



Access denied: New CCPA report documents impact of 15 years of privatization and underfunding on seniors' care

More than 15 years of underfunding, privatization and fragmentation of seniors' care has left many seniors and their families struggling to access health services, according to a new Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report on declining access to care homes, assisted living and in-home care.

The report, *Privatization and Declining Access to BC Seniors' Care: An Urgent Call for Policy Change*, uses data obtained from the BC Ministry of Health to track the access to home and residential care.

Authored by CCPA research associate Andy Longhurst, the study is the most recent product of a 17-year-old collaboration between the progressive think tank and the Hospital Employees' Union research department that has also produced three other reports on the topic.

Alarming, the situation facing B.C. seniors has deteriorated over that period – with less access to publicly funded home support, residential care and assisted living today compared to 2001.

- Between 2001 and 2016, the number of residential care and assisted living spaces relative to the population 75 years and older declined by 20 per cent. And there was a reduction in access in every health authority.
- B.C.'s seniors have less access to publicly funded home support today than in 2001. There was a 30 per cent decline between 2001 and 2016 in home support clients as a proportion of the 75-year-plus age group.

The report also documents the unrelenting privatization of publicly subsidized residential care over the last decade and a half, and the risks that accompany this trend. Since 2001, beds operated by for-profit companies increased by 42 per cent while the number operated by health authorities and non-profit groups declined by 11 per cent.

The negative impact of for-profit delivery on care quality is well documented in the academic research – and HEU members are very familiar with the disruption in the continuity of care that results from downward pressure on wages and repeated contracting out.

The report also documents the role that better home and community care play in reducing hospital overcrowding and surgical wait times, and producing better health outcomes for all British Columbians.

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HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside says the report paints a damning picture of the state of seniors’ care after 15 years of privatization, underfunding and mismanagement.

“We have much work ahead of us to repair the damage, and strengthen the entire continuum of services that exist to support seniors’ health needs,” says Whiteside.

“Our recent campaign to increase staffing levels in care homes has met with significant community support and forced government to act,” adds Whiteside.

“But we must continue to pressure government for increased funding, more accountability for these funds, and action to end the mass firings of care staff which so profoundly undermines the quality of care.”

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