



May 7, 2021

Ontario Senior Pride groups welcome Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission's report findings and the recommendations to address equitable inclusion of 2S-LGBTQ+ elders and seniors in the LTC system

On April 30, 2021, Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission released their report and recommendations to the Ontario Government (*Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission Final Report April 30, 2021*). Ontario Senior Pride, a coalition of seven organizations advocating on behalf of 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors welcomed the report's findings and recommendations. Ontario Senior Pride shares the hope expressed by the Commission that, if implemented, the recommendations would transform Ontario's LTC homes based on a philosophy of care that is anchored in respect, compassion and kindness for people who live and work in LTC and adoption of a person-centred model of care for LTC homes.

The Commission's report presents a scathing indictment of Ontario's shocking lack of preparedness for the pandemic and characterizes the response of government and provincial public health officials to the pandemic and to outbreaks in LTC homes as slow, late and reactive. Responding to outbreaks of COVID-19 in LTC homes was not prioritized. The Commission also calls out successive Ontario governments for the poor state of Ontario's LTC system that has been apparent for many years and for failure of governments to take sufficient action despite repeated calls for reform.

The Commission noted in particular that there has been a lack of responsiveness on diversity within LTC homes, an issue that Ontario Senior Pride forcefully addressed in submissions made to the Commission:

"The Commission also heard from a representative of the Senior Pride Network on this issue. 'For us, the LGBTQ seniors of Ontario, the COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that the long-term care system in Ontario is neglectful of, or unresponsive to our particular health issues, our care needs, our fears and concerns, and our social and emotional well-being'" (page 41).

Two recommendations made by Ontario Senior Pride in submissions to the Commission were adopted by the Commission as their recommendations 37 and 38a, in the *Diversity and Inclusion* section of the report (page 234):

"Long-term care home residents reflect the diversity of Ontario's population. The Ministry of Long-Term Care, long-term care home licensees, management and staff must respect and support this diversity in the care and services provided to long-term care residents.

37. The *Residents' Bill of Rights* should be amended to align more closely with the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*."



Currently, the *Residents' Bill of Rights* does not include sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination.

Recommendation 38a states that LTC home licensees should be required to, “Recognize and respect 2S-LGBTQ+ spousal relationships and chosen/non-biological family relationships generally and in any rules or policies regarding visitation and the provision of essential care to 2S-LGBTQ+ residents.”

The Commission also adopted the recommendation made by Ontario Senior Pride and many other organizations and experts in LTC that a person-centred or resident-centred model of care should be mandated as the new, transformational care model for Ontario’s LTC homes. Ontario Senior Pride advised the Commission that a resident-centred model of care could be an essential component for ensuring that Ontario’s LTC system is inclusive, respectful and welcoming of 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors by recognizing and positively responding to their particular health, care, and social and emotional needs and concerns.

However, the other recommendations made by Ontario Senior Pride have not been explicitly included or accepted in the Commission’s report. Those recommendations were directed to the Ministry of Long-Term Care and LTC homes to adopt requirements, policies and practices to ensure the LTC homes are positive, welcoming, safe and inclusive environments for 2S-LGBTQ+ residents, their families and care-givers and for 2S-LGBTQ+ staff. For example, Ontario Senior Pride recommended that the Ministry of Long-Term Care require LTC homes to provide compulsory 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors sensitivity, inclusion and cultural competency training for all staff, family council members and volunteers. Ontario Senior Pride also advocated for recognition of the spiritual needs of 2S-LGBTQ+ residents of LTC homes. It is essential that 2S-LGBTQ+ inclusivity and respect for 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors be integrated within faith-based programming in LTC homes, including in spiritual and pastoral care, religious services, end of life rituals, funerals and celebrations of life.

The Commission’s report states only in general terms without any reference to 2S-LGBTQ+ elders and seniors, that the Ministry, LTC homes, management and staff must respect and support diversity in the provision of care and services to LTC residents. And that it is imperative that residents’ realities be respected and accommodated by LTC home operators and staff. Further, respect and support for diversity should be reflected in staff training, in the homes’ policies and operations, in the manner in which services and programming are delivered and in the types of culturally and linguistically based homes that are available. Similarly, the Commission has recommended that LTC homes should ensure that residents are provided with culturally and linguistically specific care, including religious and spiritual practices and services but makes no reference to the particular spiritual and pastoral care needs of 2S-LGBTQ+ elders and seniors. The unfortunate omission of references to or inclusion of 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors in these Commission recommendations could be interpreted as excluding 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors or seen as signalling that they can be



excluded, ignored or left out when the recommendations are implemented and operationalized.

Ontario Senior Pride made a comprehensive written submission to the Commission and was pleased to have met with and made a presentation to the Commissioners. As stated in those submissions, “We have made recommendations that when implemented would better prepare Ontario’s long-term care homes to provide us with adequate care during pandemics such as COVID-19 and indeed at all times. They would help immeasurably to ensure we receive the care that we deserve and that is our right to expect and to receive under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* and its Residents’ Bill of Rights, and under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.” Ontario Senior Pride is pleased that the Commission’s report also acknowledges the imperative of ensuring that the rights of LTC residents are respected and protected. As the report notes, “Residents do not lose their rights upon entering a long-term care home. They have the same rights as everyone else in society, and those rights must be protected and respected. Residents are entitled to receive quality care and deserve to enjoy a quality of life” (page 24).

Although the Commission’s report does not include all of the recommendations put forward by Ontario Senior Pride, the report and recommendations are a breakthrough for the recognition of, respect for, and equitable inclusion of 2S-LGBTQ+ elders and seniors in the LTC system. We call upon the Ontario Government to accept the recommendations and to implement them without delay, and to ensure that the scope and planning of the implementation incorporate the recommendations of Ontario Senior Pride that are not included in the Commission’s report.

The Ontario Senior Pride member organizations are:

- Aging with Pride Waterloo-Wellington
- New Horizons 2S-LGBTQ+ Seniors Program in North Bay (program housed out of The AIDS Committee of North Bay and Area, with chapters in the Barrie and Sudbury regions)
- Ottawa Senior Pride Network/Réseau fierté des aînés d'Ottawa
- Senior Pride Network Niagara
- Senior Pride Network Toronto
- Rainbow Faith and Freedom
- Windsor Pride Community.

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