

# Understanding long-term care: Caring for depression

ONTARIO  
LONG TERM CARE  
ASSOCIATION

## KEY FACTS

- Roughly one-third (30%) of Ontario long-term care residents have some symptoms of depression. (Source: [www.cihi.ca/en/quick-stats,2014-2015](http://www.cihi.ca/en/quick-stats,2014-2015).)
- Many people have a short-term episode of depression when they first move into a long-term care home. Others come into long-term care with pre-existing depression.
- Long-term care homes evaluate all residents regularly for signs of worsening mood, whether they have a diagnosis of depression or not. Many factors can contribute to the development or worsening of symptoms of depression in long-term care residents, ranging from increasing disability to the loss of beloved people in their lives. In 2014-2015, one-quarter (25.7%) of residents in Ontario long-term care homes experienced worsening depressive mood. (Source: [your.healthsystem.cihi.ca](http://your.healthsystem.cihi.ca))
- Residents with symptoms of depression are more likely to also have dementia. Appropriately diagnosing depression in a resident with dementia can be challenging. Many of the symptoms of dementia, such as withdrawal or irritability, can also be symptoms of depression.

### EXPERT VOICE

*“There is some evidence that psychosocial interventions [such as cognitive behavioural therapy and activation] are just as effective as medications for less severe depression but they use more staff time and it’s often a question of resources. It’s a big challenge.”*

– Dr. David Conn, psychiatrist, Baycrest Health Sciences, and founding Co-Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Seniors’ Mental Health

## Helping residents feel better

- Long-term care homes look for early signs of depressive symptoms as a preventative measure. The goal is to improve the resident’s mood and prevent symptoms from worsening as much as possible.
- Increased activities and more interactions with staff will often be enough to lift mild symptoms. Homes provide activities that tap the resident’s strengths and provide a sense of purpose and pleasure to their day.
- People with both dementia and symptoms of depression need the support of staff who have specialized training in strategies and activities that will help to improve residents’ moods and reduce any behavioural symptoms related to their dementia.

## More can be done

- More staff would make a significant difference to the ability of long-term care homes to support residents with symptoms of depression.
- The Ontario Long Term Care Association has called on government to fund a Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) team in every long-term care home. These BSO teams are specially trained staff who help to manage behavioural symptoms among residents, particularly those symptoms related to dementia.
- Smaller homes often lack the resources such as social workers who can help to care for people with depression. The Association has called for a small homes strategy that will enhance the resources available to small homes.