

**Standing Committee on
Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Person with
Disabilities
November 7, 2017
Speaker: Leighton McDonald**

Good Afternoon. On behalf of the Canadian Home Care Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present to you today.

The Canadian Home Care Association (CHCA) is a national not-for-profit membership association dedicated to advancing excellence in home care through leadership, awareness, advocacy and knowledge. CHCA members include governments, administration organizations, service providers, researchers, educators and others with an interest in home care. Closing the Gap Healthcare, the company I work for is a Sustaining Patron of the association and works closely with them to advance key priorities in home care.

Supporting older Canadians to live at home with dignity, independence and quality of life is a priority for all home care programs across the country.

To achieve this goal, our health, social care services and communities must support an environment where older people with a frailty not only “age in place” but are also active and productive members of their community. Older Canadians want to remain in their homes and believe that home care is a critical part of making this happen. In fact, in a recent study conducted by the College of Physicians of Canada, 4 in 5 Canadians said that providing quality home care is an expression of Canadian health care values.

There is unfortunately chronic underfunding and suboptimal capacity for the delivery of these important services across all jurisdictions. On average provinces only spend 3 – 4 percent of their health care budget on home care services, even though it has been proven to be more cost effective than acute care and the preferred setting of care for seniors with a frailty.

Even with the federal commitment to invest \$ 6 billion over 10 years to home care, publicly funded programs across Canada will continue to be challenged with managing increased demand on limited resources and funding.

There are, however, innovative programs currently in practice that are making a positive impact on seniors' dignity, independence and quality of life. I would like to share two such innovations.

Facilitate social connectedness among isolated homebound older adults in the safety and security of their own home.

The World Health Organization states that “Belonging to a social network of communication and mutual obligation makes people feel cared for, loved, esteemed, and valued – this has a powerful protective effect on health”.

Loneliness is not the equivalent of being alone.

Of seniors 60+ years of age, 43% reported feeling lonely with 13% suffering from chronic loneliness and 30% suffering from episodic loneliness. It is estimated that 1,3 million Canadian seniors suffer from chronic loneliness. Studies show that health deterioration is twice as high (24.8% vs. 12.5%) when seniors are lonely. As health deteriorates, there is a reduction in quality of life and an increased burden on the health care system

Individuals who engage in meaningful social relationships are healthier, happier, and live longer. However, there are many in our society whose circumstances limit such interaction, particularly vulnerable frail seniors who have functional limitations that impact their ability to engage outside their homes.

Innovative programs, such as **Keeping Connected** offered by Closing the Gap Healthcare Group, support seniors from a social health and well-being perspective through planned socially supportive interactions via phone (1-3 times per week, averaging 20-30 minutes in length). This is truly a low cost, high impact solution.

When comparing loneliness scores from intake to discharge, findings indicate that the Keeping Connected Program is effective in supporting lonely seniors. Findings include:

- 97% of clients felt involved during calls
- 88% felt the companion understood them
- 96% of clients looked forward to calls
- 73% felt companions made them feel less lonely
- 99% would recommend the service to other seniors

Leveraging technology to meet the needs of seniors in their homes.

Technological advancements have created new options for care delivery; improving people's health and at the same time improving efficiencies and reducing the cost of care.

Technology-enabled home care focuses on prevention, independence and quality of life. For frail seniors with complex care needs, deployment of innovative technology-enabled home care solutions can mean the difference between being an active participant in their community or living their remaining years isolated or in institutional care. The benefits of innovative technology-enabled home care solutions include:

- Better control of chronic illnesses through remote patient monitoring.
- Improved safety in the home due to the ability for technology to alert caregivers and healthcare professionals of early signs of deterioration
- Enhanced self-care and person-centred care through the provision of education functions and active patient engagement
- Improved safety and medication management for people in their homes
- Increased access to appropriate care in rural, remote and hard to service areas
- Supporting the vital role of family caregivers who provide \$25 billion of unpaid care to the health care system (Hollander, 2009)

It is easy to envisage a future health system fully immersed in a range of technologies that support seniors' care in the home. Our collective challenge is how we attain this vision. In advancing the adoption of technology, we need a cohesive strategy, long-term investment, policy changes and change management strategies.

In closing, I would like to bring light to a vital part of the home care and health care team – the family and friend **caregivers**.

Canadian needs to do more to support caregivers, especially when their continued dedication and contribution is the reason why so many older Canadians have been – and will remain – able to age in their places of choice for as long as possible.

A 2012 Statistics Canada study found that 1 in 10 caregivers spend more than 30 hours/week providing care – that is equivalent to a full time job! They contribute \$25 billion in unpaid labour to our health care system and as 50% of carers are between the ages of 45-65, their peak earning years, the cost of caregiving to employers due to lost productivity is also significant - \$1.3 billion.

Although caregiving can be rewarding, caregivers often compromise their health, incur out of pocket expenses and face employment challenges in the absence of appropriate support. Canadians wants governments to do more to help seniors and their family caregivers. Five priority areas have been identified by caregivers and caregiver support groups across the country:

1. **Safeguard the health and well-being of family caregivers** through funding of caregiver respite programs and other community-based services.
2. **Minimize the financial burden placed on carers** by improving awareness of the new Canada Caregiver Credit and amend this to make it a refundable tax credit.
3. **Support caregiver access to information and resources** by developing a national resource database that links with current jurisdictional initiatives.
4. **Assist employers to provide supportive workplaces that recognize and respect caregivers' needs** by funding an Employer for Carers consortium that would equip employers with information, tools and resources.
5. **Invest in research on caregiving** as a foundation for evidence-informed decision making.

While we have made advances in a few of these priority areas, there is much more to be done to ensure that caregivers are recognized, valued and supported in their vital role.

Once again, Canadians believe that home, not a hospital or long-term care facility, is the best place to recover from an illness or injury, manage long-term conditions, and live out ones' final days.

Our federal government can enable the meaningful change that will be needed to meet the growing and evolving needs of our ageing population by playing a key leadership role on the issue of significant national importance.

Thank you for allowing me to share the opportunities in seniors to age in place through the provision of home care. I would be happy to expand on any or all of them during our discussions.