

Bill 283 Testimony, Alzheimer Society of Ontario

Good afternoon Committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Cathy Barrick, CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. Joining me today is Kyle Fitzgerald, the Alzheimer Society's Manager of Public Policy and Government Relations.

The Alzheimer Society is a Federation of 29 community support service providers. We have a presence in communities across Ontario, and last year provided care to 165,000 clients. Our staff includes both registered and non-registered health professionals. Personal support workers with the Alzheimer Society provide in-home respite for both people living with dementia and their care partners. Our mission is to alleviate the personal and societal consequences of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, both in the community and long-term care.

Our testimony today will focus on Schedules Two and Four of this Bill. Regulation and oversight of PSWs was one of our pre-budget recommendations this year, and the Alzheimer Society is supportive of the overall intent of Schedule Two.

We are delighted to see the new Oversight Authority will have the ability to establish minimum standards of education and skills-based qualifications for PSWs. We see this as a truly transformational opportunity to equip PSWs with the tools they need to properly care for people living with dementia.

Two-thirds of long-term care residents in Ontario live with some form of dementia, and around 150,000 Ontarians with dementia live in the community, at home—our friends, and our neighbours. Most clients a PSW will support throughout their career, especially in long-term care, will live with some form of dementia.

Education and skills-based training offered to PSWs must treat dementia as the rule, not the exception. That is not the case today. Dementia often changes how a person responds to the world around them: a person living with dementia might refuse to eat not because they aren't hungry but because another of their needs is being unmet, such as their room being too hot or cold.

It is absolutely vital that PSWs in Ontario have a fulsome understanding of dementia, including how to look past the symptoms and see the person. The Alzheimer Society has been working closely with the Ontario Personal Support Worker Association to deliver our U-First!® training on person-centred care to PSWs across the province. The Authority's mandate to set minimum standards of training and education can accelerate voluntary initiatives already underway in the sector, and equip all PSWs with the tools and training they need to deliver person-centred care to individuals living with dementia. We see the ability to establish province-wide standards for PSW training and education as one of the greatest opportunities presented by Bill 283.

The fact that registration with the Authority will be optional undermines this opportunity. If registration with the Authority will not be made mandatory

for anyone presenting themselves as a PSW in Ontario, then we urge the provincial government to use its hiring powers to make registration a de facto requirement. This could include only hiring registered PSWs to work in long-term care and retirement homes, as well as for Home and Community Care Support Services.

Fees must also be set at a level that does not place an unfair financial burden on already underpaid PSWs. Excessive fees will discourage voluntary registration, and disincentivise new entrants to the profession.

The provincial government must also proactively monitor hiring practices to ensure that the responsibilities now held by PSWs do not shift to other, less qualified roles. We are seeing new positions, such as Resident Aides and PSW Assistants, emerging due to chronic staff shortages. In the event these, or other roles start to take on functions performed by PSWs today, such as direct assistance with activities of daily living, Cabinet must exercise its ability to prescribe new classes of registrants so that the powers of the Authority are not circumvented by simply hiring PSWs by another name.

Finally, we would like to flag section 35 of Schedule Two for the Committee's consideration. We fully support mandatory reporting of suspected sexual abuse, and question why mandatory reporting requirements are not expanded to include other forms of abuse including physical, emotional, and financial.

We would now like to switch to Schedule Four of this Bill. The Alzheimer Society is supportive of protecting the designation of “behavioural analyst”, however would caution against restricting the practice of applied behaviour analysis to only those who hold this designation. Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses are often involved in developing intervention practices for responsive behaviours of people living with dementia. These nurses bring a high level of skill and understanding both around the person as an individual and the disease of dementia.

Protecting the title of “behavioural analyst” must not include preventing RNs and RPNs from exercising the role they fill so well today.

Thank you once again for your time and consideration today. Kyle and I look forward to any questions you may have.