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Eminent policy experts draw roadmap to end for-profit long-term care in Ontario

TORONTO – With licenses for more than 30,000 long-term care beds set to expire in 2025 and 15,000 new beds in the works, a group of eminent public policy experts is calling on Queen’s Park to develop them all as public non-profit beds as a first step in “an orderly and phased reduction of for-profit long-term care in Ontario.”

“The primary obligation of a for-profit long-term care operator is its fiduciary duty to maximize shareholder value,” says public interest lawyer Steven Shrybman, one of nine co-authors of a new report, *Recommendations to Transform Long-Term Care in Ontario*. “That priority is clearly incompatible with the delivery of necessary health care services, where the first and overarching priority must be to ensure the health and well-being of residents.”

The COVID-19 death rate in the province’s for-profit homes has been twice the rate of non-profit homes and five times the rate of publicly owned homes, the report notes.

“The dominant position of for-profit long-term care in Ontario is a direct consequence of policies designed to attract and support private investment in the sector, not to bring care standards up to the highest level possible,” says Senator Tony Dean. “This is a fundamental policy failure with fatal consequences, as we’ve seen.”

Among their recommendations, the authors call on government to make capital funding available to not-for-profit operators; establish a new public agency to enhance capacity in not-for-profits and smaller municipalities; and create a task force to plan for the phase-out of for-profit care, starting with those for-profit homes whose licenses are set to expire in 2025.

“The current arrangement delivers a lower standard of care at a higher cost to the citizens of Ontario,” says Alex Himelfarb, former clerk of the Privy Council. “At this critical moment, when world events have illustrated both the power and the obligation of government to take decisive action in the public interest, locking Ontario into the failed model of for-profit ownership would be a tragic error.”

The report, commissioned by the Ontario Health Coalition and published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, was independently written by Pat Armstrong, Hugh Armstrong, Dan Buchanan, Tony Dean, Gail Donner, Arthur Donner, Sharon Sholzberg-Gray, Alex Himelfarb, and Steven Shrybman.

Find *Recommendations to Transform Long-Term Care in Ontario* at www.policyalternatives.ca.