

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Courage, Compassion, Clarity – Informing Change in a Time of Crisis

Patient Ombudsman’s annual report for Years 4 and 5 (2019-2021) reflects on the offices’ last two years of operation and highlights important issues including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

TORONTO, March 21, 2022 – Since opening its doors just over five years ago, the office of the Patient Ombudsman has championed fairness in health care by listening to patients, caregivers and health sector organizations to improve services and achieve better health care experiences for all Ontarians.

The pandemic posed significant challenges for everyone and altered the number and nature of complaints that came to Patient Ombudsman. Over the course of 2019/20 and 2020/21, the office saw a significant increase in complaints, specifically complaints about long-term care in relation to restrictions on visitation, impacts of infection prevention and control measures, and staffing shortages.

The annual report also includes case studies that touch on important and concerning issues. The issues we have chosen to highlight include sexual assault in hospital settings; lack of culturally competent care for Indigenous patients and caregivers; use of force by hospital staff; and impacts of isolation resulting from restrictions on visitation. The patient stories and resolutions speak to the work of an ombuds in determining whether a health sector organization has acted fairly.

Key Highlights:

- Patient Ombudsman received a total of 2,470 complaints in 2019/20 and 3,595 complaints in 2020/21 – a 45% increase from year 4 to year 5
- Complaints about long-term care homes rose from 208 in 2019/20 to 650 in 2020/21 – a shift from 8% of total complaints in year 4 to 18% of total complaints in year 5
- The disproportionate number of complaints about long-term care homes prompted Patient Ombudsman to launch its first large-scale, system-level investigation in spring 2021
- The rise in pandemic-related complaints also prompted Patient Ombudsman to release two special COVID-19 reports during this timeframe
- More than 2,400 referrals were made to other organizations and oversight bodies in 2019/20 and more than 3,400 in 2020/21, including 2,300 referrals to patient relations offices in health sector organizations

“The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen throughout this report, both in the information presented and the stories shared. But even with the pandemic and other challenges we faced, this nascent office remained focused on meeting an ever-growing demand for help navigating a health care system that is increasingly complex and continuously evolving.”

– **Craig Thompson, Patient Ombudsman**

Who We Are

Patient Ombudsman facilitates resolutions and investigates complaints about patient care and healthcare experiences in long-term care homes, public hospitals and home and community care support services. We take the time to listen closely to all perspectives without taking sides. Our work aims to improve the system for everyone, by shining a light on issues of concern.

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