

Health and safety of residents always a priority

There are nearly 5,000 people living in nursing homes across New Brunswick. These are our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, husbands and wives. They deserve nothing but the best care and treatment, which is what we at the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes always have as our top priority. This has become even more important during the pandemic, which has affected our seniors so much.

This week, the New Brunswick Nurses Union released a report on nursing homes in the province. While it identifies areas of shared concern and advocacy – things we've consistently brought forward as an association, such as hours of care, recruitment and retention, and the increased needs of residents—we are troubled by some aspects, including its accuracy and overall tone.

As a first principle, the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes believes that change must be driven by evidence and verifiable facts. This report cobbles together evidence and data from various provinces, the United States, and past reports from New Brunswick to draw conclusions about what to do here.

It also disparages nursing homes on thin evidence, by referencing reports from other provinces, such as Ontario and British Columbia. It is not enough to say something is happening in another province, so therefore it must be happening here too.

There are many aspects to the nursing home model in New Brunswick that is unique in Canada and has actually served as a strength. We have the highest mix of Registered Nurses in Canada, we have strong connections with our local community, and we are licensed under the Department of Social Development.

This work of meeting residents needs, advocating for positive change and planning for the future is simply too important to rely on findings from other places. We are a unique place, and the best approach for us is one that's made in New Brunswick and grounded in findings specific to our province.

We are concerned by the Union's assertion that there have been 'constant calls from nursing homes themselves to ease back on regulations'. This is simply not the case. Nursing homes in New Brunswick are highly regulated and monitored by government, as they should be. We accept that level of scrutiny and oversight – and always have.

In fact, New Brunswick homes have the most advanced resident assessment information system in Canada, with our information now submitted to the Canadian Institute for Health Information – the federal body tasked with collecting data and using it to accelerate improvements in different aspects of health care and population health across the country.

We have also developed a significant recruitment and retention strategy, with the support of government and labour. We have seen success and will continue to work for system improvements.

None of this is to suggest that there aren't challenges. There are, and they must be fixed. Much work has been done already to understand where improvements are needed, and we are willing to work to achieve these in a constructive and collaborative way. A lengthy inquiry will tell us what we already know, delaying us from finding consensus and a way forward on real, practical solutions that will lead to better care for our residents.

To the residents and families of our homes: we care deeply about your health and well-being. That's why we are in this business in the first place. We know that things haven't been easy, and that improvements can be made, but know that you are the reason we work so hard every day. We hope that this report does not cause unneeded stress and anxiety during what has already been a very hard year.

Finally, we want to emphasize the respect and admiration we have for all the management teams and front-line staff. Registered Nurses that work in nursing homes have an important leadership role. Nursing homes in NB have not had COVID 19 outbreaks over the last eight months, and the clinical leadership from RNs has been an important factor in that, along with the tremendous efforts of all employees. The pandemic has been the most difficult season ever faced in long term care. Employees of long term care should only feel supported for outstanding efforts at this time.

Jodi Hall

is the Executive Director at the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes Inc.