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# RESEARCH MATTERS

RIA FEATURE

## LEADING HEALTH SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS IN WATERLOO WELLINGTON

By Liz Snyder

Community members, health care practitioners, older adults and their care partners are working to make meaningful changes to the local health system by bringing the *Older Adult Strategy for Waterloo-Wellington* to life.

The Strategy was released in 2018 and identified key areas to develop. Working groups have been struck to decide how to move forward in these areas. One of the groups is looking at how to improve connections, coordination and system navigation. Liz MacLennan is co-chair of the Patient and Family Advisory Committee for the Waterloo-Wellington LHIN and part of this group. She navigated the health care system for several years while her husband Ken, who passed away in February 2019, dealt with poor health and an eventual diagnosis of dementia.



*“That’s the journey I took to get here, to be involved in this work. It’s based on my experience as a caregiver and helping Ken navigate the system and learning about the system myself,” she says.*

MacLennan hopes the work she is doing on the Older Adult Strategy will grow capacity in the health care system and make it easier to navigate. While she feels fortunate for the care and support she and Ken received during his illness, it wasn’t always easy to figure out what was available to them and hopes her experience can help others on similar paths.

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*“I feel I had an advantage in learning slowly along with my husband’s journey and I had the wherewithal to ask questions and advocate for him but not everybody is equipped to do that kind of advocacy and I think there needs to be an easier route for people to learn what their options are for care as they age.”*

The Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integration Network commissioned the RIA in February 2018 to co-ordinate the development of the Strategy. The Strategy consists of two reports and is the outcome of work that was guided by an advisory committee and informed by the experiences, perspectives and voices of citizens residing within Waterloo and Wellington including older adults

themselves, their families and their caregivers, like MacLennan.

“I feel quite confident in the report. I think it’s well conceived and reflects openness, sharing of perspectives and depth of expertise,” says MacLennan.

MacLennan is committed to this work not just because she is qualified to do it, but because it makes the hard times with her husband mean more.

“It gives meaning and purpose to a rough journey. If we can learn from tough times and smooth people’s journey in the future, that’s good,” says MacLennan.

The strategy is expected to resonate broadly and serve as a basis for health system transformation and improvement across the region. It is a guide for local health system leaders to help best meet the evolving needs of all older adults in Waterloo Wellington over the next 10 years. ■

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