



## **Implementing an Integrated Hospice Palliative Care System in Ontario**

### Recommendations from the Quality Hospice Palliative Care Coalition of Ontario

#### **Who We Are**

The Quality Hospice Palliative Care Coalition of Ontario advocates for quality hospice palliative care for all Ontarians. Current members of the Coalition Steering Committee include:

#### **Provincial association members representing:**

Provincial End-of-Life Care Network  
Hospice Association of Ontario  
Ontario Palliative Care Association  
Ontario College of Family Physicians  
Cancer Care Ontario  
Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres  
Provincial Palliative Care Consultants Network  
Ontario Long Term Care Association  
Quality End-of-Life Care Coalition of Canada

#### **Academic members representing:**

Temmy Latner Centre for Palliative Care  
Ontario Cancer Institute  
Lakehead University and Northern Ontario School of Medicine  
McMaster University  
University of Toronto  
University of Ottawa

#### **The Ontario End-of-Life Care Strategy**

How we treat people in the last stages of life reflects who we are as a society, and directly impacts the effectiveness and efficiency of our health care system.

The Ontario government showed leadership in 2004 by funding a provincial end-of-life care strategy. This strategy was an important first step, but it fell short of creating a comprehensive and effective system of hospice palliative care services in Ontario.

The strategy was less effective than envisioned due to the lack of an integrated system-wide policy. There is significant disparity among Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) in adopting hospice palliative care as a component of their regional priorities. This regional inconsistency creates a

provincial landscape in which hospice palliative care is patchy and access by patients can vary widely. Furthermore, long-term sustainability was not addressed by the strategy.

## **The Need for Renewed Provincial Leadership**

The Quality Hospice Palliative Care Coalition of Ontario is calling upon the provincial government to develop and implement an integrated system-wide policy that will support equitable access to a choice of safe, comprehensive and quality hospice palliative care services for individuals and families across Ontario who can benefit from them.

Apart from the moral imperative of relieving suffering and improving the quality of living and dying for those with progressive, life-threatening conditions, there are solid pragmatic reasons for the Ontario government to strengthen hospice palliative care. The prevailing practice of providing aggressive medical treatment in acute care settings until one's death not only results in poor quality of life for patients, it significantly increases the likelihood of major depression, poor health and even premature death for caregivers. On the other hand, hospice palliative care programs play an important role in pre-empting or managing crisis situations that would otherwise lead to emergency department visits or hospital admissions. They provide highly-skilled, compassionate service at a fraction of the cost, while allowing more individuals to receive care in the setting of their choice. Emerging literature has shown that effective hospice palliative care saves money. The costs for enhancements to hospice palliative care are modest compared to the costs of inappropriate care and fragmented service systems.

The need to move swiftly to implement quality hospice palliative care strategies, systems and services is essential, given the aging population in Ontario, and the immediate and imminent demands on the health care system from those suffering from progressive life-limiting conditions like cancer, heart failure and dementia. The present system is ill-prepared to deal with what is to come.

## **Designing an Effective System**

The Coalition has recently endorsed a system design framework, which it recommends to the provincial government for adoption as a central part of its policy. The framework lays out six pillars of an effective regional system of hospice palliative care services:

1. A full continuum of care settings and services is in place;
2. In each care setting where patients die, there is a clearly defined hospice palliative care program;
3. Sectors and services are linked by common practice, processes, structures and education;
4. Adequate numbers of trained professionals are available;
5. System-level accountability is clearly defined and communicated; and
6. Funding models, guidelines and policy directions support an integrated system

## Key Enablers

The policy should also address the following enablers:

- i. Agreement on system-level outcomes and provincial performance indicators.
- ii. Adoption of provincial performance standards with recognition of the need for local flexibility in how they are achieved
- iii. Central monitoring and reporting of these indicators on a LHIN-by-LHIN basis
- iv. Strategic investments in hospice palliative care that will improve the quality, safety, and coordination of care for people with progressive illnesses that will lead to their deaths and provide support for their families
- v. Development and adoption of a human resource and capacity-building strategy for hospice palliative care
- vi. Dedicated policy resources and expertise within the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in the form of a hospice palliative care policy lead / office that would be responsible for bringing together different parts of government working on related issues and that would also be responsible for overseeing policy implementation
- vii. The definition of clear, consistent accountability relationships between LHINs and the Ministry's designated lead / office with respect to the implementation of hospice palliative care policies
- viii. The definition of clear, consistent accountability relationships that support integrated systems of quality hospice palliative care services between LHINs and their respective End-of-Life Care / Hospice Palliative Care Networks

## Priorities for Action

The Coalition has identified the following priorities for action, which are considered attainable within the year (the priorities are weighted equally and not ranked in order of preference).

1. Plan, adopt and begin implementing a Quality Hospice Palliative Care Strategy and System Design in partnership with the Quality Hospice Palliative Care Coalition of Ontario.
  - a. Require all LHINs to have a hospice palliative care plan supporting the provincial hospice palliative care strategy. Set province-wide requirements that all LHINs must meet in their plans. Utilize the existing End-of-Life Care / Hospice Palliative Care Networks in each LHIN as the natural leads on developing these plans for the LHINs as well as facilitating and monitoring their implementation.
  - b. Based on expert advice in hospice palliative care and performance measurement (from the Quality Hospice Palliative Care Coalition of Ontario and the Ontario Health Quality Council), provide provincial direction for consistent collection of data (consistent with

the Ontario Health Reporting Standards) and analysis of information about services, which will support rigorous system-level reporting on the provision of hospice palliative care in Ontario

- c. Endorse a provincial hospice palliative care education strategy that is evidence-based and draws on already developed curricula being used in the field. This will be essential to build capacity and develop a recruitment and retention strategy for all disciplines (regulated and un-regulated) involved in hospice palliative care.
  - d. Designate a hospice palliative care policy lead, with accompanying resources, responsible for supporting and monitoring the implementation of the provincial hospice palliative care policy, reviewing hospice palliative care plans from each LHIN, and periodically monitoring their progress to ensure that quality, integrated services are more evenly and equitably available across the province.
  - e. Utilize the existing End-of-Life Care / Hospice Palliative Care Networks as a collaborative governance structure for overseeing the implementation of provincial hospice palliative care initiatives across the continuum of care. Continue to support the Networks as HPC authorities across the continuum of care informing a wide range of projects, policies, programs and services, such as the Integrated Client Care Project. Involve the Quality Hospice Palliative Care Coalition of Ontario as an expert resource in this process.
2. Provide strategic investments to build and sustain an integrated system of safe, comprehensive and quality hospice palliative care services
- a. Fund the creation and expansion of inter-professional shared care teams across the province as a means of building palliative care community capacity within primary care, as piloted in Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant, Erie St Clair, and Waterloo Wellington, among others.
  - b. Expand the Alternative Payment Plan for the development of additional Expert Palliative Care Physicians and optimize their role by integrating them within inter-professional teams.
  - c. Fund 80% of the operating costs of residential hospices.
  - d. Review the adequacy of funding for palliative care services in hospitals.
  - e. Re-establish a funding mechanism for the Networks that ensures that they are able to deliver on their mandate of helping to ensure the delivery of quality HPC across the continuum of care, in keeping with the government's policies and objectives.
  - f. Invest in research to evaluate both the outcomes and effectiveness of inter-professional educational curricula and to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of differing health service configurations such as shared care models and more comprehensive integrated care delivery models early in the disease trajectory.

**For more information, please contact:**

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