

Meeting the needs of AGING

THE GOLDEN YEARS MAY ONLY
BE BRASS COATED

by ELLEN ASHTON-HAISTE

We may not have discovered the fountain of youth, but demographics are moving in the right direction. We are living longer and healthier lives, remaining independent at an age our grandparents scarcely hoped to reach. Surely, it should be a golden age.

But there is a flip side that's tarnishing the gold. When health and independence finally succumb to the effects of aging and we are forced to seek out residential care, we are frailer and sicker and in need of much more assistance than our predecessors a mere two decades ago.

"The level of need has risen almost 20 per cent since 1993 and the average age (of someone coming into care) is now about 86, compared with 73 two decades ago," says Donna Rubin, chief executive officer of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors (OANHSS), the umbrella body for non-profit, long-term care residences and community services for the senior population.

It's an ongoing challenge for Ontario's long-term care and retirement facilities to meet that growing demand.

"People are coming into a facility today with multiple chronic illnesses," Rubin says. "They require specialized care. More than half of them suffer from dementia and other mental illnesses and over three-quarters require rehabilitation to just maintain their level of functioning."

One of the big changes seen in recent years, she says, is the increasing need for intravenous treatments, oxygen and gastric feeding tubes, all which require specialized knowledge on the part of caregiving staff.

In recent years, OANHSS and other associations dealing with the senior population have been lobbying for new regulations and increased funding to assist these facilities, particularly in the non-profit sector, to better meet the needs.

A 2001 study, conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, comparing Ontario to 10 other regions, in Canada, the United States and Europe, indicated that the

province fell short of standards maintained in other places, particularly in areas such as counselling and rehabilitation.

"We've put a roof over their heads, we're feeding them, we're taking care of some of their basic needs, but (someone who has) really severe depression, or cognitive impairment, (may not) have access to highly specialized care, like a psychiatrist or a psychologist to help," Rubin says.

lion program to add 20,000 beds and refurbish 16,000 more in dozens of nursing homes by 2004. This is allowing many facilities – both for-profit and non-profit – to bring their accommodations up to standard and beyond.

In the short term, says Rubin, this means it may be easier to get into a facility. But it will just be a drop in the bucket in the long term. "Eight or 10 years down the road, we're going to have a real need

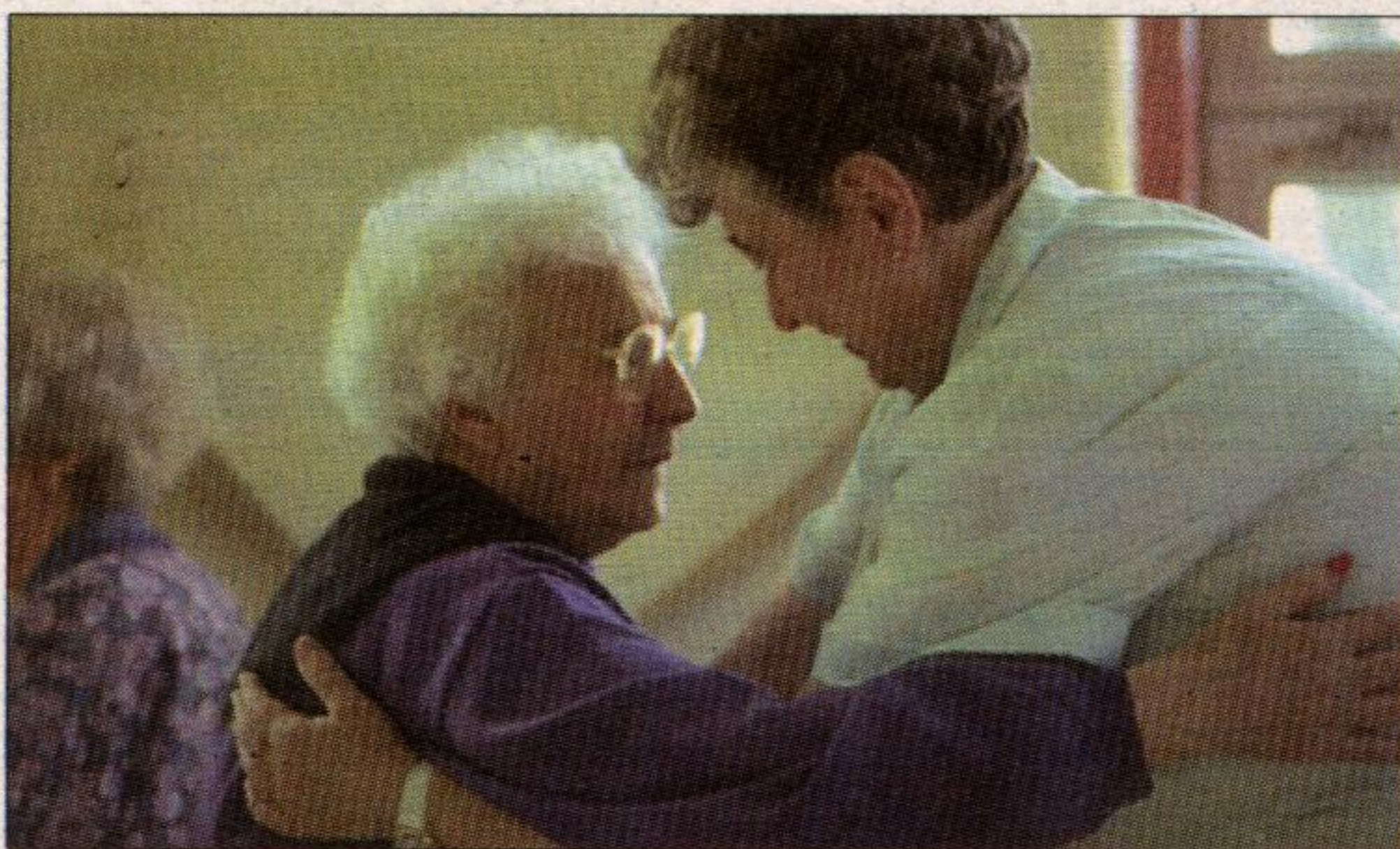
for those beds because of the numbers coming down the pike," she says, noting that there are facilities in the province that have waiting lists stretching to 12 and 16 years.

In some areas, community groups such as service clubs and churches, are offering in-home services to assist seniors to stay independent longer and building residential facilities. A number have developed aging-in-place campuses with a range of accommodations from independent apartments to assisted living suites to nursing homes providing a maximum level of care. Rubin says this is happening in many smaller municipalities where these organizations have been able to acquire large tracts of land, enabling them to expand over time. It's more difficult in Toronto, where land is at a premium, so other possibilities must be explored, she adds.

In the corporate sector, options have been emerging such as life lease communities, resort-style residences and condo apartments developments that offer varying degrees of assistance, including meals, housekeeping and social activities. Some include a separate assisted living area where residents whose needs become greater can have access to more nursing help with daily activities.

But many of these come with a price tag that puts them out of reach of seniors on fixed incomes.

However, experts are predicting a groundswell of demand for such problems to be solved as the baby boom generation reaches middle age, first looking for options for aging parents and later for themselves.



The growing senior demographic in this province is creating an exponentially increasing need for care facilities and a challenge for those providing long-term care for the frail elderly.

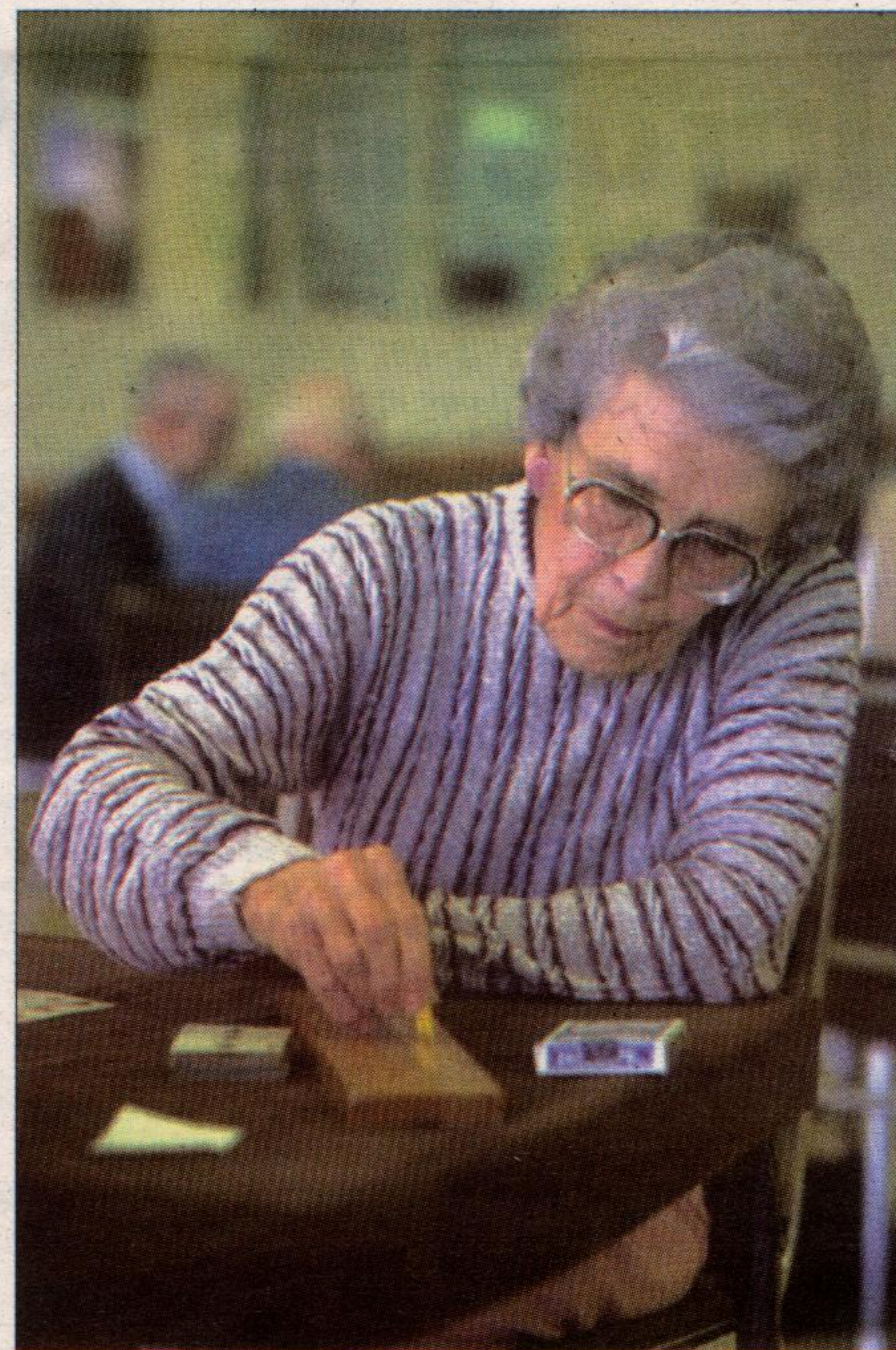


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In the area of rehabilitation, she says, a population suffering diseases like arthritis and coping with such things as hip and knee replacements, may also not have access to needed therapy.

There are ongoing efforts on the part of care and accommodation suppliers, from governments to community organizations and developers of retirement and long-term care residences.

In 1998, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care launched a \$1.2 bil-



Resources

For seniors looking to move to more supportive housing and for younger people attempting to help parents find suitable living arrangements, there are a number of places to turn for help.

- **Community Care Access Centres**, operating under the umbrella of the health and long-term care ministry, will facilitate placement into a long-term care facility or do an assessment for in-home care services.
- **The Ontario Community Support Association** (416-256-3010), a provincial association located in Toronto, representing providers of community-based not-for-profit health and social services, can help obtain appropriate services for people who can't function independently because of a disability, illness or limitation due to aging.
- **The Ontario Residential Care Association** (905-4030500/800 361-7254), a voluntary non-profit association that accredits retirement residences in Ontario and can supply information to those looking for such accommodation.
- **The Care Guide** (800-975-9736) publishes information about seniors' housing and care services in southwest, south central and northern Ontario and also offers the information online at TheCareGuide.com.
- **Toronto Supportive Housing** (416-392-8545) offers services including homemakers, nurses and day programs for seniors who need a bit of help at home.

- **Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association** (416-585-2013) Carefirst is a charitable, non-profit community-based social services agency serving the GTA and Peel and Durham regions. Carefirst provides a range of high community support services for seniors and those with special needs and has been a predominant senior service provider in the Chinese community since 1976. General information is also available by calling the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Seniors' Information Line at 888-405-0405.