

Mental Health in Long-Term Care

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Mental health issues in long-term care are common. This pamphlet talks about how to make life easier for you and your family member in long-term care.



“Long-term care homes” are homes for older adults who need nursing care and other help every day. Long-term care homes are sometimes called “nursing homes,” or “personal care homes.”

Moving to long-term care

Moving into a long-term care home can be hard for you and for your family. It may bring up feelings of anger, fear, guilt, relief or other mixed emotions. It is ok to talk about these feelings.

Try to make the move as positive as possible. Bring personal things that have meaning to your new home – family pictures, a favourite chair or blanket. It might take time to adjust and feel comfortable. Family members should plan regular visits. With time and the right support, it will get better.

Dementia

Dementia affects the way a person thinks, feels and behaves. It also affects memory. Dementia usually progresses slowly over months and years. Alzheimer's disease is one kind of dementia.

Sometimes dementia can cause a person to say and do challenging things. People might be aggressive or anxious; they may wander away or say hurtful things.

It is important for caregivers to notice changes in behaviour and to try to find out what is causing those changes. Many of these issues can be treated by making changes to the way that care is being given. Social supports help best with some behaviours like wandering, trying to leave the building or loudness. If a difficult behaviour is not getting better, medicine might help. Discuss the benefits and risks with the staff and doctor.



Depression

Spending weeks or months feeling sad, hopeless or bored with things that you would normally enjoy.

Depression is NOT a normal part of aging. With treatment and support it can get better.

Depression is common in long-term care homes. Residents who have dementia sometimes develop depression too. Staff should look for signs of depression at the time of the move and every few months after that. Check-ins should also happen after times of change like the death of a loved one, or a change in what a resident is able to do.

Preventing depression

Here are some ways that you and your family can help prevent depression, even if you have dementia:

- Having regular visits from family, friends, volunteers or a spiritual leader.
- Being supported to do enjoyable things (like baking, sewing, singing, painting or talking about the news).
- Watching videos or looking at photos of happy times with family.
- Getting exercise (for example, chair exercises, walking programs or gardening).
- Talking about family, work and happy memories.
- Listening to music.

People change over time so you might need to try new things to help fight depression. A family member might be able to help you choose activities that meet your needs and wishes.

Treating depression

There are many ways to treat depression and not all include medicines. Using different types of treatments usually gives better results.

Health and social supports

Keeping yourself engaged and active can help fight depression. Even small changes can boost mood. Joining support groups or doing activities in the home, exercising and eating well can help.

Counselling and therapy

Many people find it helpful to talk about their feelings. A counsellor can help people find ways to feel better. Ask the Director of Care in your home for information about counselling.

Medication

If needed, a doctor will prescribe medicine (antidepressants) to treat depression. Many options are available.

How can long-term care homes help?



It is important to be aware of problems or changes in your mood, thinking and behaviour while in long-term care. These could be signs that something is wrong. If there is a problem, staff at the home can help you and your family.

To take care of the mental health of all residents, long-term care homes should:

- Give care and support that meets your needs.
- Give support in ways that work for you.
- Focus on the things that you are good at and on what you can do.
- Work with families to make sure you get the best care possible.
- Plan for the physical, mental, social and spiritual needs of all residents.
- Train staff on the best ways to provide care, including mental health care.

How can I help my relative in long-term care?

Family should be an important partner in the care of their loved ones. You know your family member the best. You understand their needs.

Here are some ways that you can help a family member who is in long-term care:

- Visit often and encourage other family and friends to visit too. Even a 15-minute visit can help.
- Learn about the home and about the care your relative will receive.
- Get to know the staff and let them know if you notice any changes in your loved one.
- Ask questions. Share ideas about things that might help. Go to the annual care review and ask the home for a care review if you have concerns about new problems.



- Ask about the Family Council at the home. Councils give family members a chance to work with staff to improve the care for all residents.
- Tell staff about your loved one's routines and wishes (the form in this pamphlet might help).
- Tell staff about any changes in the family. Share news of weddings, births, deaths or illnesses of a family member or friend.

As a family member, don't forget to care for yourself. It is one of the most important things that you can do. When you are well, your loved one will benefit too!

Organization contacts

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH)

www.ccsmh.ca

Alzheimer Society of Canada

www.alzheimer.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

www.cmha.ca

Government of Canada Seniors Website

www.seniors.gc.ca

List of Provincial Long-Term Care Associations

<http://caltc.ca/provincial.html>

Care plan

Use this care plan to share information with staff about your loved one in long-term care. Knowing about a resident's routines and what they like and don't like can improve the care that is given. This is especially important for residents who have trouble talking or being understood.

Information about my family member:

Name:

Name(s) of close family member(s):

Marital status:

Name of spouse:

Names of children (if any):

Work history:

Likes and dislikes:

Food

Music

Activities (Hobbies/Interests)

Television programs

Movies

Other

Describe his or her daily routines:

(housekeeping, meal preparation,
bathing, clothing preferences, etc.)

What is important to him or her?

What is important to you?

This brochure is adapted from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH) *National Guidelines for Seniors' Mental Health: The Assessment and Treatment of Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Care Homes (Focus on Mood and Behaviour Issues)*.

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Disclaimer: This brochure is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended to be interpreted or used as a standard of medical practice.



Canadian Coalition for
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Coalition Canadienne pour la Santé
Mentale des Personnes Âgées