



HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE 2025 AGM

Membership

Sharon Penney Chair, RTANL,
Bill Berryman ACER-CART President, RTO-NSTU
Helen Sukovieff STS,
Peggy Prendergast RTAM
Dolaine Koch ARTA,
Roger Régimbal, Executive Director, ACER-CART

Terms of Reference

ACER-CART seeks to promote the optimal health of retired teachers and seniors. The Health Services Committee shall

- a) provide Members with links to reliable information on personal health and well-being;
- b) advocate for health goals identified in ACER-CART's strategic plans and Member resolutions; and
- c) prepare for the Executive proposals, position papers and appropriate recommendations related to health concerns.

To aid in our discussions and to ensure that we are remaining on the path set out for our committee we reviewed the list of Priorities for ACER-CART.

The work of the Health Services Committee (HSC) started by canvassing the existing committee to determine which members would be returning to the committee and to set an initial meeting date.

The first meeting was held on September 19, 2024, by zoom. Helen Sukovieff resigned her role to focus on her new position as Western Division Representative. She remains active on the committee as a fill when the new person from Saskatchewan is unavailable. Bill Berryman, ACER-CART President remains on the committee as an ex-officio member, while Lise Moran of Prince Edward Island and Beverly Magle of Saskatchewan were welcomed as new members to our committee.

Our second meeting, occurred on Nov 29, 2024, our third was on Feb 25, 2025. Ageing in Place was confirmed as our focus for this year.

To further our commitment to promoting Ageing in Place a review of the five Core Concepts of an Ageing in Place Policy that this committee developed last year was completed. They are listed below.

- 1) *Access to medical care, in a timely manner, in the community.*
- 2) *Adequate home care supports to enable one to live safely and as independently as possible.*
- 3) *Social and emotional support. This is necessary to allow seniors to lead vibrant, fulfilling lives.*

- 4) *Economic stability. Guaranteed income.*
- 5) *Transportation. This is a necessity in rural areas. Transportation is necessary for all aspects of independent living. Transportation to the grocery store, doctor appointments, social activities.*

It was decided that the committee would investigate splitting the list further and select one topic to investigate per meeting. A detailed discussion took place on the refining and further development of the components of Ageing in Place.

It was decided to aid in compiling information from different provinces a chart would be developed by Sharon Penney. The chart was designed so as it could be used as a checklist to determine which services are available in different provinces it included a component on wait times, access to primary care services, vaccinations, and other areas as decided by the committee.

Concerns continue to be made that many seniors are unable to afford the dental insurance premiums and are unable to access the Canadian Dental Plan because of their technical ability to have dental coverage under their existing private insurances. This is an ongoing problem that is being experienced right across our country. Bill Berryman has written letters to the Minister of Health (Mark Holland), Leader of the New Democratic Party (Jagmeet Singh), Leader of the Official Opposition (The Honourable Pierre Poilievre), Dr. Stephen Ellis, Chef du Bloc Québécois (Yves François Blanchet) and the Prime Minister outlining our concerns with the Canadian Dental Plan as it currently exists.

He received a letter in response which indicates the eligibility for the CDCP will be reassessed annually. The president wrote a second letter questioning if these statements are correct who will be doing the reassessment and what is the timeframe for such? He is awaiting a response to his latest missive. In February Bill Berryman, and Lawrence Hrycan met with Chris Galloway,

Friends of Medicare. They discussed Pharmacare and Dental Care. The Friends of Medicare were not aware of the problem our members are incurring, in that they are ineligible for enrolment in the program if they were eligible for dental care insurance at any point in their careers. He was also unaware that in some cases retired teachers were erroneously admitted to the program, received care and are now being requested to repay the program for services received. Mr. Galloway has since written to politicians supporting our concerns about the regulations surrounding the dental health program.

McMaster Optimal Ageing Portal, is a project with which we have had a long-term relationship and which we will continue. The study is centred on Dementia Research. Specifically, the two objectives list below:

1. Optimize the health and well-being of people living with dementia and family/friend caregivers;
2. Increase knowledge of dementia and risk and protective factors.

In November we were tasked with creating a one-page document which could be used by our members to guide their conversations with local politicians when a federal election was called. The initial work on this document was completed through a series of emails to and from members of the Health Services Committee. During discussion it became evident that we must recognize the need for seniors to Age at Home with dignity.

A final document was approved at the November 29 zoom meeting. It was then referred to the Political Advocacy Committee for further discussion. A document titled "Seniors Issues for 2025 Election," was shared with the Provincial Presidents, they in turn were invited to share with their organizations. The document was provided in a camera-ready version to make dissemination easier for publication

purposes. In addition to the Election Booklet the New Mode program was employed during the recent election, a one page Key Questions document was prepared for use in town hall meetings.

We did not forward questions to the political candidates in advance of the election as it is most often political staffers who answer these questions rather than the candidate themselves. ACER-CART recognizes that the Pharmacare plan is phase 1, and we will continue to advocate for expansion to more drug coverage and for coverage of more expensive medications. We were heartened to see that the program will be overseen by scientists and doctors, not businesses, or those with connections to big pharma. Not all provinces have signed onto the Pharmacare program, but it is hoped that they will. As of today's date, three provinces have officially accepted the Health Accord.

The chair signed on to a webinar titled Assessing Strategies for a Long-Term Care Labour Force, hosted by the Canadian Health Coalition, which was an interim report on the state of the Workforce in Long-Term Care. This document outlines many of the problems that we are finding in our local areas. One very common deficiency is the number of home care workers.

Some provinces have initiated programs where tuition for home care worker programs is subsidized or free, moving the program from private colleges to the public college offerings, language education for people working in the home-care field (a large number of front line workers are new to Canada), work-school set-ups so that students of the home-care programs can gain experience, obtain wages and study at the same time. It is hoped that this will alleviate some of the shortages with care workers.

While not specifically outlining ways to combat the deficit in workers, it does provide some guidelines of things to consider when developing a strategy to remediate the worker shortage. We will continue to follow the work of this study as it reaches its conclusions.

Helen Sukovieff, one of our committee members, sits on a committee that is associated with the University of Waterloo. The Waterloo Mental Health in an Ageing Population study is a partnership with CAARE (Canadian Ageing, Action, Research and Education) they share three goals.

- 1) To build and sustain authentic partnerships between researchers, health and social care providers, older adults, caregivers, funders and policymakers interested in working together to advance Ageing and mental health care, treatment and support in Canada;
- 2) To support the co-design and completion of research and action-oriented projects addressing Canadians' priority questions; and,
- 3) To advocate and/or apply for funding to support the priorities and activities of the group.

The CAARE group meets quarterly, with collaboration between meetings designed to help bridge knowledge to practise gaps in ageing and mental health, contributing to a more responsive future health system in Canada. Helen will keep us apprised of the work of this committee as they move forward.

Sharon Penney was part of a delegation from Newfoundland and Labrador who met with the Minister for Seniors Joanne Thompson on Jan. 30, 2025. Several topics were discussed, including the need for a National Seniors Strategy. We indicated that there were a number of strategies happening but lacked an overarching umbrella, a National Seniors 'Strategy would provide a foundation, a framework that would protect the rights of older persons, indicate the priorities and values related to seniors and the important role seniors have played in developing our country and provide guidance on policies affecting seniors.

The Safe Long-Term Care Act was addressed and Minister Thompson indicated that it was currently on hold. It is ready to go but it needs to be debated. Ageing at Home and its associated problems were

discussed, in particular the recognition that we are lacking sufficient caregivers and more assistance needs to be given to family members who are caring for ageing relatives whether they are living in their home or not. Many family members provide care with little or no assistance. Providing assistance to Ageing at Home is more cost-effective than acute care. It was noted that one of the problems rests with the level of income ineligibility. The income levels need to be increased to better ensure those in need receive the assistance they require. The focus needs to be on assisting individuals in staying out of Long-Term Care as long as is possible.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has released the Report on Long-Term Care and Personal Care Homes. The following recommendations were made:

- Further investments in maintenance, renovation and new construction that align with leading practice design standards.
- Improving the quality, choice and flexibility of meals for residents.
- Improving access to meaningful activities and recreational programs.
- Enhancing opportunities and supporting residents to maintain connections in the community.
- Improving access to medical, therapeutic and other health-related services.
- Improving the recruitment and retention of staff.
- Enhancing staff training and education.

We will continue to monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

We made formal reports at all Directors' Meetings Political Advocacy Meetings and Executive Meetings.

Motions for the AGM

That ACER-CART actively advocate for the reinstatement of the position of Minister for Seniors as a full Cabinet appointment.

That ACER-CART strongly encourages Members to actively advocate for the reinstatement of the position of Minister for Seniors as a full Cabinet appointment.

Report provided by
Sharon Penney
Chair HSC.