into contact with persons affected by dementia.

The Finding Your Way program is a safety campaign that helps people with dementia stay safe and active, while helping to prevent the risk of wandering and going missing. The program's training services will be enhanced this year to include first-responders as well as supportive housing and retirement homes staff.

Investing in services and supports to help keep seniors safe is part of the government's plan to build stronger and healthier communities.

The government is conducting consultations on dementia care in order to develop a comprehensive strategy for people living with dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. If you are interested in submitting ideas and sharing experiences, you can do so at: dementiastrategy@ontario.ca.

These improvements to the Finding Your Way program will help reach more people and provide important information to protect those with dementia.

By 2020, nearly 250,000 seniors in Ontario will be living with some form of dementia. Three out of five people with dementia go missing at some point during their illness. There is greater risk of injury, even death, for those missing for more than 24 hours.

Ontario has invested more than \$2.8 million in funding to the Finding Your Way program.

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org.

I look forward to hearing from you.