THE ONTARIO caregiver ORGANIZATION

ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER SUPPORT HUB

Integrating Essential Care Partners as Part of the Care Team in **Long-Term Care Homes**



INTEGRATING ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNERS AS PART OF THE CARE TEAM IN LONG TERM CARE HOMES

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated visitor restrictions in long-term care homes painted a very grim picture of what happens when family caregivers are not able to provide care or social and emotional support to residents. Family caregivers are essential care partners. Through the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, we gained a much better understanding of how imperative care partners are to the health and well-being of residents.

There is evidence to demonstrate that including care partners is an enabler of high-quality care, and a way to relieve pressures on the health care system.

Essential care partners provide critical emotional and social support to residents, as well as assisting with a range of activities such as support with eating and mealtime, dental hygiene, hand care, bathing and changing clothes. Equally important, essential care partners help make the workplace experience better for front-line providers by reducing the pressures on staff, especially in the face of chronic staff shortages.

Without the involvement of essential care partners, there are negative consequences for residents, care partners, healthcare providers and the system:

- Increased workload and staff burnout
- Unintended psychological harm to staff
- Measurable and sometimes irreversible physical, functional, cognitive and mental health declines among residents
- Increased care partner distress and unintended psychological harm



"As a result of the blanket visitor restrictions...there was unintended harm done to both essential caregivers and care home staff, including psychological harm and an increased workload on staff."[1]

[1]Lisa M. Palubiski, MD, Kurt L. Tulsieram, MSc, Douglas Archibald, PhD, James Conklin, PhD, Jacobi Elliott, PhD, Amy Hsu, PhD, Paul Stolee, PhD, Heidi Sveistrup, PhD, Anita Kothari, PhD. Guidance to (Re)integrate Caregivers as Essential Care Partners Into the LTC Setting: A Rapid Review. Published: February 17, 2022DOI:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2022.01.054

Impact when Essential Care Partners are **not** included and involved in the resident's care team

- Many residents sustained severe and potentially irreversible physical, functional, cognitive, and mental health declines[1,2]
- Residents had increased rates of depression, social isolation, loneliness[3]
- Residents showed an increase in responsive behaviours (51%) and disturbances[1,4]
- Residents living with dementia become upset and showed progression of dementia symptoms[4]
- Family members saw resident health and well-being decline[5]

The evidence is clear – residents do better when care partners are actively included and involved.



[2]Stall, N. M., Johnstone, J., McGeer, A. J., Dhuper, M., Dunning, J., & Sinha, S. K. (2020). Finding the right balance: An evidence-informed guidance document to support the re-opening of Canadian nursing homes to family caregivers and visitors during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Journal of the American Medical Directors Association, 21(10), 1365–1370.e7. doi:10.1016/j.jamda.2020.07.038

[3]Natasha L. Gallant et al. Improving Family Presence in Long-Term Care during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Healthcare Quarterly Vol. 25 Special Issue (2022).

[4]Hindmarch, W., McGhan, G., Flemons, K., & McCaughey, D. (2021). COVID-19 and Long-Term Care: The Essential Role of Family Caregivers. Canadian Geriatrics Journal : CGJ, 24(3), 195–199.

[5]Conklin, J. on behalf of the people, scientists and stakeholders. (2022, October 19). Essential Care Partners are Essential Infographic Resource. Ontario Centres for Learning, Research, and Innovation in Long-Term Care. https://clri-ltc.ca/resource/essential-care-partner/

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER?

Essential care partners play a critical role in providing unpaid physical, emotional and cognitive support to family members, partners and friends in long-term care homes.

There is a difference between essential care partners and visitors. Essential care partners are necessary to the quality of life, day-to-day experiences and well-being of residents. Visitors have an important social role but aren't actively involved in personal care.[6]

Essential Care Partners provide physical, psychological and emotional support, as deemed important by the patient. This care can include support in decision making, care coordination and continuity of care. Essential care partners can include family members, close friends or other caregivers and are identified by the patient or substitute decision maker.[6]



[6]Healthcare Excellence Canada. Policy Guidance for the Reintegration of Caregivers as Essential Care Partners. September 2021. https://www.healthcareexcellence.ca/media/4btksgep/202110_policyguidance_en.pdf

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER PROGRAM?

An Essential Care Partner program is a set of policies and leading practices implemented by a long-term care home to **identify**, **include** and **support** care partners to actively participate as members of the resident care team. An Essential Care Partner program can include components such as an identification card, training and education for staff and care partners, family presence policies, support services for care partners as well as referrals to community-based supports.

An Essential Care Partner program is a tangible way to demonstrate your long-term care home's commitment to recognizing the essential role of care partners. It is often part of a larger organizational culture shift towards person and family-centred care, which includes meaningful resident and family engagement to help inform home priorities, policies and practices.

By implementing an Essential Care Partner program, your home can proactively identify care partners, formalize how you include and support them, and empower them as members of your care team. With a program in place, it ensures a regular presence of family members, which is vital to the home-like environment that residents want in their long-term care home. Using an ID badge as part of the program also helps quickly and visually distinguish a family member or friend that has a role as an essential care partner whenever they are in the home.

Many long-term care homes have policies and practices in place to enable caregiver presence and participation in care, but they vary widely from one home to another. Based on collective learning and work with health system partners, the Ontario Caregiver Organization has developed Essential Care Partner guiding principles and leading practices to support health care organizations in achieving greater consistency regarding how essential care partners are identified, included and supported across Ontario.







WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO AN ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER PROGRAM?



Ontario long-term care homes that have implemented Essential Care Partner programs have demonstrated many benefits for residents, families, staff and management.

Essential Care Partner programs are enablers of improved physical and psychological wellbeing of residents, culturally safe and appropriate care, better quality of day-to-day life for residents, more manageable workload for staff, cost reduction for homes and improved relationships between care partners and staff.

Research done by the Bruyère Research Institute demonstrates that essential care partners are vital. Essential care partners provide vital social and emotional support, and help residents maintain contract with families, community and friends; help with important aspects of daily life and play a key advocacy role[5]. The research underscores that when care partners are absent from LTC homes, resident's health and well-being declines.

All these benefits also add up to savings for the system, as well as more manageable workloads in an environment with chronic staff shortages.

"We can't do it without our (Essential) Care Partners. They provide incredible support to our patients and residents. We believe our Designated Care Partners have the potential to reduce the risk for falls and help improve health outcomes. We know that understanding the impact of the designated care partner program and fostering its continued improvement will be just as important as creating the program."

Paula Doering, Senior Vice-President Clinical Programs, Chief Nursing Executive and Allied Health, Bruyère

"Family and caregiver presence have been associated with improving the physical and psychological wellbeing of residents; aiding in care management, reducing costs and protecting the physical and cultural safety of residents (among other outcomes)."[7]

[7]Healthcare Excellence Canada (2020). Evidence Brief: Essential Caregivers as Partners. https://www.cfhi-fcass.ca/docs/default-source/itr/tools-and-resources/essential-together/evidence-brief-en.pdf?sfvrsn=103fe5b3_4

READY TO IMPLEMENT? WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

The Ontario Caregiver Organization has created the **Essential Care Partner Support Hub** to help hospitals and other healthcare organizations implement and improve their own Essential Care Partner programs.

Through the Support Hub, you can access:

- Guidance and coaching
- Leading practices based on organizations that have successfully implemented
- Resources, tools and templates
- Connection to settings and peers that have implemented
- Opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange through our Caregivers as Partners in Care Learning Collaborative

Contact the Essential Care Partner Support Hub at ecpsupporthub@ontariocaregiver.ca to get started.

"Along with keeping families informed and engaged, when government long-term care directives changed and residents were able to designate essential caregivers, peopleCare was ready: with communication, training, PPE, and unique resources like a Caregiver Pledge and 'I am a Caregiver' ID badges. This was thanks, in part, to strong relationships with groups like the Ontario Caregiver Organization, which partnered with peopleCare as an early adopter of their practical resources aimed at supporting family caregivers in health care settings."

Sheena Campbell, Vice President Communications and Engagement, peopleCare Communities

Essential Care Partner Support Hub
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