

Health Starts at Home:

VON Canada's Vision for Home and Community Care in Canada

Executive Summary



BACKGROUND

In recent years, Canada has seen a surge in demand for home and community care services. Sadly, this increase in demand has not been met with corresponding investments in the sector. Although jurisdictions have taken steps to improve the delivery of services in homes and communities, on a national level home and community care systems remain inadequate, fragmented and inaccessible to many.

There is an urgent need for an enhanced approach for home and community care in Canada: it is what Canadians have said they want and it is also an essential step toward ensuring the sustainability of our health care system. At VON Canada, we believe this can best be achieved through a national approach to home and community care.

HEALTH STARTS AT HOME: VON CANADA'S VISION FOR HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE

Considering the current state of home and community care across the country and the fact that an increasing number of Canadians will be relying on the sector in the future, it is critical that a comprehensive, national approach to home and community care be put in place. As an acknowledged leader and innovator in home and community care, VON Canada proposes a new vision of home and community care – one that calls upon governments and other concerned parties to address the challenges facing the sector, capitalize on opportunities, and ensure Canadians' home and community care needs are met now and into the future.

To transform VON Canada's vision into reality, immediate action must take place across the following six strategic areas:

- Health Human Resources
- Integration of Care and Services
- Information Communication Technology
- Chronic Disease Prevention and Management
- Caregiving
- Investing in Home and Community Care

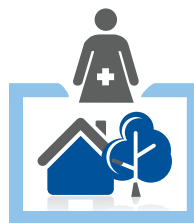
VON Canada's vision for home and community care identifies challenges and opportunities in each of these key areas and makes recommendations so that we can move forward. Although the recommendations are targeted

primarily at governments and health and social leaders, the realization of VON Canada's vision will require all those responsible for shaping health care in this country – governments, health and social sectors, communities, and Canadians themselves – to work together.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A robust and accessible home and community care system that is integral to our publicly-funded health care system will help Canadians age at home and keep people well and out of emergency rooms, hospital beds, and long-term care institutions.

The following recommendations represent a starting point to help Canada build a comprehensive, flexible and integrated system of care and supports to help Canadians remain independent and healthy in their homes.



1. HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES (HHR)

To maximize HHR capacity, better address the needs of Canadians and increase access to high quality care, VON Canada calls upon governments at all levels to work with stakeholders to:

- Pay health care workers who provide care in the home and community the same compensation as those who work in institutions and other health care settings.
- Establish pan-Canadian education standards for unregulated workers, and practice competencies and guidelines for regulated and unregulated workers.
- Develop, fund, and implement recruitment and retention strategies specifically designed for the home and community care sector, for both paid staff and volunteers.
- Increase access to educational and training opportunities for staff and volunteers.
- Base HHR forecasting on the expressed *needs* of home and community care clients.
- Develop electronic tools to ensure that innovations and best practices for the home and community care sector are shared among workers.
- Expand current HHR data collection efforts, starting with unregulated workers in both the public and private sectors, as well as volunteers.

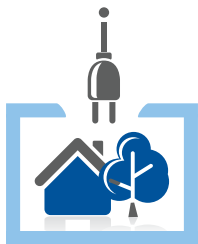


2. INTEGRATION OF CARE AND SERVICES

VON Canada's vision includes an integrated model of health and social care and calls upon governments at all levels, in

partnership with other stakeholders to:

- Evaluate the various national and international models of home and community care to determine which model would best serve Canadians. Models should be evaluated based on access, quality, cost-effectiveness and a client-centred approach.
- Examine how best to integrate social services with home and community care, while ensuring that social services are not being absorbed and redefined by the acute care lens.
- Develop policies and delivery and funding models that encourage and support communities to undertake integrated planning and delivery of care and services across sectors.



3. INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

VON Canada endorses the recommendations recently outlined in the report *Integration through Information Communication Technology for Home Care in Canada*

(CHCA, March 2008). In particular, VON Canada suggests that all levels of government work together to:

- Create and implement a technology strategy for the home and community care sector. Developed in partnership with the sector, a key goal of this strategy should be better integration among and between sectors and at a minimum include the following steps:
 - Broaden Canada Health Infoway's work on electronic health records (EHRs) to include the home and community care sector and create a comprehensive EHR connecting all points of care within the next 10 years.
 - Purchase or develop electronic clinical systems for use in the home to capture and monitor clients' health information.
 - Facilitate the development and purchase of technology in the home that directly benefits clients and their providers.



4. CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

To help prevent illness and better manage chronic disease, VON Canada recommends that all levels of government partner with stakeholders to:

- Accelerate the implementation of comprehensive chronic disease prevention and management strategies, while maximizing the contributions of all sectors and providing sufficient funding and resources. At a minimum, the following steps should be taken:
 - Provide incentives to employers to proactively support the health of their employees through healthy work policies.
 - Work with educators to ensure school curricula (starting at pre-school) emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle and highlight the consequences of chronic disease.
 - Revise curricula for all health care workers to include training on chronic disease prevention and management strategies.
 - Develop a national communications strategy to educate the public on physical and mental health and chronic conditions.
 - Fund targeted programs to work with "at-risk" populations and communities to prevent and better manage chronic disease.
 - Promote the use of client-centred models of care that acknowledge the diverse range of resources available in communities to promote health and manage chronic disease.
- Enhance the role of the home and community care sector in the prevention and management of chronic disease by:
 - Adapting all chronic disease prevention and management resources for the home.
 - Providing clients and caregivers the option to choose the services that best address their needs.
 - Working with public health and primary health care to provide tailored health promotion programs and activities to people in their homes and communities.
 - Implementing flexible community funding models that support "non-traditional" in-home service delivery.



5. CAREGIVING

To recognize caregivers as part of the health care team and to ensure that their caregiving role should not result in undue physical, mental, or financial

hardship, VON Canada recommends that all levels of government partner with stakeholders to:

- Assess the needs of caregivers and provide them with services, education, training and information.
- Convene an expert panel to look at the financial security of caregivers so that their role as caregiver does not result in personal financial loss and insecurity.
- Create an awareness campaign to recognize the contributions and needs of caregivers.



6. INVESTING IN HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE

To ensure that all Canadians have access to comprehensive home and community care supports, VON Canada

recommends that federal, provincial and territorial governments:

- Establish a federal, provincial, territorial working group to develop and implement a comprehensive, national approach to home and community care. This universal program should be governed by principles enshrined in legislation to ensure all Canadians have equal access regardless of their circumstances.
- Increase public investment in home and community care. As a starting point, Canada should double the proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) devoted to

the sector immediately, to bring Canadian investment in home and community care up to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 0.35%.

CONCLUSION

The Honourable Tommy Douglas, referred to as “the father of Medicare” and voted in 2004 as the Greatest Canadian, envisioned Medicare being implemented in two phases. The first phase was to publicly finance the medical system and the second phase was to deal with the delivery of health care services beyond acute care. While the first part of this vision has been put in place, decades later the second part remains to be completed.

Despite its exclusion from the Canada Health Act, research and experience tells us that home and community care plays an essential role in maintaining and enhancing the health of Canadians and the sustainability of the health care as a whole. What is currently in place, however, does not meet the needs of Canadians today, and demographic and other trends suggest that it will fall far short of meeting future needs. The time has come for governments to work together to put in place a comprehensive home and community care system that responds to the needs of all Canadians so that they can give the best of themselves to their families, communities and country.