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Local residents take action to improve long-term care

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Concerned local residents from Haliburton County and Kawartha Lakes have banded together to form the Haliburton-CKL

Long-Term Care Coalition to campaign for changes to nursing homes and how residents are cared for in Ontario.

GO TO
TOP

nationally.

“So many of us have had experiences with the long-term care system,” notes Haliburton community resident, Bonnie Roe. “COVID-19 has laid bare what we have all known for a long time – there’s an urgent need for improvement.”

Roe notes the coalition supports and includes hard-working, front line, long-term care workers. The group was motivated to action following the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in local nursing homes in Kawartha Lakes this past spring and evacuation of a Haliburton nursing home due to a leaking roof last year.

The Coalition is focused on action and determined to work to:

- include long-term care under the *Canada Health Act* to ensure public funding and apply national standards;

- implement the recommendations of the Registered Nursing Association of Ontario, including increasing staffing to ensure at least four hours per day of direct care per resident; improving workloads, working conditions, and conditions for care; increasing infection prevention and control and nurse practitioner expertise in care; and enhancing specialized (e.g. geriatric) expertise in LTC leadership;
- change the culture of long-term care to being more resident-centered and rights-based, including ensuring consistent implementation and safe expansion of the government of Ontario’s long-term care essential care giver (visitor) guidelines; and
- cease using private sector, for-profit companies for new nursing homes in Ontario, and consider using other models of care for our older adults such as the “butterfly” model.

“Every publicly funded dollar and every dollar paid by the residents of long-term care should go to their care, not to profit corporate entities and their shareholders,” says long-term care advocate, Brigitte Gebauer, whose mother lives in long-term care in Haliburton and has been a resident of both not-for-profit and for-profit nursing homes in the area.

Gebauer’s a member of the coalition’s campaign core group. She believes in more direct care, updated facilities, better quality of food, and more stimulating

GO TO
TOP

environments “That is what human beings nearing the end of their lives deserve,” she added.

A recent survey found that a majority of Canadians support bringing nursing home operations under the *Canada Health Act* in order to improve standards and make long-term care part of the public health care system.

In May 2020, the members of the Canadian Armed Forces were called in to assist five Ontario nursing homes during COVID-19 outbreaks. They reported instances of:

- poor infection control;
- inadequate resident care and treatment;
- lack of trained staff;
- cost-cutting on safety supplies; and
- general uncleanness including the presence of cockroaches and feces.

Research indicated non-profit and municipally-run nursing homes had far fewer cases of COVID-19—and related deaths—than corporate, for-profit facilities, at least in Ontario.

The new coalition is currently developing tactics to use in obtaining its immediate and longer-term goals, to help improve long-term care—which will include other key groups and organized labour to prevent duplication and enhance the power for change.

The coalition will be holding a COVID-safe launch event in the coming weeks.

“These are ambitious goals,” says coalition member Mike Perry from Kawartha Lakes. “The need is clearly so great. We need to help our seniors, front-line workers, and families to build things back better as any of us may need long-term care ourselves one day.”

All local residents who would like to take action to improve long-term care, are encouraged to contact Bonnie Roe at 705-286-2414 or email her at hckllongtermcarecoalition@gmail.com

Join the coalition’s Facebook Group by searching *Haliburton-CKL Long-Term Care Coalition*.

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