

# 'We are defeated' say long-term care staff in P.E.I.

Care workers on the Island continue to struggle with understaffing crisis, hears committee

Alison Jenkins · Journalist | Posted: 17 hours ago | Updated: 4 hours ago | June 8, 2022 Saltwire



Vice-president Joanne Chisholm, left, and president Barbara Brookins from the P.E.I. Nurses' Union address the burnout nurses in long-term care are feeling at the standing committee on health and social development at the Coles Building in Charlottetown June 8. - Alison Jenkins

CHARLOTTETOWN, P.E.I. — Some long-term care homes in P.E.I. are so understaffed that residents don't leave their beds for days, union workers told the legislative standing committee on health and social development on June 7.

Donna Gormley, Canadian Union of Public Employees P.E.I. shop steward for workers at the Atlantic Baptist Nursing and Group Homes, made the statement in response to a question from Charlottetown-Victoria Park MLA Karla Bernard about minimum standard of care rules.

During an extreme staff shortage, Gormley said, residents are getting the essentials like medications, meals and a wash. However, the residents don't get to leave their beds unless they can get around by themselves.

“There’s been residents who haven’t had a bath for four weeks. They’re washed every day, but they haven’t had a bath. They don’t have that pleasure of soaking in a tub. So, it’s destitute,” said Gormley.

Other activities to get left aside when staffing is short are dining room meals and general social interactions, but it’s not because staff lack caring or a desire to do more, said Gormley.

“They do their best, they do their utmost best.”



Donna Gormley, left, and Leonard Gallant from the Canadian Union of Public Employees told the standing committee on health and social development on June 8 about the extreme staffing shortages their members are reporting to them. - Alison Jenkins - Alison Jenkins • The Guardian

The standing committee invited representatives from the long-term care sector to speak about current issues and the impact of COVID-19 on the facilities.

Barbara Brookins and Joanne Chisholm of the P.E.I. Nurse’s Union said the pressure on registered nurses (RNs) has increased under rules that allow the homes to run with just one RN on site.

“Everybody’s tired, but we are defeated,” said Chisholm.

Brookins said a 2021 survey revealed nurses felt burnt out; there was an increase in sick days; nurses weren’t able to take time for education or vacations; and turnover is high.

For example, Colville Manor employs 1.6 nurses when requirements are for five. Those nurses are asked not only to work understaffed at Colville Manor, but to fill in for other homes as well, said Brookins.

“We are placing our members at an ethical position all the time, where they know it’s not appropriate, but no one’s listening to them,” said Brookins. “It’s not a business, it’s health care.”



Karen Jackson, president of the P.E.I. Union of Public Sector Employees speaks to the standing committee on health and social development at the Coles Building in Charlottetown June 8. - Alison Jenkins - Alison Jenkins • The Guardian

Also speaking at the meeting was Union of Public Sector Employees president Karen Jackson, who said she’s been sounding the alarm about understaffing for the last six years. Her union represents licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and residential care workers (RCWs).

"Many experienced caregivers are leaving the long-term care sector because they are (no longer) accepting being underpaid, overworked and under-appreciated," said Jackson. "At times they also feel unable to provide adequate care for their residents to ensure the resident’s dignity and safety."

Additionally a recent survey showed that 99 per cent of respondents said they were subjected to violence in the workplace.

“Workers do not feel safe and they need to feel supported,” said Jackson. “They are sometimes made to feel that being attacked at work is their fault.”

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