

## **Ontario LTC Residents Deprived of Programs to Support their Emotional, Cognitive and Physical Well-Being**

*Therapeutic Recreation Repeatedly Forgotten in Queen’s Park Plans to Improve Staffing at Facilities across the Province*

February 24, 2021 – A year into the pandemic and many Long-Term Care (LTC) residents are living without the necessary therapeutic recreation programs they need to sustain good quality of life. With February being National Recreation Therapy Month, Therapeutic Recreation Ontario is calling on Queen’s Park to prioritize the wellbeing of residents by recognizing the essential, highly specialized and life-enriching work its members provide.

### **Premier Admits to Need for Better Quality of Life for LTC Residents**

Earlier this year, Ontario’s Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission noted that the long-term care system had an obligation to support quality lives for residents. In mid-December 2020, Ontario Premier Doug Ford made funding announcements following recommendations from the report.

In his announcement, Ford said “I made a promise to long-term care residents, their families and their caregivers that we would deliver better care for our seniors.....Today, we are delivering on that promise. By increasing the hours of daily direct care for residents, we will improve their quality of life and ensure they are more comfortable and safe.”

The funding focused specifically on increased staffing of personal support workers, registered nurses and registered practical nurses. Therapeutic Recreation (TR) professionals were not included.

Ten weeks later, funding for TRs continues to be ignored.

### **Legal Requirements under Ontario’s Long-Term Care Homes Act**

*The Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* states “... that a long-term care home is primarily the home of its residents and is to be operated so that it is a place where they may live with dignity and in security, safety and comfort and have their physical, psychological, social, spiritual and cultural needs adequately met.” Many of those legal requirements, including the psychological and social needs, are supports provided by TRs. Without their support in homes, LTC homes run the risk of not providing the minimum legal requirements of care.

Therapeutic Recreation professionals are crucial in supporting the emotional, social and mental well-being of their residents, and, with increased social isolation, visiting restrictions, anxiety and physical health issues intensified in LTC homes during COVID-19 lockdowns, their work is needed now more than ever.

Yet limited resources in homes and a lack of understanding about the significant role TRs play has meant that TR staffing numbers are not keeping pace with current needs.

### **Relegated to Administrative Duties**

“What we’re seeing is that LTCs are not prioritizing therapeutic recreation professionals in their budgets, and even when therapists are working in homes, they often have to take on additional responsibilities outside their job description including serving meals or helping other staff with day-to-day duties. That means LTC residents are really being deprived of programming that is essential to their emotional, physical and mental wellbeing and quality of life. This is never okay, but for it to continue as these residents are at a heightened risk for mental and physical illness because of the current pandemic, is a real crisis,” says Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, Executive Director of Therapeutic Recreation Ontario.

### **Recognition of importance of Therapeutic Recreation**

The organization is calling on the Ontario government to give its members the same recognition it has given to nurses and personal support workers.

Earlier this week, the Ontario government made another announcement allocating a \$4 million investment to train new Personal Support Workers. Again, training for TRs was ignored.

Werner-Arcé notes that TRs are often overlooked because their designation is not seen on the same level as personal-support workers. “We’re not diminishing the work that personal support workers do. What we are saying is that we have equally important, but very different roles to play in ensuring LTC residents have a good quality of life they deserve. That includes daily support for their physical needs but also their social, emotional and mental health needs.”

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