

BRIDGING THE GAP:

STRENGTHENING ONTARIO'S HOME AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Prepared by Ontario Community Support Association

2024+

Pre-Budget Consultation Submission

There is a critical need to improve home care and community support services across the province. Almost universally, elderly Ontarians and those with disabilities prefer to receive care in their own homes and communities and want to live and age there for as long as possible.

Wisely, the province has aligned their strategy and plans to this priority. **We commend the province for the work it has initiated to transform the home and community care sector** which includes significant investments and the recent passing of Bill 135, Convenient Care at Home Act, 2023.

Investing in these services is both socially and fiscally responsible. Especially as our population continues to age, supporting people to stay at home reduces hospital visits and premature long-term care placements. However, **we have a severe shortage of trained professionals to provide these services, coupled with significant unmet and steadily growing community need.**

This shortage compromises care. To address this issue, it's crucial that we address the wage and benefits gap between what workers are paid in our sector and what workers who do the same work in other parts of the health system are paid. This will enable providers in home and community care to recruit, train, and retain the qualified healthcare workers they need to deliver care.

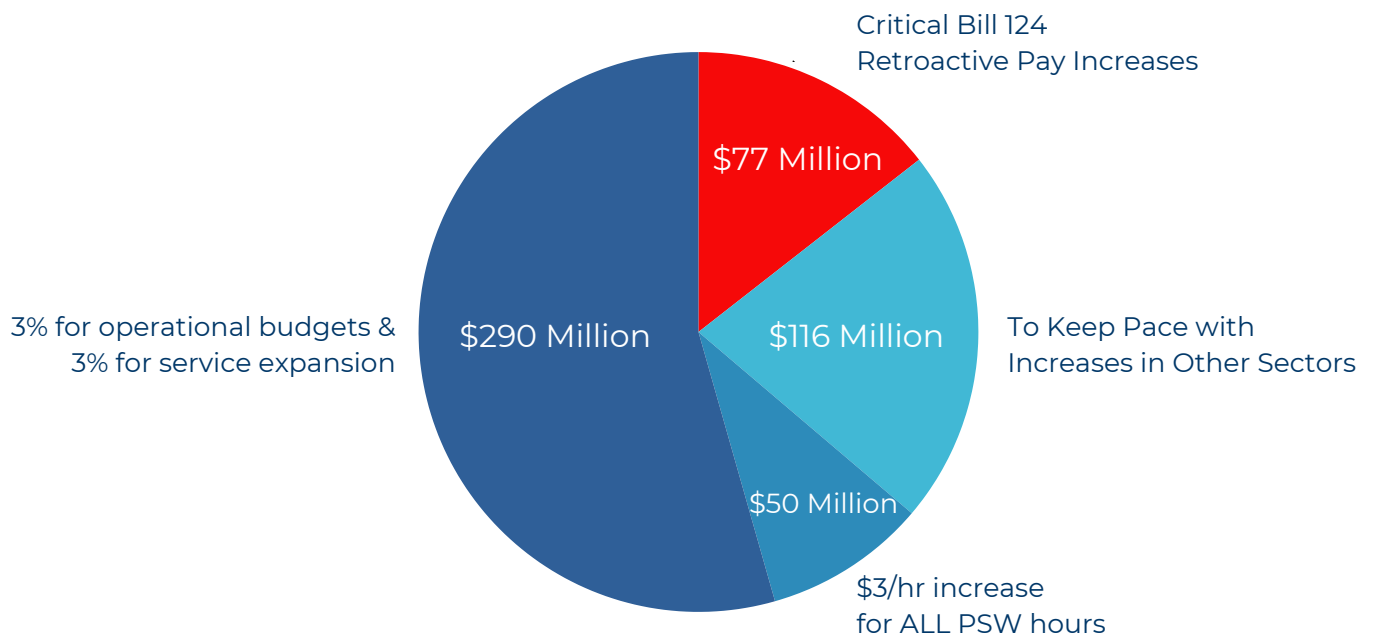


If we do not take urgent action to secure an ample home care and community support workforce, many of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens will face a shortage of services and be forced to live and age somewhere they would rather not be, nor is the most appropriate place for them.

To meet growing need, our funding approach has to address the wage gap to allow service providers to build capacity, while setting the stage to expand services as needs increase in the years ahead. **Before receiving a 3% increase in base funding this year, most providers had not received a cost-of-living increase in nearly a decade.** This increase, while greatly appreciated, did not do enough to compensate for the inflationary pressures of the past few years.

In Budget 2024, OCSA recommends that the province invest \$533 million to build a sustainable home and community care sector. In addition to this investment in 2024, the province should commit to investing an additional \$519 million between 2025 and 2029 to eliminate the wage and compensation gap between home and community care and other health sectors.

IN 2024, THE \$533 MILLION INVESTMENT SHOULD BE STRUCTURED AS FOLLOWS:



Invest **\$290 million** to increase service providers' operational budgets by 3% and service volumes by 3% this year to meet growing community need and to build a comprehensive basket of home and community care services in each community across the province.

Invest up to **\$77 million** for retroactive pay increases to prevent wage disparities from worsening as a result of Bill 124 arbitration awards and **\$116 million** in increases in 2024 to keep pace with increases in other sectors and start closing the gap between the sectors.

Address the previous shortfall in the province's PSW Wage Enhancement funding by applying the permanent \$3 an hour PSW wage increase to all hours of work not just direct care hours. This would cost an estimated **\$50 million**.

WHAT IS HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE?

Service providers within the home and community care sector provide supports across the province for clients of all ages with diverse care needs, ranging from simple day-to-day housekeeping supports that enable seniors to stay in their home for longer to highly complex supports for vulnerable clients on dialysis and home ventilators.

91% of seniors would prefer supports to help them stay at home if they were on a waitlist for long-term care.



85% of seniors who receive home and community care services say the service helped them stay at home.

Many of these essential services, such as friendly visiting and Meals on Wheels, are not fully funded by government and rely heavily on volunteers who **donate over 3 million hours of service** across the province every year.

These proactive and cost-effective services are key to a sustainable health care system and provide:

- important support to caregivers
- improve clients' quality of life

These services also prevent:

- unnecessary hospitalizations
- emergency room visits
- premature institutionalization



WAGE AND COMPENSATION GAP

A strong, resourced workforce is critical to supporting modernization of the sector. The persistent wage gap between the home and community care sector and other health sectors poses a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified professionals. Skilled professionals who chose to work in this sector, **will earn considerably less than their peers** in other healthcare domains. Consequently, the sector struggles to recruit a robust workforce.

In last year's budget the province invested in wage increases for the sector. **Community support service staff have been allocated wage increases of only 2% and home care staff were allocated increases of 3 and 4.6%.** While we are grateful for these increases, they are still a considerable distance from the 11% increase awarded to hospital nurses and the 8% increase for emergency medical services. These inequitable salary increases mean the gaps will widen again, reversing any progress we've made to reduce the gap between sectors over the last few years.

PSWs in the home and community care sector have the same training yet make:



Furthering the gap is the province's policy to pay the \$3/hour PSW increase only on direct care hours, meaning that PSWs do not earn their full wage on all hours of work. As an example, PSWs do not receive their full wage while traveling to clients' homes or documenting care. PSWs who work in long-term care earn the same wage regardless of what aspect of their job they are performing, and we should not be paying PSWs in home and community any differently.

The wage disparity not only undervalues the essential work that home and community care PSWs perform, but also stifles the sector from attracting and retaining the talent it needs.



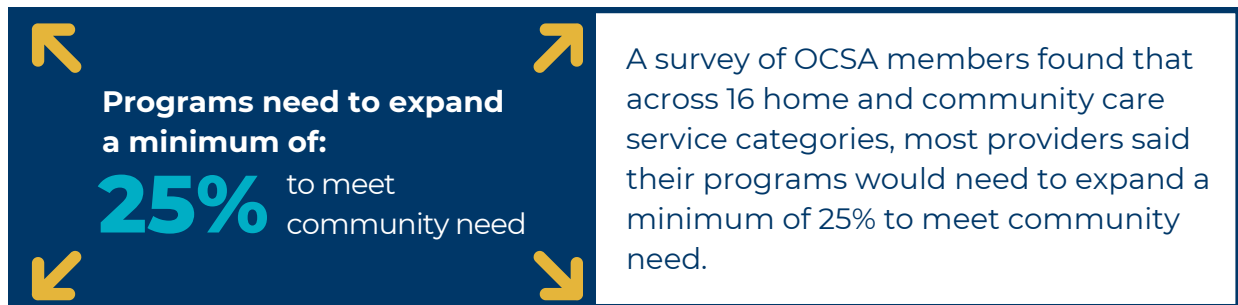
Recently published research demonstrated that wage parity would retain 1 in 5 PSWs who would have left the sector. Retaining these PSWs would create over 23.5 million additional yearly care hours for vulnerable Ontarians, shifting care from institutional settings that could **result in a 26% reduction in health care expenditures.**¹

Addressing the wage gap is pivotal in securing our sector's ability to recruit and retain competent professionals and to deliver services. Providing equitable compensation in home and community care not only acknowledges the significance of these roles but lays the groundwork to be able to meet the growing demand for services as Ontario ages. Stabilization of this workforce is critical to a well-functioning health care system.



A COMPREHENSIVE BASKET OF HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE TAILORED TO CLIENTS' NEEDS

Current service volumes and organizational capacity are not meeting the needs of communities.



Programs need to expand a minimum of:
25% to meet community need

A survey of OCSA members found that across 16 home and community care service categories, most providers said their programs would need to expand a minimum of 25% to meet community need.

As the population ages, even by the province's own estimates, we will need to **make room for an additional 23,000 home and community care clients annually** just to keep 76% of people aged 75 years or older at home and in community.

Even with a projected growth in spending of 5.1% until 2027-29, the Financial Accountability Office predicts "a modest decline in the number of nursing and personal support hours per Ontarian aged 65 and over, from 20.6 hours in 2019-20 to 19.4 hours in 2025-26."²

The Ottawa West Community Support's [Aging in Place Program](#) showcases the success of expanding tailored home and community care services in collaboration with Ottawa Community Housing and other providers. This expansion saw 8 more locations in Ottawa receive vital services such as Meals on Wheels, health and social service navigation, home care coordination, and social activities to all residents.³ Similarly, PACE models, like the one in Burlington, illustrate the potential for service expansion through collaborative care delivery. These models consistently result in notable enhancements in overall and mental health for clients, reducing feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression, and physical discomfort.⁴

OCSA suggests that the province task all Ontario Health Teams with building capacity in the home and community care sector to ensure there is a comprehensive basket of services available to wrap around care to meet clients' needs.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: HIGH ACUITY CARE IN HOMES AND COMMUNITIES

The perception that providing care in the community is less demanding than in institutional settings is simply incorrect. **Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in the acuity level of clients in the community.** Home and community care workers are supporting significantly more clients with highly acute and complex needs while providing critical post-surgical and high acute chronic care. And because they work very independently in their clients' socially and environmentally diverse homes and neighborhoods, they are having to execute increasingly intricate care plans for clients with acute medical conditions without the same supervisory and/or team supports as those working in institutions. To continue to delivery high quality care, their skillset has grown to match the growth in complexity and acuity of their clients.

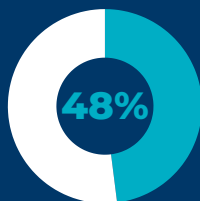
MEASURING THE ACUITY

Between 2003 and 2018



The proportion of home care and community support service clients who are **high risk or very high risk of an adverse event** has almost doubled ⁵

2x



Nearly half of all long-stay home care clients have **high or very high care needs** ⁵



increase in clients who need **assistance with activities such as bathing and eating** since 2012 ⁶

This speaks to the importance of addressing the wage gaps in home and community care. **We have more individuals returning home and living in community with higher medical needs making it imperative that we provide the appropriate compensation and operation support our health professionals in home and community care need.**

Home and community care staff also act as a vital link between healthcare providers including primary care, and families and caregivers, and community resources. Recognizing the complexity and acute nature of the care they provide is crucial in justifying their right to equitable compensation and support.

BEYOND BUDGET 2024: SUPPORTING OUR FRAIL ELDERLY

OCSA has partnered with eight health system leading organizations to develop an [Action Plan](#). Collectively, we have identified 11 solutions to reduce long-term care wait lists, to help more people with complex care needs age at home, and to fast-track access to long-term care for those who really need it.

HOW TO SUPPORT OUR FRAIL ELDERLY SUGGESTED ACTION PLAN

EXPAND SERVICES TO ENABLE PEOPLE TO LIVE AND AGE AT HOME

1. Home care
2. Community care
3. Primary care
4. Mental health and addictions supports
5. Digital technologies
6. Long-term care community hubs
7. Caregiver respite and supports

BRIDGE SERVICES TO GET PEOPLE OUT OF HOSPITALS AND BACK TO A HOME

8. More transitional care units

EXPAND SUPPORTIVE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

9. More seniors' units in existing housing

PRIORITIZE THOSE WITH HIGHEST NEED TO ACCESS LONG-TERM CARE

10. Fulfill commitment to redevelop/build allocated beds
11. Expand community admissions



Partnering Organizations:

- AdvantAge Ontario
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario
- Home Care Ontario
- Ontario College of Family Physicians
- Ontario Community Support Association
- Ontario Hospital Association
- Ontario Long-Term Care Association
- The Ontario Caregiver Organization

CONCLUSION

OCSA recommends the Ontario government invest \$533 million into home and community care this year to keep seniors and those adults with disabilities receiving the right care in the right place.

Providing healthcare for Ontarians at home and in community is cost-effective, efficient, and alleviates pressure on other health care sectors. **With Ontario's 80+ population projected to more than double by 2040, the government needs to take urgent action** to ensure that the home and community care sector is adequately funded and resourced to provide Ontarians with healthcare where and how they prefer to receive it – at home and in their communities, delivered by trained professionals.



1. Economic Evidence for Home and Community Care Investment: The Case for Ontario PSW Wage Parity. Zagrodney, K. et Al. Healthcare Policy 19(1) August 2023 : 23-31. doi:10.12927/hcpol.2023.27161 <https://www.longwoods.com/content/27161/healthcare-policy/economic-evidence-for-home-and-community-care-investment-the-case-for-ontario-personal-support-work>
2. Ontario Health Sector: 2023 Budget Spending Plan Review. Financial Accountability Office. May 31, 2023 <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/health-update-2023>
3. Ontario Ministry of Health boosts support for seniors in Ottawa, Dave Charbonneau. CTV News Ottawa. Oct. 20, 2023 <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/ontario-ministry-of-health-boosts-support-for-seniors-in-ottawa-1.6610619>
4. PACE Coalition of the Willing, Paul Sharman, 2023 OCSA Community ReConnect Conference
5. Health Quality Ontario, Measuring Up 2018 <http://www.hqontario.ca/Measuring-Up>
6. InterRAI, Ontario Home and Community Care Client Population Profile, Prepared for OCSA, September 2018

ABOUT OCSA

The Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) represents over 220 not-for-profit organizations that provide home care and community support services to over one million Ontarians. Our members help seniors and people with disabilities live independently in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. These proactive and cost-effective services improve quality of life and prevent unnecessary hospitalizations, emergency room visits and premature institutionalization. They are the key to a sustainable health care system for Ontario.

OCSA's mission is to advance innovative solutions in health and social care.

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