

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL NOVEMBER 15, 2011 AT 12:01 A.M. EDT

WOMEN FACE GREATER HEALTH RISKS AS THEY AGE

New ICES report highlights how the elderly will use the health-care system

TORONTO, November 15, 2011 –A significant proportion of the “oldest old,” that is adults over 80 years of age, is and will continue to be women. This longevity influences how and why older women make contact with the health system. New research from the **Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)** shows that older women use more home and long-term care services because they have a higher burden of disabling conditions and because they are more often alone in their later years.

“While the majority of older adults will remain relatively independent as they age, there are important concerns related to older adults who have particularly heavy needs or inadequate support – such as older women,” says Susan Bronskill, lead author and ICES Scientist.

The report “Health System Use by Frail Ontario Seniors: An in-depth examination of four vulnerable cohorts” studied examples of individuals with heavy needs (older women, individuals with dementia living in the community, home care clients with serious medical conditions and individuals waiting for placement in long-term care homes) and found:

- Older women account for the majority of long-term care placements, especially in the oldest age groups.
- Older women and older men use hospital and physician services at similar levels; however older women are more likely to use long-term care services.
- Among older adults who received long-stay home care services, a larger proportion of women lived alone and relied on their children for support, whereas men also relied on a spouse.
- While waiting for placement in long-term care, older adults make frequent contact with the health-care system and have high rates of emergency department use.
- Women account for a larger proportion of older adults with dementia than men across age categories.

“The report reinforces what we’re seeing at the Alzheimer Society,” says David Harvey, Chief Public Policy and Programs Initiatives, Alzheimer Society of Ontario. “Women are disproportionately affected by dementia and also make up the majority of caregivers to people with this disease. We’re going to need more responsive care options at home and in the community if we want to alleviate some of the challenges faced by older women living with chronic conditions and reduce pressure on our health-care system.”

The “Health System Use by Frail Ontario Seniors: An in-depth examination of four vulnerable cohorts,” is being published by ICES November 15, 2011.

Author Block: Susan E. Bronskill, Ximena Camacho, Laura Corbett, Sudeep S. Gill, Andrea Gruneir, Minnie Ho, Jeff W. Poss, Jacqueline E. Stevenson, Walter P. Wodchis.

More detailed study findings on the ICES website: www.ices.on.ca

ICES is an independent, non-profit organization that uses population-based health information to produce knowledge on a broad range of health care issues. Our unbiased evidence provides measures of health system performance, a clearer understanding of the shifting health care needs of Ontarians, and a stimulus for discussion of practical solutions to optimize scarce resources. ICES knowledge is highly regarded in Canada and abroad, and is widely used by government, hospitals, planners, and practitioners to make decisions about care delivery and to develop policy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

**Deborah Creatura
Media Advisor, ICES
deborah.creatura@ices.on.ca
416-480-4780 or cell 647-406-5996**

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