

Ontario to invest \$700 million in Aging at Home program

Toronto - The Ontario government is launching an Aging at Home Strategy that will transform community health-care services so that seniors can live healthy, independent lives in their own homes, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced.

According to the government, a total investment of \$702 million will be made in the Aging at Home Strategy. The program will include a \$40 million increase in funding for assistive devices.

"Our goal is to open a whole world of opportunity for seniors that will offer new lifestyle choices that are reflective of how Ontario's seniors truly want to live," said Smitherman. "As our population ages, we need to look for innovative solutions that are more responsive to their needs and allow seniors to continue to live in comfort and with respect in their own homes, ideally for the rest of their days."

More than 20 percent of the Aging at Home funding is earmarked for innovative approaches to service such as culturally sensitive options and community economic development approaches for service delivery that will increase equity and access for marginalized and at risk seniors, and employ community members (cultural, linguistic, etc.) who can identify and connect with seniors, and build capacity for members of the community to help each other.

These approaches may also include funding to support non-traditional partnerships and new preventive and wellness services. For example, groups and individuals who deliver care informally, such as friendly home visits/telephone calls and transportation to appointments.

The historic new funding model used to allocate funding to Ontario's 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) is based on the estimated health needs of the people in each LHIN and their associated costs.

Estimates of health needs are based on each individual's age, diagnosis, and rural and socio-economic status. The needs of each LHIN's population in 2010 have been forecasted, based on projections of population growth and aging, and a funding allocation has been made to each LHIN.

As part of the three-year \$700 million strategy, Ontario's LHINs will lead the exciting initiative, which will impact the way services are delivered and help provide more equitable access to the health-care by matching the needs of the local senior population with the appropriate support services.

These services could include enhanced home care and community support services like meals, transportation, shopping, snow shoveling, friendly home calling, adult day programs, homemaking services and caregiver supports.

"The Ontario Community Support Association and our members are pleased that this government recognizes the value of community support services and assisted living in supportive housing programs that keep people healthy at home where they want to be. Evidence shows that these services reduce seniors and persons with disabilities use of hospitals, ERs and prevent premature institutionalization - which is what this system desperately needs," said Susan Thorning, CEO of the Ontario Community Support Association.

The Aging at Home Strategy will offer new possibilities for Ontario's culturally diverse populations and other community-level organizations - like service clubs and groups of seniors - to help serve themselves, the government said.

It will make available supports to help keep seniors healthy and active. Innovative thinking combined with healthcare solutions that encourage prevention and health promotion will play a large role in the LHIN's plans to support Ontario's seniors.

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