



*Touching Lives Since 1897
Au cœur de la vie depuis 1897*

BACKGROUND

At 108 years old and counting, VON still making a difference

Because there simply aren't enough hospital beds and buildings to cope with patient needs, home care has grown enormously in the past 30 years. And the 108-year-old VON continues to be an innovative and vital component of community health care across Canada.

The VON (Victorian Order of Nurses) was founded in 1897 in response to a failure to meet the health needs of Canadians living in outlying areas of the then-young nation.

For more than a century, the VON has pioneered health services in Canada, upholding a proud tradition of often being first to identify emerging health and social needs; then developing and delivering innovative program and service solutions to meet them.

It's a tradition that continues today.

Today's VON – still making a difference

Today's VON delivers more than 50 different programs and services through more than 51 branches with an army of almost 16,000 staff and volunteers that covers 1,300 communities – and touches more than a million Canadians annually – across Canada.

In 2005 alone, VON volunteers gave 667,146 volunteer hours providing meals on wheels, caregiver respite and school breakfast programs among other programs.

But the VON goes further... much further.

VON Canada works hard for all Canadians to bring its unique wisdom to bear on the nation's evolving health and social policies. It has joined forces with similar organizations, families, communities, governments and other parties to advocate policies that ensure health care and supports are available and accessible to everyone.

The VON continues to seek creative and innovative solutions that respond to the evolving needs of individual Canadians in ways that enhance health and quality of life.

VON: committed to a second century of service

As decreasing health dollars leave government-funded programs struggling to meet local demands, the need for charitable services in Canada is increasing. Given this fact of economic life, the VON is committed to continue its vital charitable work.

VON's non-profit role will carry on providing governments with services that help fulfill universal public health care programs. The organization is also developing related service ventures to provide new revenue streams to supplement existing funding for VON's charitable services.

The early days

Nurses, doctors and hospitals were in desperate short supply in the remote areas and rapidly growing towns and cities of 1890s Canada. In a visit to Vancouver in 1896, Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, wife of Canada's Governor-General at the time heard vivid accounts of hardship and illness afflicting women and children in isolated areas of the young country.

Later that year, she participated in the annual meeting in Halifax of the National Council of Women, where similar stories of hardship spawned a resolution asking her to found an order of visiting nurses in Canada. The new nursing order was to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign and in 1897 at a February 10th meeting at Rideau Hall, then-Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier launched it with a motion.

As the order's first President, Lady Aberdeen undertook a campaign to establish and solidify the VON, enlisting the help of Dr. Alfred Worcester, a Harvard University hygiene professor and founder of the Waltham Training School for District Nurses in Massachusetts. To convince his Canadian colleagues, Dr. Worcester delivered supporting addresses to large audiences of physicians in Ottawa, Toronto and other Canadian cities.

The first VON branches were quickly organized in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver and Kingston and in 1898, a VON "cottage" hospital opened in Regina to serve early prairie settlers. Thanks to fundraising efforts by the VON's second honorary president, Lady Minto, 43 more hospitals were soon established in local communities and isolated areas across Canada. Community groups gradually assumed responsibility for the hospitals, with the last one placed in the hands of local citizens in 1924.

Throughout history, VON continues to meet new challenges

From the horrific 1917 Halifax munitions ship explosion through a deadly 1918 influenza epidemic and on through two world wars, a great depression, the advent of modern medicine and high tech medicine, the VON evolved to meet new challenges. Early on, the VON established prenatal education, well baby clinics, school health services, visiting nursing and co-ordinated home care programs.

By the 1990s, home care was becoming more and more complex, as hospitals shortened lengths of stay and technology became available for specialized care – intravenous therapy, dialysis and chemotherapy, for example – to be delivered in the home. VON has kept pace with change and continues today with innovations that enable more Canadians to receive the level of care they need in their homes and communities.

For example, the VON led the formation of the Canadian Caregiver Coalition in 2000 to raise awareness of increasing numbers of Canadians who care for family members, friends and neighbours. Responding to caregivers' needs has become one of VON's commitments and the organization is dedicated to keeping the issue at the top of political agendas locally, provincially and nationally.

More recent initiatives include home-based palliative care, adult day programs, footcare clinics, respite care, primary health care clinics and health services in shelters for women, children and youth at risk.

What VON clients say about the services they receive

Home Care

“Paulette, Elaine and all the others who gave so much to Bob and myself. Just the knowing your were coming to see him gave me strength and hope to make the day and go on with everyday life. Thanks.”

Susan Neufeld, of VON Sudbury



“Please accept my sincerest thanks for the fantastic job you are doing for senior citizens. Because of it, people like me are now able to live alone in my own home. I am 85 years old and I cannot express, as words fail me, to say that it means to me to know that a 3 course meal will be delivered to me every day; yes and by “real newfies” as last Friday I met the delivery at the door and I said, “Fish today I presume?” No Sire! It’s “sole” (“fish” in Newfoundland is codfish hence the joke about sole). Thank you again from the bottom of my heart. God love you all!!!”

Frank King of VON St. John’s, Nfld.



“Thank you for coordinating the nurses’ visits to our home during my husband’s terminal cancer bout. It was comforting to know others shared and understood our experience. Please express our thanks to all nurses – Iris, June, Lindie, Josie, Anne, Sue, Bernice and Carolyn.”

Elsie Verwijk of VON Peel



We see the same volunteers every week, which is a comfort for us because we have gotten to know them all very well. We are very independent because we have the help from the VON.”

Floyd Donald, VON Middlesex-Elgin