

Home Care: Humane and Equitable is Also Effective and Efficient

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A new study provides startling evidence that provision of simple housecleaning services can save lives, and reduce health care costs. "The design of this study is compelling," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Rosana Pellizzari. "Every government in Canada should wake up and listen."

In 1994 the British Columbia provincial government instituted a policy of cutting services to clients with minimal home care needs. The policy of cutting housecleaning services was ignored in some jurisdictions and not others, creating a large-scale natural experiment.

Marcus Hollander, a health economist, and his colleagues found no important differences between clients who did and did not receive housecleaning services in the first year after the cuts. In the second and third years, large and important differences emerged.

In the third year, costs for health services averaged \$7,808 for those who retained services and \$11,903 for those who did not. Furthermore, 17% of those who suffered the cuts ended up in long-term care institutions, compared to 7% who retained the service. The cost of the home care is about \$2,500 per year, the basic cost of institutionalization \$42,000. Finally, housecleaning saved lives. Of those receiving services, 15% died over 3 years, compared to 22% of those who did not. Most of these additional costs are borne by the general public.

"Hard-hearted governments are ready to leave those who can't afford it without basic services," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. PJ Devereaux. "Perhaps those same governments, with a corporate mentality, will listen to the bottom line." "This research shows how we need to extend the principles of the Canada Health Act to include basic home care needs," Dr. Devereaux continued. "This study provides crucial data for the Romanow Commission, and demonstrates that the National Health Forum was spot on in its recommendations for a national home care program. In Ontario, it shows the foolishness of home care cuts which impact on housekeeping services."