

# Manitoba's Story

While British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario experienced large outbreaks in congregate settings with tragic consequences for residents during the first wave, Manitoba's long-term care situation seemed a success. Community transmission remained low for the first several months of the pandemic in Manitoba and no deaths occurred in any Manitoba Personal Care Homes (PCHs) until the end of summer in 2020. Unfortunately, this early "success" perhaps engendered wishful thinking that in Manitoba residents of PCHs would be relatively unscathed due to restricted visiting and a few other policy changes. However, as community transmission rose precipitously after a summer of reopening, the second wave (fall of 2020 and the winter of 2021) saw tragic situations unfold in many PCHs.

The first worrying signs regarding PCHs occurred in Bethesda Place in Steinbach, in August 2020. Once an outbreak was declared resident and staff cases as well as resident deaths followed. Parkview Place (which Revera ultimately shuttered in 2022) alarmed many in Winnipeg when case numbers escalated and resident deaths started to occur. Residents like Clifford Nelson felt trapped and helpless. It seemed like insufficient protection measures were in place to deal with an airborne virus, and medical care was lacking. Then the public learned that a physician had not entered the facility until almost two months after the outbreak had begun.

The situation was similar in many PCHs during the fall of 2020. Facilities became overwhelmed due to staff being away ill. In one facility the CEO came in on the weekends to wash the laundry, as almost all the staff were sick. Alarm bells were also rung on social media by a paramedic whistleblower regarding the situation at Maples PCH,



another Revera facility. Again, staff illness and shortages meant residents were dehydrated and unfed, and the paramedics discovered more than one deceased resident who had died hours before they were found.

After loud outcries from the public and the facilities themselves, the Red Cross and paramedics began assisting with care, and severe measures were finally put in place to limit community transmission. Unfortunately, these measures occurred too late and hundreds of residents of Manitoba PCHs died in the fall of 2020 and the early winter of 2021.

Eventually, an independent reviewer, Dr. Lynn Stevenson, would assess what happened, particularly at the Maples PCH and make recommendations for the entire system in Manitoba that is responsible for PCHs. Amongst the many recommendations are the following:

- “Ensure that LTC is an integral part of the continuum of care in the health care system
- Review funding for PCHs to ensure that staffing levels and services provided are appropriate to the complexity of current and future residents
- Given the impact of an outbreak of this magnitude, work must be done to rebuild trust with families. Consideration must also be given to the staff who have been negatively impacted by the experience and the amount of media scrutiny. This will require a multifaceted and ongoing approach to ensure healing and sustainability.”