

**Final Report:**  
**Developing an Assessment Tool for Younger Residents of Long Term Care Facilities**  
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**Executive Summary:**

In our study, we built on previous work done by Weeks, Early and Aubrecht, in which several areas in which young residents in long term care (LTC) feel their needs could be better met were identified. We interviewed younger residents (in the age group 18-64) and staff at Northwood about questions which could be asked when a younger resident comes to LTC. The interview responses were used to make an assessment tool, containing questions which could be asked to better support younger residents in the transition from living in the community to living in a LTC facility. The tool was then reviewed by those who were interviewed, and feedback was used to improve the questions asked in the tool. Areas especially emphasized by participants were the difficulties associated with using technology as they enter LTC, and the ability to participate in activities outside of the facility. It was also important to participants that questions about visitors be included in the assessment tool, including the need for uninterrupted time with family (especially young children) coming to visit the resident. Limitations were also identified, including resources, both within the facility and for the individual residents. These resources included financial and personnel, and should be considered when using the assessment tool during admission.

**Report:**

**Background**

Residents under the age of 65 are becoming more common in Long Term Care (LTC) facilities. About 10% of residents in long term care are under age 65 (Kay & Chaudhury, 2013) and the current model of care does not always meet the needs of this population. While LTC tends to focus on meeting the needs of an older population with more physical and cognitive needs related to aging, the needs of younger residents tend to be more physical in nature, with less mental decline (Kaldy, 2012). Additionally, much of the research which exists about residents' experiences in LTC is focused around the older adults (Jervis, 2001), which makes it difficult to determine how effective the current care model is in meeting the needs of this population.

Previous research has found that there are several areas in which the current model of LTC does not meet the needs of this population, including a lack of engagement, a feeling of not meeting the norms for their age group (Kaldy, 2012), and a loss of independence (Levack and Thornton, 2017). These shortcomings of the current system are related in large part to the age gap between younger residents and older residents in a LTC setting. The ideal care situation for these residents is not to be living in LTC, but to receive care in a private home through formal or informal caregivers (Levack and Thornton, 2017), but this can be unattainable for several reasons, including financial barriers and a lack of social support.

Northwood is a LTC facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with two campuses in the area. Their residents include a number of younger residents living in the facility between the two campuses. While the second campus was being built, research was conducted to determine the best way to build and staff the facility, and during this time information about younger residents living at Northwood was also gathered. This led to a research project by Weeks, Earl and Aubrecht entitled “From Surviving to Thriving” which aimed to determine the ways in which the younger population’s needs could be best met in a LTC setting. This research aimed to build off of the previous research by creating a supplementary assessment tool that can be used to best determine how homes can support younger residents entering LTC.

The current interRAI assessment tool is contained in the SEAScape database and is used for assessment in Nova Scotia. It addresses many areas of functioning for an individual entering LTC but does not address several domains applicable to the lives of younger residents, such as technology use, employment, or education opportunities. Through interviewing residents and staff at Northwood, it was our hope to identify questions which could be asked at assessment, in order to better inform the LTC facility about the needs of incoming younger residents.

### **Study purpose**

The purpose of this study was to create a supplemental assessment tool which could be used in the admission of a younger resident (age 18-64) into LTC in order to better understand their unique needs.

### **Methods**

Research Ethics Board approval was obtained through Dalhousie University (2019-4794), and the study was approved by the Northwood Research Advisory Council. Recruitment occurred at both the Halifax and Bedford sites, using posters to recruit both residents and staff. We required that participants were either a staff member who worked with residents ages 18-64 or were a resident that was between 18 and 64, and that they were willing and able to consent to participate in the individual interview and focus group.

The interview guide for individual interviews was developed in relation to the results from the results of the Weeks, Earl and Aubrecht study. It asked what questions should be asked about the various areas identified as areas of concern in the previous study. Individual interviews were performed and were recorded with the participants’ consent. The responses were summarized and compiled to create a preliminary assessment tool, which was then distributed to the participants before the focus group was held. Four Northwood residents and four staff were interviewed individually, and two residents and four staff participated in the focus group. Two residents did not wish to participate in the focus group. The preliminary assessment tool was reviewed during the focus group, and strengths as well as areas for improvement were identified. Changes were made based on the feedback given during the focus group session.

## **Results**

The individual interviews and focus group resulted in the identification of several questions which could be asked in order to better serve the younger population entering LTC. Residents were especially enthusiastic about the potential to have access to more technology as they entered LTC. Technology was described by the residents as a vital component of their life in LTC, as it allowed them to communicate with family and friends who are not living in the facility. One resident described the important role technology and social media had in her ability to communicate with members of the disability community.

Participants also thought there was value in asking about time needed for visits from family and partners. The visitors for this population of residents can differ from the visitors for older residents. Some younger residents have younger children who would wish to visit their parent in the facility, and participants felt that asking a resident about how these visits could be supported would benefit the resident. While it may not be possible to meet their expectations fully, understanding those expectations was thought to be a good place to start in organizing visits from family, friends and partners.

Participation in activities both within the facility and outside of the facility was an area that participants identified that could benefit from being asked about in more detail during the assessment process. Younger residents interviewed appreciated efforts by the staff to support them in participating in activities outside of the facility. Staff and residents believed that the participation of residents in activities outside of the facility is something that staff currently assist residents in navigating, but that they could benefit from asking more about this at the time of assessment.

In the process of creating the assessment tool, there were also several limitations identified. The primary limitation is resources, both within the facility and for the individual residents. There is not enough staff employed by LTC facilities to meet all of the needs of this population to the extent that they would like to. These limitations should be made clear upon admission when the assessment tool is used, as the facility will help as it is able to, but is working with finite resources. For residents, who are often on a fixed budget, there may be many things they would like to participate inside the facility and in the broader community, but financial constraints can be prohibitive. This is something that the staff members interviewed said they often help residents balance and should be considered when using the assessment tool.

## **Conclusion**

Our hope with this assessment tool is to better understand how LTC facilities can support younger residents entering their care, and to improve the quality of life of these residents as they begin their time in LTC. Next steps for this research are to trial an implementation of this assessment tool, and to evaluate its practicality in the assessment of a younger resident entering LTC.

## Sources

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## Supplemental Assessment Tool for Younger Residents Entering LTC

1. Are there any activities that take place in the external community that you participate in regularly and would like to continue to participate in?
  - a. Are there any ways we can help you to participate? (example: help scheduling access-a-bus, etc.)
  - b. Before moving into LTC, what types of activities did you enjoy participating in?
  - c. If we were to run these activities, what time of day would you be most likely to participate in them?
2. Do you currently use mobility aids such as a wheelchair or walker?
  - a. Are there any ways in which we could help you in meeting your mobility goals?
3. Do you have any family (including children), friends, or a partner who would visit regularly?
  - a. Would you be in need of uninterrupted time for their visits?
  - b. How could we best support you in receiving visitors?
4. Do you currently have access to a computer or other device to use the internet?
  - a. What kinds of support could the facility provide to help you utilize this technology?
5. Would you be interested in pursuing further education after you moved in?
  - a. If so, is there any way we could help you in participating in opportunities to further your education?
6. Are you interested in volunteer opportunities within the facility?
  - a. What areas would you be interested in volunteering?
  - b. How much time are you willing to commit to volunteering?
7. Do you currently volunteer or work in the community?
  - a. Do you think you would like to, and are able to continue this after you move into the facility?
  - b. If so, is there any way we could help you maintain this part of your routine?
8. If you practice a religious or spiritual belief, are there any ways in which we could help you to continue this belief once you move in?
  - a. Do you currently attend religious/spiritual services in the community?
  - b. Are there ways in which you think we can support you in continuing to do so?
9. Do you currently have supports who are able to help you during your transition in to LTC?
  - a. Are there any ways in which we could help with this transition?
  - b. Do you currently utilize the mental health system (ex. Seeing a therapist, psychiatrist, social worker)?
  - c. If so, are there any ways in which we can support you in continuing to use the system while transitioning to LTC?
10. What do you see as your ideal living situation within the facility?
11. Are there any other concerns you have about LTC that you would like to address?
12. Is there any other information about the facility you would like to have before moving in?

Notes about this tool:

- It's not a placement tool, individuals who answer questions in this tool have already been identified as needing to enter LTC. The hope is that through using these questions we can better understand the expectations and wishes of incoming residents.
- While an array of information can be obtained using this tool, it's important to note that LTC facilities work with limited budgets, personnel and volunteers. This tool is not meant to be a definitive agreement between resident and facility, it is more so meant to be a place to start, so that the LTC facility knows what the resident is hoping to get out of the transition and can communicate what is possible based on this information.
- Within Northwood, many of these questions are already asked. This tool aims to provide a resource that allows those involved in care to know a bit more about residents before entering the facility. It is our hope that these questions could be helpful for improving quality of life for younger residents in LTC as a whole.
- Each LTC facility, including Northwood, could modify questions based on what is available and reasonable for the facility. In an ideal world, all residents could be given exactly what they needed to live their ideal life. We must balance our desire to meet their needs with the constraints of the system we are working in.