

News Release

December 10, 2008

Health Quality Council of Alberta announces findings of its first provincial Long Term Care Resident and Family Experience Survey

(Calgary, AB) – The Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) today released the results of its first survey examining the experience of long term care residents and their families across Alberta. Overall, 50% of those residents surveyed rated the care they get from nursing home staff as 9 or 10 out of 10. Overall, nearly half of the family members surveyed (45%) also rated the care at the nursing home as 9 or 10 out of 10. In addition, the survey found that family members rated smaller nursing homes (those with fewer than 100 beds) more positively than large facilities.

On releasing the survey results, Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Cowell said, “This is the first provincial survey of its kind undertaken in Alberta and it establishes a baseline for measuring the experience of long term care residents and their families. The results provide Alberta Health Services, long term care operators and management, direct care providers, health professionals and Alberta Health and Wellness with the information they need to improve the quality of resident care and services as well as aspects of residents’ quality of life.”

Residents and family members associated with over 170 long term care facilities across Alberta participated in the surveys. For the resident survey, 3,415 face-to-face interviews were conducted, covering about 25% of Alberta’s long term care residents. Survey results represent the views of cognitively able residents only. As a consequence, facility sample sizes for the resident survey are often much smaller than for the family survey.

For family members, survey packages were mailed to 11,311 family members (or the most involved person) from October 2007 to January 2008. Overall, 7,943 surveys were completed for a response rate of 70.2%. This high response resulted in a very low margin of error $\pm 1.1\%$.

Highlights of the key findings follow:

RESIDENT SURVEY

*Most questions in the resident survey asked respondents to answer on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is the worst possible and 10 is the best possible. For reporting purposes, a resident response of 9 to 10 is reported as a rating of excellent, 7 to 8 as average and 0 to 6 as poor. These ratings reflect the distribution of responses in Alberta.

Overall care rating

- 50% of those residents surveyed rated the care they get from nursing home staff as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent). 32% rated the care as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) and 18% rated the care as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).
- When asked how they would rate the nursing home on a scale of 0 to 10, 52% rated it as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent), 30% rated it as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) and 18% rated it as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).
- Most residents (89%) said they would definitely (51%) or probably (38%) recommend the nursing home to others and 86% said they received the care they needed at the nursing home.



Key findings – The survey found that from the residents’ perspective, items related to communication and respect had the strongest relationship to the overall care rating. This included how respectful staff were to residents, how well staff listened and how well they explained things to residents. Items related specifically to resident care (e.g., pain control, staff responsiveness and privacy) and the nursing home environment (e.g., food, cleanliness, safety and security) were also important.

- 51% of residents rated the respectfulness of staff as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent), 31% rated it as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) while 18% rated it as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).
- 42% of residents rated the ability of staff to explain things in a way that is easy to understand as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent), 32% rated it as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) while 26% rated it as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).
- 90% of residents reported that staff ensured they had enough personal privacy when dressing, showering or bathing and 90% said they received the help they needed to stay clean.
- 23% of residents rated the food at their nursing home as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent), 33% rated it as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) and 44% rated it as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).
- 28% of residents rated how quickly staff came when they call for help as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent), 33% rated staff responsiveness as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) and 38% rated it as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).

Differences between facilities with higher than average overall care ratings (upper quartile* facilities) and those with lower care ratings (lower quartile facilities)

- Staff from upper quartile facilities were perceived as more respectful and better listeners than staff from lower quartile facilities.
- Nearly every attribute related to the nursing home environment (food; mealtime enjoyment; nursing home temperature; nursing home cleanliness; feelings of safety and security; quietness at night; noise during the day; privacy with visitors) received significantly better ratings from residents in upper quartile facilities than those in the lower quartile ones.
- Residents from upper quartile facilities rated the care they received from staff in particular and the nursing home in general higher than residents from lower quartile facilities.

FAMILY MEMBER SURVEY

Overall care rating

- 45% of respondents rated the care at the nursing home as 9 or 10 out of 10 (excellent). 41% rated the care as 7 or 8 out of 10 (average) and 14% rated the care as 0 to 6 out of 10 (poor).
- 92% of those surveyed would definitely (54%) or probably (38%) recommend the nursing home where their family member is living to others who need nursing home care.

Key findings - The survey found what had the strongest relationship to family members’ overall care ratings were items related to nursing home staffing, care of residents’ belongings and nursing home environment.

- 13% of those surveyed said there were always enough nurses or aides in the nursing home. 41% said there were usually enough and 19% said there were never enough.

*Quartiles are determined by listing the long term care facilities with sufficient sample size by their overall care rating from highest to lowest. The list is then divided into roughly 4 equal groups called quartiles.

- 67% of respondents believed nurses/aides always treated residents with courtesy and respect in the last 6 months.
- 38% of respondents said the resident always looked and smelled clean while 51% said this was usually the situation.
- 49% said the resident's room always looked and smelled clean while 42% said this was usually the case.
- 33% reported residents' personal medical belongings were damaged or lost in the last 6 months either once or two or more times.

Differences between facilities with higher than average overall care ratings (upper quartile facilities) and those with lower care ratings (lower quartile facilities)

- Upper quartile facilities received an overall care rating of 9.1 out of 10 from respondents compared to 7.1 for the lower quartile facilities.
- Upper quartile facility respondents felt there were always or usually enough nurses/aides compared to lower quartile facility respondents. They were also more likely to find a nurse/aide when they wanted one.
- Residents' rooms in upper quartile facilities were more likely to always or usually look and smell clean compared to lower quartile facilities.

“Over the next few weeks, we will be meeting with the long term care facility participants as well as other stakeholder groups to discuss the findings,” says Cowell. “The survey results clearly suggest that the areas of staffing, nursing home environment and care and communication would benefit from further strategy development and the sharing of best practices.”

Specifically, from the perspective of family members and residents, the following actions could be considered:

Staffing – improving the number and availability of long term care staff and improving communication and respect between staff and residents.

Environment - ensuring the cleanliness of residents, their personal space and the public areas in nursing homes; focusing on the care and security of residents' personal belongings; improving the food and residents' enjoyment of mealtimes; making nursing home temperatures more comfortable; and creating environments similar to those found in smaller nursing homes.

Care – improving the effectiveness of medication for, and how well staff help, those residents with pain; improving staff responsiveness when residents call for help; and ensuring that staff are gentle when they help residents with personal care activities.

As an independent organization legislated under the *Regional Health Authorities Act*, the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) gathers and analyzes information and collaborates with Alberta Health Services, professions and government to translate that knowledge into practical improvements to the quality and safety of the health care Albertans receive.

The provincial technical reports are available at www.hqca.ca.

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