

Saskatchewan's Story

Saskatchewan's COVID-19 Community Archive was created to collect diverse stories of people across our province who lived through the pandemic. Long-term care facilities became hot spots for measuring the intensity of the pandemic and these facilities suffered some of the most acute outbreaks, leading to outright pandemic disasters. As you reflect on the chairs here, we hope you will also share your experiences with long-term care during the pandemic. We want to hear from elders, staff, friends and family.

In the opening months of the pandemic, news stories were dominated by frightening outbreaks in long-term care homes across BC, Ontario, and Quebec. We now know that first wave pandemic deaths in Canada's care homes were 50% higher than countries like Italy, Spain, the U.K. and United States. Seeing examples from other regions, the Saskatchewan Health Authority alerted long-term care providers in the province to be vigilant to the risk of an outbreak and initially mitigated the spread of COVID with a robust lockdown, social distancing, and masking.

COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed over the summer months of 2020 as the provincial government pushed to re-open the economy and were only slowly re-instated in October and November when daily infections surged to unprecedented levels. By November 19, 2020, COVID-19 cases had nearly tripled to 5,651 and there had been 32 deaths in the province. The next day, Saskatchewan declared its first major outbreak at a long-term care facility —Extendicare Parkside— an aging, low-rise complex nestled in a quiet Regina neighbourhood. During the two-month outbreak, 194 of the 198 residents had contracted COVID-19 and 132 staff were infected. When the outbreak finally ended, 39 people from Parkside had died from COVID-19.



Parkside was one of only five for-profit long-term care homes in Saskatchewan, all run by Extendicare Inc. That arrangement ended in October 2022, when the Saskatchewan Health Authority officially took control of all five locations following the disaster that unfolded at Parkside between November 2020 and January 2021.

The crisis at Extendicare Parkside was the most serious outbreak in the province, but significant outbreaks also occurred in dozens of other homes, most notably Santa Maria Senior Citizen's Home (Regina), Luther Special Care Home (Saskatoon), and Saskatchewan's largest long-term care home, Pioneer Village (Regina). Many of these facilities had a history of previous complaints including infrastructure issues, assault of residents, and serious neglect. While the findings detailed in *Caring in Crisis* were drawn from a 2021 provincial inquiry specific to Parkside and Extendicare, they highlight serious flaws in the funding and management of long-term care across the province that predate the pandemic.

The Parkside outbreak drew public attention to the plight of elders, staff, and families. We heard poignant stories from overworked nurses, families who said goodbye forever to their loved ones over Facetime, elders who suffered, unable to access the level of care they needed during arduous lockdowns. How can we change the system to make sure this does not happen again?