

# Older and Wiser: Calls for a better long-term care system

*A well resourced and highly functional long-term care system is in the interests of all of us, says Coates.*

Margaret Coates

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Long-term care provided in residential facilities has not always lived up to people's expectations, says Coates.

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Over the last few years residential long-term care has been a focus of many articles in the news, mostly because of the devastating effects of the pandemic on residents in LTC facilities.

The reality of the negative aspects of the pandemic for residents brought attention to many of the problems often associated with long-term care. Many community groups and individuals have been working on improving the state of residential care in the province for years.

Finally, the reporting of these issues is amplifying what these groups have been saying.

On the British Columbia government website ([gov.bc.ca](http://gov.bc.ca)), there is a section called Long-Term Care Services - Province of British Columbia which describes LTC in the province, stating that long-term care services provide 24-hour professional supervision and care in a protective and supportive environment for people who have complex care needs and can no longer be cared for in their own homes or in an assisted living residence.

Unfortunately, long-term care provided in a residential facility has not always lived up to people's expectations about how an older person should live out their end-of-life years.

An organization called Action for Reform of Residential Care Association, which is dedicated to promoting quality of life in long-term care facilities in British Columbia through education and advocacy, has been critical of many features of LTC.

The association is made of up clinicians, researchers, family members and other citizens concerned with the care provided in long-term care facilities.

This organization has noted several areas of concern which are mainly attributed to inadequate structures and resources.

In their report, *Improving Quality of Life in LTC - A Way Forward*, they say, "systems with lean resources cannot adapt to stressors such as pandemics, and Band-Aids can no longer cover the wounds to the system illuminated by COVID-19."

Among many of the issues raised by ARRCBC is the fact that family members or councils are often the first to identify inadequate care but perhaps do not know how to complain effectively or are intimidated by the system.

The British Columbia government website says that a "family and/or resident council is a group of persons who either live in a long-term care home or are the contact persons, representatives, or relatives of long-term care home residents, and who meet regularly to identify opportunities to maintain and enhance the quality of life for the care home clients, and to engage with staff to contribute a voice in decisions which affect the clients."

Though individuals and groups have fought for years for the establishment of resident and family councils, not much was done about proactively supporting this strategy which many maintain works towards changing the negative aspects of the long-term care system.

An announcement was made recently that the province has revised regulations to strengthen the support and oversight of resident and family councils.

One of the initiatives is that government will strengthen support of individual councils through several measures, including requiring care-home operators or licensees to meet with a council twice a year or more frequently as required to promote the collective interests of persons in care.

Isabelle Mackenzie, the BC Seniors Advocate who has been critical of many aspects of residential long-term care, has said that "these changes will give residents of long-term care, and the people who love them, a much stronger voice in shaping the quality of life for most frail seniors. It is an extremely positive step forward."

On Jan. 4 it was announced that the BC Care Providers Association had released a new guide called *Supporting an Active Partnership: A Service Provider's Guide to Family & Resident Councils*.

The guide is intended to “share learnings and best practices for supporting long-term care operators in the development and continuation of resident and family councils. Councils can ensure that input and feedback occur in a meaningful, respectful, and timely way.”

You may not need long-term care in the future, but you may have a family member or friend that will need this type of care for their end-of-life years.

A well resourced and highly functional long-term care system is in the interests of all of us. It provides older people with the best quality of life in the remaining years of their lives.

In a just and caring society, we should all work towards providing the best system possible.

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