

Halton says crunch coming in senior citizen care

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

Pressure is mounting on long-term care in Halton.

Halton Region has an estimated requirement for 442 additional long-term care beds simply to meet probable demand by the end of the century, according to a report by the Halton District Health Council (HDHC).

"We've been talking about long-term care beds for a long, long time," said Linda Rothney, executive director of the HDHC. "It's time we looked at short term and long-term solutions."

Currently Halton has 856 long-term care beds, or about 70 beds per 1,000 people over the age of 75. Ontario as a whole has 112.7 beds per 1,000 people over the age of 75. The HDHC's projected requirements include a 20 per cent

lower estimate than the provincial numbers, because Halton is seen as a relatively healthy community due to its affluence.

Members of the region's health and social services committee heard a number of presentations regarding long-term care at a recent meeting. In addition to the extra beds, the HDHC is recommending an expansion of adult day programs by more than 2,000 person-days per year, and a determined effort to coordinate homemaking services.

No increase

According to Brenda Elias of the Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ontario spends \$43.3 million each year in Halton on elderly services. These include homes for the aged, chronic care hospital funding, retirement homes, nursing homes and in-house care.

Long-term health care beds are funded in large part by the provincial government. The province is not increasing the number of beds it funds, so Halton is forced to try to wrest beds from those municipalities which are not using their entire allocation.

Because of the shortfall in beds at the highest levels of care, many elderly are forced to remain in facilities which are not fully equipped to handle their needs, putting more pressure on those institutions, according to Ms Elias.

Michael Klejman, executive director of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, said the province is trying to shift chronic care patients out of shrinking hospitals, and that in turn is putting more emphasis on various seniors care facilities. Ms Rothney told the committee that despite a total cost of \$28 million for community care in Halton, the

region is underfunded by \$5.9 million.

"We have to make the most efficient use of what we have now," said Ms Rothney. "We need someone to take a leadership role and step in and get all the agencies working with them."

Lack of beds

The committee heard that currently 10 to 12 per cent of all Halton residents placed in long-term care are forced to leave the region due to the lack of beds. There are currently 450 people on the waiting list for spaces in Halton. In addition, neighbouring regions also face similar shortages of long-term care beds, meaning those who must move are often placed far from home.

Ms Rothney said the recommended addition of 442 beds does not address future needs for the baby boom generation, which will begin to turn 65 in 2011.

13—The Canadian Champion, Friday, March 1, 1996


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