

Province moving into two-tier home care system: Opposition

Support services under review: Health minister

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CORNER BROOK Opposition leaders are concerned about the state of the home care services in this province, while government says it's boosting contributions and reviewing the overall program.

The subject has received much attention after *The Western Star* ran an article on the Victorian Order of Nurses' decision to stop providing home support services to government-funded clients. Government doesn't pay an sufficient subsidy, according to the organization, and the not-for-profit group is losing a substantial amount of money because of it.

Yvonne Jones, Liberal Opposition leader, said people are disappointed it has come to this, when government has had ample time to find a resolve. She said there are people in the province who are unable to access home care and now more people will not be able to afford the service.

"To me, we are allowing this to move into a two-tier system," Jones told *The Western Star*. "When you have home care, and people who have money can access it and those dependent on the public purse to be able to subsidize their service cannot, to me that is not the province we want to be living in."

"Health care should be accessible to all people within reason and moving towards a two-tier system is going to leave a lot of people out in the cold."

Jones said the contributions of the VON have not gone unnoticed, and that the contributions the government speak of are not sufficient.

"Look at the relatively small subsidy it is costing government to have VON take care of these patients as opposed to what it would be costing government had they had to them in a long-term care facility or in acute care facilities within our hospital system," she said. "The cost would be far greater and I would encourage government to, wherever possible, move people out of our hospitals and into

independent living arrangements because it will cost us far less as a government and as a taxpayer to provide people with the assistance to live independently than to have them hospitalized or institutionalized."

Meanwhile, Lorraine Michael, leader of the NDP party, said the problem is an indication of the need for the home care program to become public, and universal and accessible to everybody, the same as other aspects of health care.

"It is an essential part of health care and should be public," she said. "It should also be needs based. People shouldn't have to prove, based on economics, why they need it. It should be that, if they need home care, they get it."

She also said status quo leads to a two-tier system and that government has had plenty of time to find a solution. She said government is dragging its heels on the review of long term care and community supports services.

Meanwhile, Health and Community Services Minister Ross Wiseman, issued *The Star* a prepared statement when he wasn't available for an interview.

"As a government, we recognize the important role home support workers play in our communities and in the health and community services system," he said. "This is reflected in the many increases we have provided in the home care subsidy rate. We have provided five rate increases in the last three years for home support workers in this province. Since we have formed government, the annual budget for the home support program has grown by \$36.7 million in new funding."

The minister said home support services are part of the active review.

"This is a substantial piece of work and we have a significant portion of it completed," he said. "In the near future, I expect we'll be prepared to speak to some of the changes we'll see in different areas of the long term care and community supports services system as a result of this review."



Yvonne Jones



Lorraine Michael