

MAY 2025

*By Action for Reform of Residential Care BC Leadership Team*

## WHY LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES SHOULD BE SMALL AND HOMELIKE

Action for Reform of Residential Care (ARRC <https://arrcbc.ca>) applauds the National Institute on Aging's (NIA) 2025 report entitled *There's No Place Like Home: Why Canada Must Prioritize Small Care Home Models in its Provision of Long-Term Care* (1). In this report, Dr. Samir Sinha and a team of expert gerontologists thoughtfully describe the benefits of designing small long-term care facilities that look and feel like a home, instead of like an institution.

ARRC is an independent, non-profit society that advocates for residents' quality of life in long-term care. Our membership includes health care professionals, researchers, academics, residents and family members. We are concerned that despite clarion calls for reform of long-term care over many decades, opinion polls and research continue to confirm that many Canadians fear being admitted to care. COVID-19 gave the public an in-depth look at the realities of long-term care, as well as revealing shocking morbidity and mortality statistics for residents and staff in the early periods (2).

A significant contributing factor to this poor showing by Canada is the continued use of old and outdated hospital-like buildings as long-term care facilities. Still today, some residents live in a four-bed ward with a shared bathroom. In addition to other issues, these old facilities can lack air conditioning and may not afford residents access to safe outdoor space. ARRC believes that residents, their loved ones, and long-term care staff deserve better.

The international cry for culture change in long-term care was met in the 1990's with the creation of the Eden Alternative, the Pioneer Network and the Greenhouse Project.

These organizations launched the concepts of homelike environments and models of person-centred care. ARRC believes that Canada must mandate the construction and operation of small, homelike facilities that adopt a person-centred philosophy. Resident-centred models of care not only empower staff to provide superior physical care and comfort, but research shows that residents and their loved ones also enjoy an overall higher quality of life. Canada's flagship Eden Alternative™ facility is the Sherbrooke Centre in Saskatoon (3).

The Eden Alternative™ is a resident-centred care model adopted in many countries around the world. First introduced by long-term care facilities in the 1990's, a major goal was to address the "three plagues" of life in long-term care: loneliness, helplessness and boredom. The Eden philosophy contends that these plagues are painful and destructive to health and well-being and teaches staff how to prevent them. For example, it reminds us that residents need purpose in their lives, and opportunities to give as well as to receive. All staff in Eden Alternative facilities receive training and ongoing support in order to contribute towards the creation of a caring, inclusive and vibrant community.

Staff members learn how to give resident-centred/directed care, placing priority on respecting the choices and preferences of each person. They are supported to honour individual strengths and unique challenges. This environment provides opportunities for personal growth and empowers residents to contribute to their community. Loved ones and visitors are involved and made to feel welcome. There is consistency in scheduling staff, allowing them to sustain therapeutic connections with residents and their loved ones.

This kind of community thrives in a long-term care facility designed to be homelike. Small pods/neighbourhoods allow elders and staff to make connections and experience comfort and safety. Many such designs have their own kitchen with comfortable seating, encouraging people to relax and socialize over a cup of tea or coffee. Ideally, there is safe access to outdoor space and well-maintained gardens.

We all want residents in long-term care to enjoy as good a life as possible. To that end, in addition to providing physical care, staff members should also be empowered to meet residents' psychological, social, cultural and spiritual needs. A person-centred philosophy comes to life in a residence that feels and looks like a home. We thank the NIA team for clearly describing the benefits of person-centred care models and small home design. We hope the sage advice in this report will be endorsed by decision-makers and funders, by those involved in care, and by those of us who may need care in the future.

- (1) SK Sinha, S Naylor, A Arulnamby, A Brierley. There's No Place Like Home: Why Canada Must Prioritize Small Care Home Models in its Provision of Long-Term Care. Toronto, ON: National Institute on Ageing. (2025), Toronto Metropolitan University.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c2fa7b03917eed9b5a436d8/t/678158265129b96131097144/1736529960268/Small+Homes+Report.pdf>

- (2) Canada's nursing homes have worst record for COVID-19 deaths among wealthy nations: report. Julie Ireton, CBC News, March 30, 2021.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/canada-record-covid-19-deaths-wealthy-countries-cihi-1.5968749>

- (3) Sherbrooke Centre.

<https://www.sherbrookecommunitycentre.ca/sherbrooke-difference/>