

June 30, 2020 Winnipeg Sun

Personal Care Homes are getting \$280 million to upgrade their safety infrastructure as part of a \$358 million health care funding package

Health Minister Cameron Friesen. Winnipeg Sun

Personal Care Homes are getting \$280 million to upgrade their safety infrastructure as part of a \$358 million health care funding package.

Health, Seniors and Active Living Minister Cameron Friesen teased the funding last week but on Monday he put a dollar figure on it in a



press release. The government will also be spending a combined \$78 million on digital health initiatives and equipment and infrastructure upgrades at health-care facilities.

The long-term care industry has gone decades without significant infrastructure investment and has led to a massive deficit.

“Our government is undertaking the most significant transformation to the Manitoba health-care system in 40 years,” said Friesen in the press release. “These investments continue with that generational change, creating an impact that will not just be felt today, but decades from now.”

Jan Legeros, executive director for the Long Term and Continuing Care Association of Manitoba, said the funding is a welcomed but it just begins to address the needs at long term care facilities in the province.

Much of the \$280 million will be directed at basics like fire alarms and fire system repairs and upgrades. More money is required for things like eliminating rooms with three or four people, repairing HVAC systems, or applying new knowledge about the size of hallways and dining rooms to the wellbeing of those with dementia.

“I think it’s a good start, I think it’s a small amount in comparison to what’s required,” said Legeros. “We know that 60% of the infrastructure in personal care homes needs to be renovated and upgraded.”

NDP Health critic Uzoma Asagwara said in a statement the province should be focusing on the bolstering staff first in personal care homes.

“We know real investments are needed in PCH today — and that should start with a firm commitment to hiring more staff including nurses and aides, to help meet the needs of some of our most vulnerable Manitobans living in personal care homes.”

Last week, Friesen said the original plan for investing in the safety measures announced Monday was on a 10- or 20- year plan. This has been accelerated in large part due to COVID-19 and the way personal care homes have been ravaged by the pandemic, exposing issues across the country. Manitoba has been able to avoid the virus from running rampant through local facilities but it has still shone a light on the issues that exist.

Legeros said the Canadian Association for Long Term Care has been lobbying the federal government for years for action to be taken. The federal government has deferred back to the provinces as it falls under the provincial jurisdiction, but she says there may finally be progress.

“Where before we were always at the bottom of the list when funds were being handed out we seem to have climbed the ladder to a higher level at this point in time,” she said. “There seems to be some optimism amongst our group that this time around attention will be paid to long term and continuing care.”

The province will also be spending \$46 million on digital health initiatives, upgrading technology and record storing and sharing systems.

The remaining \$32 million will go to equipment and infrastructure upgrades at health-care facilities. Of that will be \$17.4 million for 85 projects expected to cost less than \$500,000 each. The final \$15.3 million will be invested in replacement equipment in each of the regional health authorities and for diagnostic services provided through Shared Health Manitoba. This equipment includes equipment for microbiology and virology, gastroscopes, endoscopes, colonoscopes, anesthetic machines, fetal and cardiac monitors, surgical tables and instruments, newborn bed warmers, hypothermia heating units, stress exercise equipment and bladder scanners.

jaldrich@postmedia.com