

Funds for elderly care to take new path away from hospitals

By KAREN SMITH

Care for the province's elderly and disabled adults will undergo a major facelift if government proposals to improve support services become reality.

Ontario's long-term care system is in the process of being revamped to accommodate the province's aging population as well as the growing number of physically disabled.

It is estimated that by 2010, the number of people aged 65 years and older will grow 68 per cent. And, the majority of an estimated 40,000 disabled people currently supported by family and friends, will outlive their caregivers and require publicly-funded care.

While the government believes most elderly and disabled people prefer to stay at home in their own communities instead of living in a hospital, a home for the aged, or nursing home, Ontario continues to spend close to 80 per cent of money available for long-term care on institutions instead of improving community-based services.

But that is all changing with a long line-up of proposals put forward by three provincial government ministries to improve and expand long-term care and support services in Ontario, said Brenda Elias, area manager of Halton/Peel Community Health and Support Services.

Seeking the views of everyday citizens regarding the

government's redirection plans, Ms Elias lead a public meeting at Hugh Foster Hall Monday night.

About 50 people turned out for the event — one of four such meetings put on by a Halton consultation committee set up by the provincial government to record public input.

A gerontologist who has developed a wide range of services for the elderly with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ms Elias said it's important the government "distribute services evenly across the whole region."

Support for caregivers

She also said one of the key directions in long-term care services for the future is improved support for family caregivers — the pressures of caring for an elderly or disabled relative can become so great, the family feels overwhelmed.

A public consultation paper on long-term care redirection proposes increased support opportunities be provided for family caregivers. Emphasis would be placed on providing counselling and support groups for families who need help coping with the stress.

Meanwhile, community support services are currently provided by more than 500 community agencies across Ontario. About 10,000 volunteers and 3,000 staff mem-

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