



Soar-ing costs, no recourse

Seni-ors home res-id-ents face sharp increases in monthly bills, for-cing some to relo-cate

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When John Sim-mons moved to a Whitby seni-ors com-munity in 2021, he and his wife paid \$2,739 a month for a large one-bed-room apart-ment along with hos-pit-al-ity ser-vices — three meals a day, house-keep-ing and bus transportation.

By early 2025, Sim-mons, now a 96year-old wid-ower, was pay-ing \$4,362 a month for the same unit and ser-vices, a nearly 60 per cent jump.



John Simmons, 96, had to move to a smaller unit in his Whitby seniors home after monthly costs jumped nearly 60 per cent.

Residents of seniors homes across Ontario have seen their monthly bills balloon over the past few years at rates most other tenants in the province could never face.

Provincial guidelines have limited rent increases to 2.5 per cent per year for most tenants since 2023. It will be even lower, 2.1 per cent, in 2026.

But in care homes and retirement homes, the cost increases of meals and care services such as assistance with bathing are not regulated. Landlords need only respect a 90-day notice for an increase; the amount is left to market forces. In a recent Landlord and Tenant Board decision, the adjudicator noted that charges for care services can even be increased more than once in a 12-month period, as long as the tenant is given proper notice.

Since moving into the Court at Brooklyn, a care home operated by Atria Retirement, a seniors residence chain headquartered in Kentucky, Simmons's fees for hospitality services have nearly doubled, soaring to \$3,349. The increases far out-paced inflation.

"I haven't been able to keep up with it," Simmons said. With his pensions no longer covering his living expenses and despite financial assistance from

his son, Sim-mons had to down-size and move into a smaller studio in the same community.

Steep increases in care service charges remain allowed in Ontario despite years of calls by the auditor general and advocates for more oversight, and an opposition party's effort to rein them in through legislation. The increases have hit both care homes, like the one Sim-mons lives in, and retirement homes, which offer more services.

“Under the Residential Tenancies Act, there is no limit to the amount a care home landlord can raise the cost of care services or meals, and there is no mechanism for government oversight of these charges,” Graham Webb, executive director of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, told MPPs in a 2017 committee hearing.



In his submissions, Webb noted that, for regular apartment tenants with services such as power included in their rent, increases are limited by the actual utility cost increases. “There’s no such mechanism for care home or retirement home tenants,” he said.

In December, a group of New Democrat MPPs introduced a bill to limit increases to meals and care service charges to the same rate as rent increases. The bill passed first reading but has since stalled. “As with all private member’s bills, the process to reach second reading takes time,” said NDP MPP Chandra Pasma, one of the bill’s sponsors.

“However, the government has the ability to act immediately to end these practices if it chooses to do so,” she added, referring to the unregulated service fee increases.

Sim-mons himself reached out to Premier Doug Ford directly in late 2022 after his fees were raised for the second time at a rate he found unconscionable.

“This increase of 16.6 per cent must be considered as price-gouging!!” he

wrote, plead-ing for the premier to “find a way to ini-ti-ate some form of legis-la-tion” to curb the prac-tice.

Ray-mond Cho, the min-is-ter for seni-ors and access-ib-il-ity, wrote Sim-mons back, thanked him for his per-spect-ive, explained that homes such as his can raise fees with proper notice and guided him to a web-site with inform-a-tion rel-ev-ant to seni-ors in Ontario.

In a state-ment that echoed this response, Cho's min-istry did not address ques-tions from the Star about ten-ants' con-cerns that they're being gouged by care and retire-ment homes, or say whether it plans to reg-u-late the cost increase of meals and ser-vices.

Accom-mod-a-tion costs in longterm-care homes, which include meals, are reg-u-lated, with a max-imum \$2,979.32 monthly rate for private rooms. Ontario sub-sid-izes long-term care but not retire-ment res-id-ences, where ten-ants pay the full cost of hous-ing and addi-tional ser-vices at rates set by pro-viders. These res-id-ences are privately owned, some of them by mul-tina-tional chains with a goal of max-im-iz-ing profits for share-hold-ers.

Atria, based in Louis-ville, Ky., oper-ates 29 senior hous-ing prop-er-ties in Canada, includ-ing 10 in Ontario from Niagara Falls to Ott-awa.

Colin Le Brun, the gen-eral man-ager of the Court at Brook-lin, did not respond to the Star's request for com-ment.

Atria said that “rate adjust-ments are based on a num-ber of factors includ-ing increased oper-a-tional expenses — like labour costs, bene-fits, taxes, insur-ance — and the increased cost of goods and ser-vices.” The com-pany did not dir-ectly answer ques-tions about why they went so far above infla-tion. While Atria, which is partly owned by Ventas, a large U.S. real estate invest-ment trust, told the Star that it raises its prices to cope with cost increases, exec-ut-ives touted a dif-fer-ent strategy to investors.

Dur-ing an earn-ings call on July 31, J. Justin Hutchens, who over-sees senior hous-ing at Ventas, said the com-pany aims to increase occu-pancy rates and raise rents to drive growth in this sec-tor.

“We found a way through our data ana-lyt-ics to really focus in on the right price to do two things: either just get higher price or to drive volume,” Hutchens, who is also a board mem-ber of Atria, said. “What's really driv-ing the under-ly-ing trend are higher move-in rents and then con-tin-ued strength in our internal rent increases. And so, that's something we'll stay very focused on, and we're try-ing to pull both levers.”

Asked about growth oppor-tun-it-ies in Canada spe-cific-ally, Hutchens said: “Pri-cing has been a little bit bet-ter there as well. So we're always focused on rev-enue across the board, but price is an oppor-tun-ity that's emer-ging in Canada.”

Even though they also cater to seniors, Atria facilities in Ontario do not fall under the pur-view of the Retirement Home Reg-u-lat-ory Author-ity (RHRA), which over-sees licensed retirement homes offer-ing more care ser-vices such as assist-ance with dress-ing or per-sonal hygiene.

Con-cerns about skyrocket-et-ing ser-vice fees exist at those homes, too.

Dan Rogall's mother, Mag-dalena, who lived at an Alavida Life-styles res-id-ence in Ott-awa until she moved to a long-term-care home a few months ago, saw her monthly bill increase by about \$2,500 last year, he said. "These res-id-ences can do whatever they want on their fees," Rogall told the Star. "That needs to stop."

Res-id-ents at Alavida homes were told the soar-ing costs were driven in part by mar-ket-ing dis-counts the com-pany had taken away. Julie Smith, the gen-eral man-ager of the Rav-ines res-id-ence, where Rogall lived, did not return the Star's calls. When the com-plaints sur-faced in 2024, Alavida told the CBC and the Ott-awa Cit-izen it was fin-an-cially unusus-tain-able to keep the dis-counts in place and it was never inten-ded for them to be per-man-ent.

Des-pite the exist-ence of a ded-ic-ated reg-u-lator for retire-ment homes, the aud-itor gen-eral of Ontario noted in a 2020 audit that "there are no organ-iz-a-tions or stat-utes that pre-vent retire-ment home res-id-ents from being charged unreas-on-ably high prices for care ser-vices." The aud-itor urged the Min-istry for Seni-ors and Access-ib-il-ity to eval-u-ate whether the RHRA should have over-sight of ser-vices fees and con-sider related legis-lat-ive amend-ments.

In a 2022 fol-lowup report, the Min-istry for Seni-ors and Access-ib-il-ity told the aud-itor gen-eral that it was in the pro-cess of con-duct-ing research and ana-lysis before mak-ing policy recom-mend-a-tions and under-tak-ing con-sulta-tions. Spokes-per-son Oliver Orm-rod said the aud-itor will release another fol-lowup report towards the end of the year