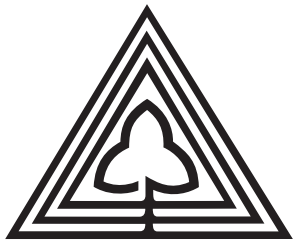


**OPSEU**



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# ***Take action*** **on Community Health!**

**A campaign bulletin  
for OPSEU members  
working in community care**

**Issue #8: August 24, 2001**

**Sector Chair Sue McSheffrey wrote the following "op ed" piece, which was circulated to Ontario newspapers. Feel free to add your own comments and send it off to your local newspapers.**

The slogan for home care in Ontario should read: "Go home, we don't care."

Home care workers are seeing increased demands on services as a result of shorter hospital stays, a rapidly growing elderly population, human resource shortages and rising service costs.

Our growing home care crisis has been worsened by the Ontario government's introduction of "no deficit" legislation for Community Care Access Centres (CCAC), followed by the June announcement of no new provincial funding for home care.

The Ministry of Health's long awaited operational review (which was completed last December) was released to the CCACs at their June annual general meeting, where Health Minister Tony Clement received an icy reception.

The review highlights the problems in the system: a critical shortage of staff, compounded by wage differences between the institutional care and home care sectors, long waiting lists for services, a lack of consistency over who's eligible across the province, and issues of financial management of the individual centres.

Front line workers are speaking out: The Ontario Public Service Employees Union represents nurses, personal support workers, therapists, case managers and support staff in 24 community care units across the province. OPSEU members see this crisis on a daily basis. We grow increasingly concerned about its effect on vulnerable members of our communities. We call on all concerned citizens in the province to raise their voices and to stop the erosion to home care services. Adequate home care should be a right of every citizen. Instead, it's an under-funded mess.

In 1997-98, the province's CCACs ran a combined deficit of \$34 million, prompting the provincial Auditor General to find that the funding formula does not "establish the amount of funding required to provide an adequate level of service." With the recently announced funding caps, the agencies are projecting a system-wide shortfall of \$175 million this year -- 5 times worse than it was three years ago! When CCACs were surveyed during the operational review, 91 per cent indicated that the Ministry's funding formula does not support their service delivery mandate.

Each of the province's 43 CCACs is responding to the crisis in a different way. Some are limiting access to services, reducing nursing visits, allowing longer waiting lists, eliminating help at home, and adding increased fees (for equipment and supplies, for example), to patients and clients. They are also laying off staff.

Our home care services have become a patchwork quilt of services auctioned off to the lowest bidder. At the heart of the problem is the "competitive" bidding process, which forces service providers to reduce wages and service levels in order to remain competitive. This threatens the quality of home care services in the community.

The myth is that home care delivered in this manner is more cost effective. The reality is this is not the case. In Ottawa, for example, the cost of delivering therapy services through a private company is \$800,000 more a year than it would cost if the CCAC employed the therapists directly. In order to provide the same level of service, using the same staff being paid the same salary, the private company contracted to provide the service laid off six therapists.

*(over)*

The stories are repeated in other communities: In Kingston, layoff notices were issued to 16 occupational therapists and six social workers. The CCAC decided it could no longer afford their services as it is facing a \$8.8 million shortfall in the current fiscal year. The CCAC has terminated the contract with Providence Continuing Care Centre in the middle of its four-year term and is now looking for a cheaper provider.

In Peterborough, the CCAC has decided to reduce nursing services by 13.5 per cent and personal support and homemaking services by 23.8 per cent.

In Niagara, facing a \$9.4 million shortfall and a 68 per cent increase in caseload volume over the past three years, the CCAC is significantly altering how quickly clients receive at home nursing, personal support and therapy.

The Renfrew CCAC is cutting \$2.5 million by eliminating homemaking services.

These cuts to services are being borne by your neighbours, your friends and your family. The public also shares this concern. A recent survey (VHA Home Health Care - released on April 11, 2001) showed that 82 per cent of Ontarians are concerned about having access to home health care support so they can live at home as they age.

People can make a difference. Get involved in the campaign to save home care.

**Authorized for distribution:**



**Leah Casselman, President**

## **OPSEU asks therapists, others to boycott CCAC**

Reprinted with permission from *Kingston this week*—August 14, 2001

More heat is being put on the local Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), as the union representing 22 laid off therapists took to the streets of Kingston August 10.

About 40 supporters of the laid off therapists rallied outside the Ministry of Health offices at 1055 Princess St. Friday, to draw public attention to their plight. The protesters also launched a petition to gather signatures from other therapists willing to boycott working for the CCAC unless they are represented by the union.

The therapists, who worked for Providence Continuing Care Centre (PCCC), are represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) Local 452. PCCC announced last month it could no longer afford to provide occupational therapy and medical social work to clients through the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington CCAC.

OPSEU Local 452 President David Carmichael says about 250 dietitians, physical therapists, speech language pathologists and social workers in the area are being asked not to accept individual contracts with the CCAC to fill the 22 vacancies.

“It’s clear,” he said, the government and Access Centre “cannot take advantage of therapists.”

OPSEU has also filed grievances with the Ontario Labour Relations Board citing unfair labour practices. Carmichael contends the Access Centre is “union-busting.”

The idea of having therapists pledge to not work for the CCAC came from the community, Carmichael said. People affected wanted to lend a hand. Similiar tactics have been used on other agencies, he said.

“There are limited resources for health care in this community and across the country,” Carmichael said.

Howard Hampton, Ontario New Democratic Party leader, walked the information picket line with the workers.

“The province is trying to force all kinds of health organizations and service providers into union shedding tactics,” Hampton charged. “It’s an underhanded back door scheme to reduce services and reduce people’s wages.

“Driving a wedge between CCACs and workers by underfunding home care is no way to make things better for the residents of the Kingston area,” he said.

The pledge, Hampton said, is a unique idea, similar to asking people not to cross a picket line.

The laid off therapists, he said, “are very dedicated. You can tell when you talk to them how dedicated they are to their clients.”

This issue of Take Action is being distributed to all OPSEU community care bargaining units. **Please post or copy for your members.**