



Can the Pandemic Lead to a Systemic Fix?

As the modern world lives through unprecedented times with COVID-19, we are all learning about dealing with adjustments to how we live, work and relate like never before.

Through 2018-19, SSM (Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism) met with many people and asked them to identify key concerns that if addressed, would make their lives more comfortable and productive. These concerns were validated by a follow-up survey that reinforced the research findings.

Through the survey, SSM also learned about the substantial contribution that older adults continue to make to the fabric of Saskatchewan. Through volunteering, caregiving and continuing in the labour force, the “Saskatchewan Advantage” is estimated to be contributing close to \$1 billion in economic activity to the province.

With the arrival of COVID-19, all of our worlds have been turned upside down. All the concerns raised through the research have been highlighted and reinforced in a dramatic way. Issues about health care, safety, financial security and acceptable housing are now squarely in the headlights of Canadians.

Families in Saskatchewan that have been dealing with older adults in care facilities have been living with the issues now reaching the public in more tragic ways. The cracks in the system were there if anyone chose to look with a critical eye. Commentary about low wages, caregiver turnover and burnout, uneven caregiving bordering on older adult abuse have generally been noted and ignored. With the carnage of COVID-19, there is an opportunity to turn the page and reset the dial on how older adults are cared for in the months and years ahead. Levels of support for older adults at all stages along the continuum of care – from homecare in their homes, through assisted living, to long term care - need to be enhanced to go beyond minimum support to the provision of quality of life.

Just adjusting the dials to quiet the swell of negative feedback does little to respond to the systemic issues that brought us to this point. What’s really needed is a more integrated planning initiative among government and community leaders in Saskatchewan. SSM and its member organizations (over 100,000 voices) are ready to participate in this planning Initiative. Together we all can work through longer term responses that address both immediate problems and the broader direction of how older adults will be honoured, celebrated, respected, cared for and enabled to provide their continuing contributions to life in Saskatchewan.