

# Long-term, home care key to helping seniors

**The Ottawa Citizen**

Published: Wednesday, March 05, 2008

Re: Hospital bed crunch is 'critical,' March 3.

This Citizen article draws attention to a very important health-care issue, providing detailed analysis from an overcrowded hospital perspective. The people affected by this crunch are not only those whose surgeries are delayed, but older people, who are often vulnerable and frail.

Tom Closson, the new president of the Ontario Hospital Association, gives the figure of 2,800 hospital beds -- or 18 per cent of all beds in the province -- as being occupied by patients who can't find long-term care beds in proper facilities or support services to remain at home.

The challenge in Ontario now is to provide more affordable supportive housing for seniors, and community support services in their own homes. A hot meal, transportation to needed appointments, homemaking services and visits from a co-ordinator or nurse to monitor their health care and provide reassurance, are keeping many seniors in their own homes.

When they have these supports, they are less likely to visit emergency departments. Or if they do, they can be assisted to return home with needed supports.

Ontario has a three-year plan, Aging at Home, providing funds to develop some of these initiatives, many of which will offer a real capability to help seniors.

Not only is it more cost-effective to keep seniors at home, it is what seniors want. There are real people living real lives who are being affected. The "hospital bed crunch" is having far more than just an impact on balance sheets.

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