

## Aging at Home Strategy - Background

The Aging At Home strategy is a provincial initiative, developed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and announced in August 2007. The 3 year strategy is aimed at meeting the health and wellness needs of seniors to enable them to continue to live at home independently. It is also aimed at relieving the reliance on hospitals and long-term care (LTC) homes. The North West LHIN was allocated around \$6.5-million to invest in this initiative in the region over the three years.

While there are concerns about the capacity of the health system to support the increasing aging population, there is also a growing appreciation of the desire of most seniors to live independently and with dignity in their own homes and communities. The senior population in Ontario is predicted to double in the next 16 years, thereby increasing reliance on the health care system, given the increased health services required later in life.

The majority of seniors are able to live independently, managing their day-to-day activities. When help is required, approximately 80% of their care is likely to be provided by relatives, friends and volunteers. With the economic decline in the North West LHIN region and subsequent out-migration of people to find employment, communities are challenged to sustain the informal caregivers and health human resources required to support seniors.

A recent study *Setting the Balance of Care in Northwestern Ontario* by Dr. Paul Williams and Kerry Kukuski (2008, University of Toronto) found that almost half of those on the waitlist for LTC in the North West LHIN could age safely and cost effectively at home through community support services. The challenge is these supports are either not available or are limited throughout the region.

The Aging at Home strategy has three main objectives:

1. Provide seniors with a continuum of supports that will enable them to stay healthy and live with independence and dignity in their homes.
2. Provide a comprehensive plan for an integrated continuum of care that includes community support services, home care, supportive housing, long-term care home beds and end-of-life care.
3. Offer preventive supports to sustain the healthiest population of seniors possible.

In 2009/2010 the Ministry further defined the parameters for Year 3 of the Aging at Home strategy to focus on reducing Emergency Department (ED) wait times and addressing Alternate Level of Care (ALC) pressure provincially.

In accordance with MOHLTC guidelines, the North West LHIN's investments have been allocated to address four key priority areas:

- Additional Temporary Care Bed Capacity
- Admission Avoidance/Timely Discharge Initiatives
- Enhanced Home Care
- Outreach Teams

In our June LHINfo Minutes, we will be discussing each priority, outlining some of the initiatives we have funded to address each priority and the outcomes of those projects.