

## Flexibility as a Relational Phenomenon is Positive Step

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### THE SYNOPSIS

Analysis provides insight into the impacts of relationship-building and interactions between non-clinical home care service providers (i.e. personal care, housekeeping, meal prep, etc.) and recipients – and how building flexibility into policies, protocols and institutional practice can better support client-centred care and provide more choice in care pathways over time. Results from this article can inform current and future policy development to better acknowledge and support the undervalued role of flexibility in approach, and in client relationship building.

*“Flexibility, and its implications for client-centred care, may be particularly important when we consider non-clinical goals of home care for older adults - for instance, to adapt to circumstances to preserve wellbeing in the home. Our findings provide a rich, contextualized understanding about flexibility in the allocation and receipt of non-clinical home care, which can provide a base for improving such services through relational approaches.”*

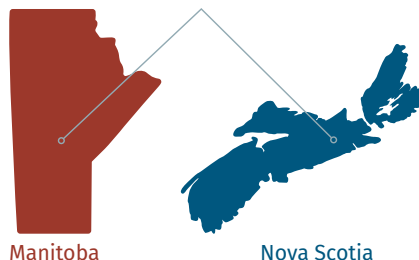
### HOW WE DID IT

Interview data gathered from

**46**

**PARTICIPANTS**

in two Canadian Regions



Manitoba

Nova Scotia

**12** configurations  
of **PARTICIPANTS**  
centre around older  
adults receiving



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

### THE HIGHLIGHTS

- Pandemic period demanded new approaches to long-term care, and in particular supporting older Canadians to remain in their homes as long as possible.
- Rigid approaches to practice centred around clinical needs and tasks can be disadvantageous.
- The development and application of relational approaches can enrich practice knowledge as well as service benefits in important ways.
- Situational flexibility is a growing requirement, especially in non-clinical situations.
- This flexibility is often dependent on the worker themselves, but in order to be consistent and see full benefits, flexibility must be reflected in policies, protocols and practices.
- Broaden representation in the development of policy formation to include clients, families, and workers.

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## THE IMPACT

### of Flexibility within Home Care Delivery

**Flexibility** in client-care approach (around schedules, tasks, roles and social connection) can positively impact relationship development, outcomes and provider-time management.

#### Flexibility can look like:

- Including longer-than-usual transition between home visits to accommodate more “talkative” clients.
- Longer visits for clients who have returned from hospital.
- Ability to modify task boundaries – shaping client’s access to help – such as meal preparation.

*“One worker describes how agency schedulers leave her a longer-than-usual transition to her next home visit, following one particularly talkative client. Although this may have emerged out of the scheduler’s concern for the worker (‘just to give me time to get out in the car’), this adaptive response to work scheduling might also benefit the client’s social well-being.”*

*“I usually just tell [clients], ‘What do you want me to make today?’ And usually they’ll have an idea, like they’ll [say] ‘I have some hamburger I want fried up and made into this’ or one lady always has some kind of elaborate soup that she wants me to make or .... She wanted me to make a cake the other day (laugh) I was like, ‘Alright. Well I have the time, like let’s do it.’”*

## THE TAKEAWAY

#### Government and regulators need to explore and consider systemic benefits.

Case studies and anecdotal material in this study serve as proof points.

**The capacity of home care programs and providers to quickly respond** to individual, everyday needs and changing circumstances can measurably affect the paths of clients, family care givers and others within the broader support network. Further, flexibility in approach can provide more relational aspects of care.

**Integrating flexibility into home care** often is made possible through workers contributions of unpaid time – a concern raised in C.J. Cranford’s 2020 report, “Home care fault lines: Understanding tensions and creating alliances”, described as “economy of favours” in home care. This needs to be addressed systematically by improving the ability of organizationally coordinated home care programs to respond to requests with greater agility.



The full article can be accessed at [sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667321522000695?via%3Dihub](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667321522000695?via%3Dihub)

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## 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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