



Research Priorities for Long Term Care

March 2010

research

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Long Term Care Association (OLTCA) is committed to fostering innovation, continuous improvement, accountability and consumer choice along the continuum of aging services through advocacy, strategic partnerships, research and data analysis, and value-added membership services. This discussion paper reviews current research gaps in long-term care and OLTCA's role with respect to knowledge creation, knowledge exchange and knowledge uptake.

RESEARCH GAPS

Long term care (LTC) is an important component of the healthcare system. Over the past decade, there has been unprecedented investment in research on aging, Alzheimer's and other dementias, chronic disease, health services management, and more. While some of these studies have informed policy and practice in long-term care, significant gaps in knowledge remain. Here, we highlight five priorities for further research:

- Long Term Care Regulation
- Funding Policy
- Health Human Resources
- Quality of Care
- Innovation

1. LTC Policy & Regulation

Long-term care is a highly regulated environment. Some argue that regulation is required to protect a vulnerable population. Others maintain that overregulation increases costs, stifles innovation, demoralizes staff, and shifts the focus from a culture of quality improvement to a culture of compliance. Research is needed on:

- The cost and impact of various approaches to regulation, including the socio-economic costs of regulatory burden in the Ontario LTC sector
- The quality, reliability and impact of different approaches to enforcement, including an evaluation of compliance transformation in Ontario
- Approaches to health service planning, including models for simulating or forecasting needs of the diverse boomer population and associated capacity requirements along the continuum of aging services
- Policy options for better meeting the care, service and accommodation needs of younger residents and residents without cognitive impairment
- Study of trends in home admissions, including policy options for improving wait list management, reducing ALC days and preserving the mission of ethno-specific homes
- The impact of Ontario Long-Term Care Homes Act (LTCHA) and impending retirement sector regulation on consumer choice, care quality and cost, and sector viability
- The role of service accountability agreements in promoting service integration, performance improvement and clarity regarding funder/regulator/provider roles and responsibilities
- The impact of public reporting of quality and compliance data on system improvement, consumer preferences and public confidence

2. LTC Funding Policy

Long-term care funding has been the subject of much debate in recent years. The introduction of a new case mix system in Ontario is expected to have a significant impact on the sector. Research is needed on:

- The implementation of the RUGS case mix system, including peer review and independent replication of the grouper and weights methodologies used in Ontario
- Improved methods for determining the price/cost of specialized/acuity-sensitive care bundles
- The feasibility and impact of various "pay for performance" schemes
- Financial instruments to promote equitable access to care for lower income individuals/couples
- Tools to promote the viability of small and rural facilities
- Innovative capital redevelopment/infrastructure financing instruments
- Incentives for investment in technology and applied research and development
- Cost-effectiveness of various models for resourcing the quality improvement function within homes

3. LTC Health Human Resources

Health human resources (HHR) have a significant impact on care quality, cost and access. The LTC sector is especially challenged by an aging and increasingly diverse workforce, shortages in key specialties, high turnover among administrative and clinical leaders, and the care demands of residents with increasingly complex and specialized needs. Research is needed on:

- Staff competencies, configurations and occupational mixes needed to maintain high quality care
- HHR related approaches to improving quality of care and resident satisfaction, including the feasibility/impact of permanent assignment
- Cost-effective education and training programs for front-line staff, particularly those caring for special populations
- Innovative low-cost ways to improve staff recruitment, retention and work life
- Disability prevention and management policies and practices
- Impact of growing ethno-racial diversity on service delivery and HR management
- Knowledge, skills and behaviors needed by managers and administrators to move from a culture of compliance to a culture of inquiry and quality improvement
- Effective ways to integrate technology in the delivery of front-line care, including an evaluation of e-health/telemedicine pilot projects in LTC
- The effectiveness of current policy initiatives to support health human resource management and care delivery in LTC, including the Late Career Nurse Initiative and Continuing Medical Education for physicians with a significant LTC practice

4. Quality of Care

The vast majority of long-term care homes provide care that meets or exceeds legislative requirements and resident expectations. Yet a small number of poor performers continue to attract a disproportionate amount of attention from the media, legislators and the public at large. OLTC is committed to continuous quality improvement at the home level and to changing public perceptions at the system level. Research is needed on:

- Tools and methods to assess the full scope of the resident experience in long-term care, including a better understanding of how performance in one domain may have unintended consequences for performance in another
- Exemplary approaches to benchmarking and promoting performance improvement at the home, chain and association levels
- Practical approaches to improving care transitions within LTCHs and between homes and the continuum of aging services
- Chronic disease management and end of life care in long-term care settings
- Impact of RAI MDS 2.0 implementation on quality and time released to care
- An independent evaluation of the interRAI Long-Term Facility (LTCF) tool and MDS 3.0
- A cost-effectiveness study of implementing the interRAI Clinical Assessment Protocols (CAPs) versus the Resident Assessment Protocols (RAPs)
- Effective/ineffective approaches to documentation and care planning in long term care settings, including impact on time released to care and staff satisfaction
- Factors that promote or block/constrain implementation of quality initiatives in long term care (culled from pilot projects, studies, etc undertaken in Ontario and elsewhere)
- Determinants of public confidence in LTC and effective communication methods and tools to address the needs of diverse audiences

5. Innovation

The gap between demand and supply is a source of concern for health economists, policymakers and citizens alike. A solution often proposed for increasing value and decreasing costs is innovation. In long-term care, the development and uptake of new or significantly improved products, services, processes, structures and ways of doing things, varies widely. Research is needed to what makes some homes better than others at developing, implementing and sustaining research-based innovations. More specifically:

- Qualitative studies to better understand how successful facilities implement change, including ways to create and sustain a culture of inquiry and innovation
- More rigorous peer review prior to implementation of evaluation plans of publicly-funded LTC research initiatives and pilot projects to identify common issues and ensure these initiatives address key needs and provide value for money
- Improved access to resources for policy and program evaluation and a more coordinated approach to helping all stakeholders to learn from the results
- Improved processes and support for developing, testing and promoting uptake of product and service innovations in long-term care
- A study of the impact of Ontario's Aging at Home Strategy on LTC innovation
- An international review of effective and disproven technologies for promoting quality of care and quality of worklife in long-term care settings
- The role of the built environment, including construction and design features, in promoting quality of care, quality of life and quality of worklife

OLTCA's ROLE

OLTCA has long believed that sound research is critical to the provision of high quality resident care and sector sustainability. It has a reputation for producing timely, well- documented and solution-oriented discussion papers on a variety of funding and policy issues. In 2003, the association created a senior director position charged with providing leadership on health planning and research issues. The Applied Research Committee (ARC), composed of sector leaders and independent researchers, was established a year later to promote dialogue and partnerships between researchers and long-term care homes. Among other things, ARC:

- Responds to request from researchers for letters of support for funders, assistance in recruiting sites or study participants, membership on research advisory committees, dissemination of study results, etc
- Provides input on research-related content of the OLTCA website
- Organizes an annual applied research education day to promote knowledge exchange and research uptake
- Facilitates research related to sector needs and OLTCA priorities

These initiatives reinforce the dual roles of OLTCA as both a Knowledge Creator and a Knowledge Broker. Below are additional suggestions for strengthening our impact in these areas.

OLTCA as a Knowledge Creator

In addition to responding to members requests for information, research and resources, OLTCA also has a role to play in promoting the longer term viability of the sector within the context of changing consumer expectations and an evolving healthcare policy and funding environment. To be effective, OLTCA must have timely access to key data and the organizational capacity to produce analyses that inform our decisions and positions as an association, and add value to our members. Accordingly, OLTCA will:

- Create a data warehouse and analytical team to support the policy and research priorities of our membership
- Produce an annual report on long-term care in Ontario to dispel myths and promote a shared understanding of the sector
- Partner with funders and researchers to undertake original research and carry out evidence-based analyses in support of our priorities

OLTCA members also play a vital role in the creation of knowledge. Some, such as Baycrest Geriatric Healthcare System, have research at the core of their mission. Others such as RBJ Schlegel Holdings/Oakwood Retirement Communities see research as an investment in their business and in the community. OLTCA has a role to play in working with our membership to advance common research priorities. Over the coming year, OLTCA will:

- Convene a panel of sector leaders to discuss ways to advance research and innovation capacity within our membership
- Work with members to fund a long-term program of research to address sector needs, including the creation of 'research chairs' in areas such as LTC funding policy, leadership and culture change, and end of life care
- Work with LTC partners and government to promote the adoption of a sustainable model of teaching long-term care homes
- Work with funders and researchers to ensure that research undertaken in long term care settings includes adequate resources to facilitate LTCH participation and uptake of the findings
- Work with government and other stakeholders to clarify the process for timely 3rd party review or cost-benefit analyses of new or emerging technologies relevant to long-term care.

OLTCA as a Knowledge Broker

Many of OLTCA's activities focus on promoting knowledge exchange with and between members and stakeholders. Over the coming year, OLTCA will:

- Consult with members on their research and information needs, barriers to research uptake, and the role their association can play in promoting innovation and benchmark performance
- Expand research-related content on the OLTCA website, and at regular OLTCA events and facilitate information and knowledge exchange regarding how to translate research into action/improved practice at the home level
- Expand the reach and impact of LTC Applied Research Education Day through continued focus on high quality presenters and posters, and support for subsequent publication of the content
- Facilitate knowledge networks and strategic partnerships between member homes and producers of applied research including other OLTCA members, the Senior Health Research Transfer Network (SHRTN) and community colleges and universities, to promote ongoing knowledge exchange with respect to evidence- informed care and effective health human resources practices
- Work with the MaRS Discovery District, our members, government and other stakeholders, to develop an innovation strategy for the LTC sector
- Work with funders, policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to evaluation of policy and quality improvement initiatives in long-term care and that evaluation and related knowledge transfer plans are subject to a rigorous review process
- Develop a framework to guide our knowledge exchange efforts and track and report on progress to the OLTCA board and our members.