

Meetings with Ontario Government 2023 Report



From left to right: Colleen Martin, OPC Pres-Elect, Joanna Sisk, OPC Legislation Chair, MPP Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure, Linda Squarzolo, OPC President, Honourable Raymond Cho, Minister Seniors and Accessibility and Mary Capobianco, OPC Resolutions Chair.

I am happy to report that after 3 years we were finally able to meet with government once again. Although the meetings did not take place in the traditional manner with a visit to Queens Park, we were still very happy to receive invitations to connect. Linda Squarzolo, Ontario Provincial President, Colleen Martin, Ontario Provincial President-Elect, Joanna Sisk, Provincial Legislation Chair and Mary Capobianco, Provincial Resolution Chair attended these meetings.

On February 15th, we had the opportunity to meet virtually with Stakeholders and Policy Advisors from the office of the Honourable Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. We presented the resolution on Loneliness (ON 22.02) and stressed the negative impact and increased risks of isolation and loneliness. The meeting had good interactive discussion with a great exchange of ideas. The government representatives recognized that loneliness and isolation was a very serious issue especially in light of the increasing number of teen suicides. They were very receptive of the many ideas put forward by the CWL team and promised to keep us abreast of any progress on initiatives addressing this issue.

On March 13th, we had the privilege of meeting in person with the Honourable Raymond Cho, Minister of Seniors and Accessibility. The meeting took place at the office of MPP Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure.

Points of discussions and a sharing of information with Minister Cho and MPP Surma included the following:

- There is currently a comprehensive guide to programs and services for seniors available online. www.ontario.ca/seniorsguide
We asked if it was possible to make this resource more readily available and especially for those without access to internet. After an exchange of ideas, it was agreed that both the government and CWL would communicate the existence of this resource. MPP Surma also agreed to share this information with her fellow MPPs and to include this in their constituents home mailings.
- Minister Cho shared that there are over 300 *Senior Active Living Centre* programs across Ontario offering community programs for seniors. There are also community grants available for up to \$25,000.
- There is also a Senior Safety Line (SSL) available in different languages which is a 24/7 crisis and support line for seniors in Ontario who have experienced any type of abuse or neglect.

- We spoke about how important the ability to hear is for social inclusion. The loss of hearing often prevents seniors from social interaction and unfortunately the subsidy currently available for hearing aids falls far short of the actual cost.
Also, some medical supplies and equipment, particularly as they relate to diabetes and health alerts are costly and expending funds for the purchase of those items may preclude individuals from participating in other social activities. Once again good discussion and exchange of ideas followed. Recognizing that all suggestions and funding for all items cannot be accommodated, Minister Cho pointed out that these items mostly fall under the Ministry of Health. He suggested that the CWL write a letter to Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health to address these items and agreed to provide support in our letter writing efforts. This is something that CWL will be pursuing.
- Although resolution *Improve Care in Long-Term Care Homes* (ON22-01) did not fall under this ministry, the executive assistant for MPP Surma promised to personally deliver it to the Minister of Long Term Care.
- It was also brought to Minister Cho and MPP Surma's attention that the government had previously seen Bill 104 to maintain a strategy to reduce impacts of mental health issues and loneliness had previously reached second reading in March 2022, but this had never become law. However, it would still be pertinent for the province to have a strategy.

At both meetings, we pointed out that although the resolution specifically requested action by the federal government to establish a national strategy, including a minister responsible for loneliness and establishment of a commission, there is still much that can be done under provincial jurisdiction to alleviate loneliness. We also stressed that studies indicate policy proposals need to be analyzed with a 'loneliness' lens which is possible at all levels of the government under various ministries and/or departments.

As much as the process for a successful resolution is long and entails a lot work and challenges, there is nothing more satisfying as the opportunity to speak with government about our concerns and the feeling that YES, together, *We Can Make A Difference!*

Submitted by:

Mary Capobianco
Ontario Provincial Resolutions Chairperson