

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Assisted Living Services of the 2021 Annual Report of the Auditor General. Ontario Health

Introduction:

Ontario Health appreciates the opportunity to provide a status update to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on progress made in the implementation of the recommendations from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario's 2021 value-for-money audit on assisted living services.

Shortly after the December 1, 2021 release of the Ontario Auditor General of Ontario's audit on assisted living services, the province of Ontario experienced the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this wave, Ontario Health, the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care, and healthcare partners redirected resources to support the provincial pandemic response. Ontario Health and the Ontario Health Regions have focused their efforts throughout the pandemic to support the safety of Ontarians and the optimal provision of care across the entire system of care.

The health care system and the Assisted Living Service (ALS) health service providers have experienced significant challenges during the pandemic, including Human Health Resources (HHR) shortages. This has challenged the ability of Ontario Health to actively engage with health system partners in a meaningful way to develop a comprehensive plan to implement the Auditor General's recommendations. Despite these challenges, some early progress has been made on the communication and implementation of assisted living services audit recommendations. To ensure the full implementation of the recommendations, Ontario Health will work in partnership with the Ministry of Health (Ministry), Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS), ALS providers and health system partners.

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Recommendation 4 To improve the sharing of client assessment information between Home and Community Care Support Services organizations and assisted living agencies, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with Ontario Health: • require all assisted living agencies to upload client assessment information into a central repository that includes the entire continuum of care including long-term care services clients receive; • require all Home and Community Care Support Services organizations to enter assessment results into this central repository; • monitor that the central repository contains all clients' assessment information and follow up as needed; and • in the interim, prior to the creation of a central repository, build an interface between all repositories of assessment information, including those used by both assisted living agencies and home care agencies.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health is working with the Ministry of Health (Ministry) to support the development of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), including their ability to access provincial digital health assets. • Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo informed assisted living providers that for any clients they have who are receiving both assisted living and home care services, all approved agencies under the Home and Community Care Services Act, 1994 (HCCSA) are included in the client's circle of care. With the client's consent, their personal health information can be shared to members of that circle of care.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health will continue working with the Ministry in the development of OHTs across the province, including the development of digital platforms and interfaces to support the sharing of assessment information. • The anticipated completion date for the remaining portions of this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 05 To better serve clients receiving both assisted living services and other health care services, we recommend that Ontario Health: • amend service agreements to clarify that assisted living agencies and other service agencies can exchange information, such as the timing and the type of services provided to clients and the condition of a client, when it is necessary to help maintain continuity of care; and • instruct assisted living agencies and monitor that they maintain ongoing communication with other health service providers, including primary care providers.	OH RESPONSE: • As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, health system resources have been directed to support the provincial pandemic response resulting in limited capacity for Health Service Providers (HSPs) to conduct the planning processes necessary to inform the service accountability agreements. As such, the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23. Clarification of expected exchange of information, such as the timing and the type of services provided to clients and the condition of a client, when it is necessary to maintain continuity of care will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle.	OH RESPONSE: • Updated service agreements are being prepared for the next amendment cycle and will consider and incorporate recommendations from the Assisted Living Services audit. • The anticipated date for completion is March 31, 2024.
Recommendation 07 To help eligible individuals obtain more timely and equitable access to assisted living services and to help plan health services in Ontario, we recommend that Ontario Health, in conjunction with Home and Community Care Support Services: • collect and review wait lists to confirm their completeness, including whether the person is waiting for a spot in an assisted living building versus the community, as well as the priority of the client as indicated by their needs and length of time on the wait list; • track people waiting in hospitals for assisted living separately from supervised living; • publish wait time and wait lists by region; and • work toward developing a central wait list for the whole province.	OH RESPONSE: • As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health resources were redirected to support the provincial pandemic response, with limited progress made in the implementation of this recommendation. However, Ontario Health is committed to exploring solutions that best meet the needs of patients.	OH RESPONSE: • Over the next year, Ontario Health plans to work with our health system partners, including the Ministry of Health, Home and Community Care Support Services, Ontario Health Teams, Assisted Living providers, patients and families, to clarify roles and responsibilities for waitlist management. This process will enable more effective planning and allocation of appropriate resources with the goal of ensuring that eligible individuals obtain timely and equitable access to assisted living services. • The anticipated date for completion is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 8 To improve the consistency and sufficiency of services that assisted living agencies provide to clients, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with Ontario Health: - collect and validate information on the number of service hours clients receive in the assisted living services program and in the home care program as well as the corresponding assessment scores, and compare them and re-assess whether the service maximum hours for both programs are still reasonable; and - develop monthly minimum service hour targets for various care levels—for example, based on assessment scores—and update its policies accordingly.	OH RESPONSE: Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo reminded assisted living providers of the requirement within their accountability agreements with Ontario Health to adhere with the reporting requirements therein. These agreements also stipulate the obligations that assisted living providers have for the provision of timely and accurate reporting.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will continue working with the Ministry to review and assess hours of service, and current service volumes provided in assisted living services. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2023.
Recommendation 09 To improve the consistency and sufficiency of services that assisted living agencies provide to clients, we recommend that Ontario Health: - update its agreements with assisted living agencies to include monthly minimum service hour targets for various care levels; and - monitor reported service hours against the revised Ministry standards.	OH RESPONSE: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health resources were redirected to support the provincial pandemic response, with limited progress made in the implementation of this recommendation.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will support the Ministry in the development of standards for service hours and will develop a system to track and monitor the reported service hour data. - As the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23, consideration for inclusion of monthly minimum service hour targets for varying care levels will be based on the standards set by the Ministry, and will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 10 To provide equitable access to assisted living services for those who most need it to live independently, we recommend that Ontario Health, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health: - collect data on client needs and service hours, monitor cases where ineligible clients are admitted to assisted living services and clients who receive services above or below the intended level as established in Recommendation 8, and require agencies to provide services only to eligible clients, refer ineligible clients to other services and adjust the nature and amount of services provided as needed; and - at least annually, collect and analyze data on the assessment scores of assisted living and home care clients to confirm they are commensurate with their health profiles.	OH RESPONSE: Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo reminded Home and Community Care Support Services Care Coordinators of their role in assessing client eligibility, and assisted living providers of the requirement within their accountability agreements with Ontario Health to adhere with the reporting requirements therein. These agreements also stipulate the obligations that assisted living providers have for the provision of timely and accurate reporting.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will work with the Ministry to review the data currently being collected and reviewed on client service needs, and the policy required to do so. - Ontario Health will work with the Ministry in developing indicators to reflect these data requirements, and a process to collect and monitor these indicators. - As the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23, the inclusion of the data requirements based on Ministry policy will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 11 To provide more equitable services to all Ontarians who can benefit from assisted living services according to their need, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with Ontario Health: • monitor that assisted living agencies do not hereafter admit seniors according to criteria outlined in the 1994 policy; • evaluate whether the eligibility criteria for adults with physical disabilities, an acquired brain injury or HIV/AIDS should be updated to include evidence-based criteria such as capabilities to live independently, similar to the approach resulting in the updated 2011 policy for seniors; and • review and revise both the provincial exclusion criteria (such as those that do not allow services to be provided to people who reside in retirement homes and those on long-term care wait lists) and local exclusion criteria (such as those restricting eligibility to only those who reside within certain areas of the province) that have been used, considering the impact of these criteria on the broader health care system.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo reminded assisted living providers of the requirement within their accountability agreements with Ontario Health to comply with the applicable laws and policies that are defined in their agreements.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health will support the Ministry in its review of the assisted living program, including eligibility criteria and exclusion criteria. • The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2023.
Recommendation 12 To help keep assisted living clients from requiring acute care or premature admission to long-term care, we recommend that Ontario Health include in its agreements with assisted living agencies a requirement to provide homemaking services, consistent with the Ministry of Health's policies.	OH RESPONSE: • The service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health will conduct a review of the current services provided through the Assisted Living service accountability agreements, including homemaking services, to support alignment with policy. • Ontario Health will develop metrics to monitor avoidance of premature admission to long-term care. • The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 13 To best align funding with the future needs of those who will require assistance to live at home and to help ensure more efficient use of funding, we recommend that the Ministry of Health: - analyze relevant information, such as wait lists and demographics, to understand current and future expected demand for assisted living, home care and long-term care across the province, and determine funding for each of these programs while taking into account local factors such as marginalized or low-income populations; - request Ontario Health review local information, such as local wait lists and demographics, and reallocate funding across the continuum of care over all regions based on demonstrated need; - work with Ontario Health to analyze agency funding on a per client or per hour basis periodically and investigate anomalies; and - review and update all assisted living policies accordingly.	OH RESPONSE (13.2, 13.3): As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health resources were redirected to support the provincial pandemic response, with limited progress made in the implementation of this recommendation.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health looks forward to continued discussions with the Ministry and Home and Community Care Support Services regarding appropriate funding for assisted living services. Additional resources (financial and human) will be needed to support a collaborative, coordinated health system model that best meets the needs of its patients, including establishment of a centralized waitlist for eligible patients, and centralization of all Assisted Living Services. - Ontario Health, in consultation with its community service partners, will explore options for broadening the scope of service management and reporting for Assisted Living Services (e.g., through the service accountability agreements). - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 15 To strengthen assisted living services' role in helping clients improve their quality of life while living in the community, and lowering the overall costs to the health care system, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with Ontario Health: - identify what data is relevant to measure the performance of the assisted living program (including the break-even point between assisted living and long-term care, and gaps in availability); - collect and evaluate this data on an annual basis; and - use the results to inform how it funds and operates the program going forward.	OH RESPONSE: Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo provided assisted living providers with a reminder on the need to adhere to the reporting requirements, and for their obligations to provide accurate reporting, as found in their accountability agreements with Ontario Health.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will work the Ministry in identifying the relevant data required to measure the performance of assisted living programs, and the annual collection and evaluation of this data. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.
Recommendation 16 To help ensure adults with physical disabilities, an acquired brain injury or HIV/AIDS receive quality assisted living services, we recommend that the Ministry of Health: - obtain trend data on the number of people in Ontario living with physical disabilities, an acquired brain injury or HIV/AIDS to inform planning decisions; - clarify whether assisted living services should be expanded into the community beyond designated assisted living buildings; - further to Recommendation 11 on updating the 1994 policy, and with input from relevant experts, identify appropriate outcome targets to help measure the effectiveness of assisted living services; and - work with Ontario Health to require all assisted living agencies measure and report on outcome data, including reductions of emergency room visits or delayed admissions to long-term care.	OH RESPONSE (16.4): As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health resources were redirected to support the provincial pandemic response, with limited progress made in the implementation of this recommendation.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will work with the Ministry to identify appropriate outcome targets. - Ontario Health will develop a system to track and monitor the data required to measure and report on the outcome targets. - As the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23, the inclusion of the data requirements based on Ministry outcome targets will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 18 To obtain the highest quality of services for the Ontarians who rely on assisted living services and maximize the value obtained from this funding, we recommend that Ontario Health: - perform periodic risk-based audits on assisted living agencies to verify whether they complied with assisted living policy requirements such as developing a care plan for each client and updating it regularly, and providing assisted living services only to clients whose capability assessment scores met eligibility requirements; and - update the standard accountability agreement with assisted living agencies to use across the province to include the requirement to report data including time spent on providing care, Home and Community Care Support Services referral acceptance rate, and missed visits.	OH RESPONSE: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health resources were redirected to support the provincial pandemic response, with limited progress made in the implementation of this recommendation.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will work with the Ministry to identify program standards. - Ontario Health will conduct a review of current processes, and develop a standardized procedure to audit and verify compliance of assisted living providers which ensures clients are meeting eligibility requirements for services. - As the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23, the inclusion of the standardized reporting and compliance requirements will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.
Recommendation 19 To improve the quality and consistency of assisted living services provided to clients, we recommend that the Ministry of Health establish standards for staff-to-client ratios (considering the level of client needs) and for direct-care staff qualifications (including minimum initial and ongoing training), and monitor that Ontario Health update the accountability agreements accordingly.	OH RESPONSE: Ontario Health is engaged in ongoing efforts to address current staffing challenges related to the COVID-19 Pandemic, including the issuance of Temporary Wage Enhancements for staff providing Personal Support Services.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will support the Ministry in the development staffing standards, including staffing ratios, training and qualifications. - As the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23, the inclusion of requirements to reflect program staffing standards established by the Ministry will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 21 To protect assisted living clients from harm and poor-quality services, we recommend that Ontario Health: - define serious incidents and include the reporting of them as a requirement in the accountability agreements with assisted living agencies; - develop a standard format of complaints log, require assisted living agencies to document all information in the log, and track and monitor this information fully; and - follow up, on a timely basis, with assisted living agencies to confirm each complaint is appropriately resolved or refer the cases to an appropriate third party as noted in Recommendation 20.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo reminded assisted living providers of the requirements, under section 39 of the Home and Community Care Services Act, 1994 to ensure that their complaints process respects and promotes the rights set out in the patient Bill of Rights. It also states that the Ministry will be enhancing the process requirements for patients who are reporting complaints with their providers. - As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health resources were redirected to support the provincial pandemic response.	OH RESPONSE: - Ontario Health will work with health system partners, including assisted living providers, to develop a definition for serious incidents, and a common process for clients to report service complaints, procedures for resolving complaints, and for the tracking and monitoring serious incidents when they occur. - As the service accountability agreements have been extended in their current form for the fiscal year 2022/23, the inclusion of a requirement for the reporting of serious incidents will be reviewed for consideration in the 2023/24 amendment cycle. - The anticipated completion date for this recommendation is March 31, 2024.

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Recommendation 23 To protect vulnerable adults living in assisted living buildings from the risk of financial exploitation and fire, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with Ontario Health: • update the inventory of assisted living buildings that was compiled for this audit (Appendix 8) and include other relevant information, including the characteristics of services provided to clients in those buildings; • develop mechanisms to segregate the provision of services from landlord responsibilities, such as competitively procuring services from another agency; • monitor whether third-party assisted living agencies charge for other provincially funded services, including personal support and/or homemaking services, and take corrective actions where non-compliances are noted; and • identify which assisted living buildings should be considered a care occupancy assisted living building under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 and share the listing	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health worked with the Ministry on the development and distribution of the memo issued to assisted living providers by the Ministry on December 10, 2021. This memo provided assisted living providers with a reminder on the prohibition of providers to charge or accept payment for assisted living services for personal support and homemaking services identified in the client's plan of service. • Ontario Health reached out to assisted living providers to gather updated information on the inventory of assisted living buildings across the province. This information was submitted to the Ministry for distribution to the Office of the Fire Marshall.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health will develop an annual process for gathering information related to the inventory of assisted living buildings. • The anticipated completion date for the remaining portion of this recommendation is March 31, 2023.

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Recommendation 24 To provide assisted living clients with protection against infection from COVID-19 and future infectious disease outbreaks, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with Ontario Health: • identify aspects of assisted living buildings that require oversight, including infection prevention and control, care standards and safety, and work with other partners, such as public health units, to conduct regular, risk-based inspections; and • work with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility to share the listing of assisted living buildings with the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority such that buildings that meet the conditions in the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 are regulated as retirement homes.	OH RESPONSE: • Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario Health has worked with health system partners, including hospitals and public health units, in the development of local Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) hub networks. These hubs have supported the health and safety of Ontarians living in congregate living settings, including those receiving assisted living services, by providing the organizations in these hubs with access to IPAC expertise, training, and supports. • Ontario Health has gathered updated information on the inventory listing of assisted living buildings across the province. This information was submitted to the Ministry for distribution to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility so that it can be shared with the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority.	OH RESPONSE: • Ontario Health will continue working with the Ministry in exploring ways to improve and strengthen inspection protocols for assisted living buildings. • Future work will entail the development of an annual process for gathering information related to the inventory of assisted living buildings. The inventory of assisted living buildings was submitted to the Ministry in March 2022.