

Understanding Change in Home Care Pathways Over Time

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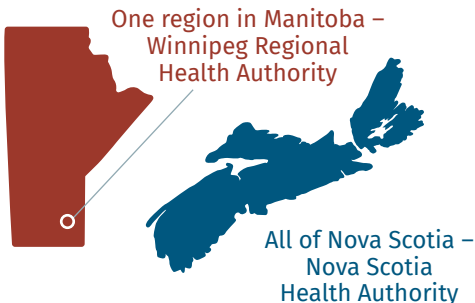


THE SYNOPSIS

Home care clients' experience with services and their own personal wellbeing can change over time. Using longitudinal qualitative inquiry in two Canadian jurisdictions, this paper discusses how factors such as everyday disruptions, pandemic-related disruptions and systemic policies shape client pathways. The findings call for more person-centred, equitable approaches to home care.

HOW WE DID IT

Researchers interviewed
53 PARTICIPANTS
 in two Canadian Regions



12 configurations
 of **PARTICIPANTS**
 followed over three time points
 (2019 – 2021)
 spanning the early COVID-19 pandemic



PUBLICLY-FUNDED

non-medical home support, and include the case/care coordinators (CCs), support workers, and where applicable, family carers and private agency supervisors.

STUDY SAMPLE

136
INTERVIEWS

Clients, family/friend carers, coordinators, home care workers, and supervisors were asked about the clients' sources of unpaid help.

– AND –

Interview field notes and minutes from team discussions contributed to the analysis.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

- Disruption is common: Clients faced cancellations, shifting schedules, and rotating workers.
- COVID compounded risk: Service pauses, shortened visits, and staffing shortages hit hardest for those without family supports.
- Wellbeing is complex: Clients sometimes improved in one area (mobility) while declining in others (mental health, energy).
- Invisible needs: Systems responded most to clear physical decline, but less to social isolation, caregiver burnout, or mental health.
- Equity gaps: Income, housing, and social networks buffered some clients; others experienced disproportionate impacts.



THE IMPACT

- 1 Service disruptions led to frustration, anxiety, and loss of control.
- 2 Health declines (e.g., pressure sores, reduced mobility) were linked to inconsistent care.
- 3 Family carers reported burnout and strained relationships with providers.



ABOUT

The Home Care Pathways Project Overview

Understanding clients' journeys through provincial home care systems is critical to providing good quality care. "How approaches to care shape the pathways of older adult home care clients" (or "Home Care Pathways") is an interdisciplinary research project being conducted in Nova Scotia and Manitoba. The project draws on different methods and focuses on specific timeframes, in this article's case the approach we considered was around care constellations. The Project's goal is to understand how approaches to care shape client pathways of older adult home care clients with chronic and long-term conditions through the home care systems in the two provinces.

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Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Caring for Health

Office régional de la santé de Winnipeg
À l'écoute de notre santé



Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

"Home care is not a guaranteed service... that assumes you've got back-ups. And myself, because I am alone here without family support, I don't have the kind of backups that people with family have."

"I wish they'd be more prompt on [letting me know] if they can't come, or they're going to substitute someone. You could have gone out for the afternoon and suddenly, it looks like a no-go because there's a home care worker at your door...it definitely disrupts my activities."

THE TAKEAWAY

Home care trajectories are dynamic and inequitable, shaped by policy, staffing, and personal resources. To support aging in place:

Shift toward person-centred care that values the full spectrum of wellbeing.

Build equity into home care planning and funding decisions.

Improve scheduling stability and worker continuity to protect daily routines and dignity.

Replace assumptions of inevitable decline with approaches that recognize clients' diverse trajectories.



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