

Overworked PSWs Forced to Seek New Models of Care

December 8, 2021

Several Canadian Personal Support Workers (PSWs) no longer want to work in long-term care facilities. As one news story reported, many PSWs are reaching their breaking point due to staffing shortages. Chronic under-staffing often leads to unsafe work practices. In her former workplace, an Ontario long-term care facility, Danielle Turpin said that some clients lacked access to a bath and washroom or were not repositioned in bed as needed. (1)

Turpin then began exploring different models to see if she could provide better care. It wasn't long before she discovered workers' cooperatives, which let employees own a stake in an organization and run it democratically.

The cooperative Turpin launched with fellow PSWs provides clients with care in their homes, something that nearly all Ontarians prefer over institutional care. It is the first co-op of its kind in the province, according to labour experts. Some critics believe the co-op model is a sign of broader failures in Ontario's home care system, which, they argue, is increasingly becoming a two-tiered system. (1)

Experts say staffing issues are common at long term care (LTC) facilities, and that labor shortages have become even more acute during the pandemic. Nurses and PSWs in home care have left the field because of long hours and low pay, and those requiring care report no-shows and rushed visits.

Essential Health Care Providers Need the Right Protection

What is currently being done to address the crisis facing PSWs? To extend the temporary wage enhancement for direct support workers and personal support workers, the Ontario government is investing an additional \$373 million. As a result of this increase, workers in these industries will be better able to attract and retain employees. (2) But will this suffice for those who are already under strain, not to mention those who are turning to alternative models of care?

Liability Hazards on the Job

Those PSWs acting as independent contractors and senior care operators in environments where quality of care is compromised are at risk of suit if their patients suffer any negative outcomes. Among the risk factors associated with staffing issues are:

- Lack of staff in long-term care facilities leads to poor living and working conditions, which negatively affects PSWs' reputation in the public eye.
- As patient acuity increases, poor pay, subpar working conditions, and high management turnover threaten the health and safety of PSWs and residents.

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Coverage overview:

- Medical Malpractice
- Professional (Medical Malpractice) and General liability (combined form)
- Clinic, office, and facility package policies (property, boiler, crime)
- Cyber/Privacy Liability (first-party expense reimbursement and third party liability)

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Sources:

1. <https://www.tvo.org/article/a-very-real-crisis-why-these-personal-support-workers-started-a-home-care-co-op>
2. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001056/ontario-extending-temporary-wage-enhancement-for-personal-support-workers>