

ARRC BC Proposal for a B.C. Long-term Care Advisory Forum September 2023

Introduction

COVID-19 has revealed glaring gaps, weaknesses, and long-standing deficiencies in the B.C. long-term care (LTC) system. Across Canada, pandemic-related mortality in facility care was high and evidence of neglect and abuse became public knowledge. In 2023, the continued inability of many facilities to provide safe and person-centred care relates to the effects of ageism, decades of underfunding, failure to address systemic issues, ongoing staffing challenges and lack of oversight and monitoring of standards.

Addressing these systemic and structural issues requires a planning model with new processes that are inclusive, collaborative and built on a foundation of multi-stakeholder input:

- From residents who **live there**: wisdom from people with personal experience.
- From care partners who **visit daily**: “informal” caregivers and loved ones.
- From people who **work there**: those with “boots on the ground” knowledge.
- From those who **study long-term care**: gerontologists and other researchers.
- From **future users**: the perspective of Canadians who will be users of LTC down the road – those many Canadians who indicate on surveys that they are frightened by the thought of needing LTC someday.

Our NDP government is well positioned to lead the way in reform of long-term care in collaboration with stakeholder partners. B.C. would be the first province in Canada to create an action plan to improve quality of life for people in long-term care. With expert gerontological researchers at UBC, UVIC and SFU, research findings arising from a successful plan to adopt the recently released National Standards would be disseminated across Canada, garnering recognition for the province.

Recommendation for Change

[Action for Reform of Residential Care \(ARRC\) BC](#) asks that the B.C. government strike a diverse and inclusive multi-sectoral Long-term Care **Advisory Forum** to facilitate the development of a comprehensive and evidence informed action plan to reform the long-term care system in British Columbia.

The Advisory Forum would be modelled on the successful Poverty Reduction Forum and bring together representatives from all stakeholder groups to expedite problem solving and provide foresight, thereby optimizing available time and resources. The Advisory Forum would develop and guide implementation of a comprehensive provincial action plan to reform long-term care by addressing long standing systemic issues, inadequacies, weaknesses and urgent needs

identified in the December 2020 ARRC report [Improving Quality of Life in Long Term Care - A Way Forward](#) The Advisory Forum would ensure that the perspectives of all stakeholders are represented in the plan for long-term care and be able to articulate the plan to their public.

Advisory Forum Terms of Reference: The Advisory Forum Terms of Reference would articulate two work streams:

- **Creation of a sustainable action plan to effect systemic reform in B.C. long term care facilities:** the Advisory Forum would create an action plan to address improvements needed to strengthen quality of care and quality of life including a mandate and resources for a person-centred model of care in every facility. This model of care would include:
 - Empowerment of families and family councils
 - Enhanced staffing levels
 - Staff education standards
 - Quality of care and quality of life monitoring
 - A plan to replace old, institutional buildings and aging infrastructure.

Adopting an evidence informed framework for change, designed jointly by government and stakeholder, and aligned with the newly released National Long-term Care Standards, would facilitate the achievement of many of these goals.

- **Supporting the model:** the Advisory Forum would act as a clearinghouse for collection and sharing of data, collect and disseminate emerging knowledge, best practices, and standardized clinical guidance to facilities. It would also offer strategies to help restore trust and enhance the mental health and well-being of residents, families, and facility staff in the post-acute pandemic phase.

Rationale for Recommendation:

Since the ARRC report was released, the capacity of long-term care facilities to support resident quality of life has worsened due to the impact of the pandemic on an under-resourced system with longstanding systemic problems. Serious staff shortages are being experienced at all levels, compromising care. Front line staff remain poorly supported with little access to appropriate training, clinical resources, or specialized consultation, which together undermine their ability to consistently provide respectful, person-centred care to residents. Physical care is prioritized over relational or emotional care, and institutional routines and practices are adopted that do not support resident quality of life. Residents have suffered from social isolation, mental health challenges, and decreased cognition, because of COVID lockdowns¹. Families have publicly expressed anger and grief over often arbitrary visiting restrictions and the inability to make

¹ MacCourt, P. (2021). Supporting Mental Health and Well-Being in Community Residential Care Settings. Canadian Standards Association, Toronto, Ontario. <https://www.csagroup.org/wp-content/uploads/CSA-Group-Research-Supporting-Mental-Health-and-Well-Being-in-Community-Residential-Care-Settings.pdf>

their voices heard by facility management. COVID and its effects have likewise had negative impacts on staff morale and the health/mental health of staff.

Expectations are that facilities will be addressing the long-standing challenges exacerbated by COVID for several years to come. Despite this it must be recognized that the need for system reform requires an urgent and holistic response. There is a danger that the practices and shortcuts adopted during the pandemic and their negative impact on facility cultures are becoming entrenched as the “new normal” moving forward. A plan for systemic change must be launched soon if we are to take advantage of the momentum generated by public anger over what COVID has revealed about life in long-term care.

Addressing these issues will require a whole system approach - a reactive, piece-meal approach will not suffice.

Moving Forward

Many stakeholder organizations and influencers have publicly expressed their conviction that full-scale transformation of the current system is necessary for the sake of current residents and because the status quo will be wholly unacceptable to Baby Boomers in the future.

A diverse and inclusive multi-sectoral Advisory Forum made up of residents, family members, family councils, seniors’ organizations, health authorities, government agencies and departments, private and public facility owners/operators, ethicists, health care staff and unions, and gerontologists, collaborating with the government, would develop a plan for a long-term care system that all British Columbians could embrace.

ARRC is a model for a LTC Advisory Forum. Our single purpose – quality of life for long-term care residents – is shared by an alliance of over 60 diverse supporting organizations that together bring a richer and broader perspective on LTC reform than any single stakeholder group could do.

The Advisory Forum process would enable our government to offer a hopeful reprieve for many from the legacy of negativity, compassion fatigue and grief caused by the pandemic. It would empower key stakeholders, giving them optimism and a path on which to move forward with confidence.

With sincere appreciation for your consideration of this proposal.

Penny MacCourt, MSW, PhD

Action for Reform of Residential Care <http://arrcbc.ca>

Email: maccourtp@gmail.com Tel: 250-756-2129