

Long-Term Care

COVID-19 has greatly stressed Canada's health care system. This has exposed some structural failures in the system and highlighted areas where reform is needed. No failure is as stark as Canada's failure to protect residents and workers in long-term care (LTC) facilities from COVID-19. During the most acute part of the pandemic, many promises were made. This election is a chance to outline the concrete steps the parties will take to ensure problems in LTC are not ignored after the pandemic.

A range of reforms are needed, but governments must not ignore the evidence showing that for-profit providers had higher death and infection rates than those in public and non-profit homes. For-profit LTC has failed Canadians. While provinces have the primary responsibility for LTC, the federal government also has an important role to play.

Having LTC under the *Canada Health Act* (CHA) and applying the 5 principles of the act to LTC in Canada would be a positive first step towards reform. It would support the creation of national standards, equitable care, and proper oversight.

Workers in LTC also would benefit from making the LTC system public. Private long-term care facilities are well known for keeping wages low, neglecting training and not providing adequate resources to care properly for seniors. The exploitation of women as workers in LTC facilities, especially of racialized women, has been exposed through this crisis. Making LTC public would increase oversight and improve working conditions.

Liberal

The Liberal platform proposes \$9 billion in funding over 5 years, though at least \$2.5 billion of this total was previously announced in Budget 2021.

The funding is to be used for several initiatives. Training up to 50,000 new personal support workers (PSWs) will cost \$500 million. Guaranteeing PSWs a minimum wage of at least \$25 per hour will cost \$1.7 billion over 5 years. The Liberals also promise to implement strict infection prevention and control measures and to develop a Safe Long-Term Care Act.

The bulk of the funds are going to be used to improve the quality and availability of beds in long-term care homes. The Canadian Institute for Health Information shows only 46% of LTC homes are public. 54% are private, with 30% private for-profit and 24% private not-for-profit. With no restrictions on where these billions of public dollars are spent, most of the money will likely go to supporting private LTC. That would mean funding the same corporations who allowed disproportionately more deaths and infections than public homes did.

Another important item to note is the Liberals' promise to co-develop a community-led Indigenous LTC framework.

Conservative

The main Conservative promise is to devote \$3 billion of infrastructure spending over 3 years to renovate LTC homes. The Conservatives also call for more partnerships with private non-profit LTC providers.

They are also proposing to increase the number of workers in LTC by prioritizing LTC and home care workers in immigration programs. The Conservatives are proposing to amend the *Criminal Code* to make clear that the operator of a licensed care facility shall be presumed to have a legal duty to the residents of that facility. Though not directly related to LTC, the plan also calls for an increase in the limit of the Home Accessibility Tax credit from \$10,000 per dwelling to \$10,000 per person. The credit would help seniors with the means to renovate their homes to be able to stay in their homes longer.

NDP

The NDP is proposing the most reforms to LTC of any of the federal parties. They promise to end private, for-profit long-term care and bring LTC under the principles of the *Canada Health Act*. The NDP says it will work with patients, caregivers, and provincial and territorial governments to develop national standards for long-term care intended to protect access to LTC and ensure consistent quality across the country. These proposals will be backed by funding tied to meeting national standards and to supporting a core set of services.

The NDP specifically say that it will start by making the for-profit, federally-owned LTC company, Revera, public. They will also work with provinces to develop and support workforce strategies to recruit front-line staff and provide better wages, stable jobs, and health and safety protections.

Green

The Green Party has a comprehensive set of reforms that includes calling for LTC to be brought under the *Canada Health Act* and for the creation of enforceable national standards for LTC. The platform also outlines proposals to improve quality of life for LTC workers and for investment in home and community care. The Green Party wants to end for-profit LTC and move towards a community-based model.

Conclusion

The crisis in LTC and the rates of infections and deaths have led to Canadians demanding reform. But while all parties are promising changes to LTC, many of the proposals fall short of what is needed. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has estimated it will take \$13.7 billion to improve LTC. And, without clear national standards, there is a danger that many of the problems will remain.

In the coming years, the number of people in care will increase rapidly and we are not prepared to meet the demands an aging society will place on our current system. Without greater public investment and oversight of the sector, for-profit corporations will expand their role in the system to fill the demand. While they aren't admitting it, parties that are not willing to invest in a public LTC system are effectively supporting an expansion of the very for-profit homes that allowed thousands of seniors to become infected with COVID-19 and to die.

