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Etobicoke long-term care resident died after losing support worker

PSW couldn't provide #essentialservices due to visitor restrictions

NEWS APR 23, 2020 BY [TAMARA SHEPHARD](#) TORONTO.COM



Carol Ledden-Cusson's mom, Wilda Ledden, 90, died April 2 at an Etobicoke long-term care home after her private personal support worker could not enter the home to feed her due to COVID-19 visitor restrictions. Ledden died of natural causes. She did not have the virus. - Dan Pearce/Torstar

Carol Ledden-Cusson could never have imagined she'd lose her mother and her husband this year.

Or that her grief would be complicated by the self-isolation and social distancing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wilda Ledden, 90, died on April 2 at [Lakeshore Lodge](#), a city-operated long-term care home in Etobicoke, after her private personal support worker could no longer enter the facility under Ontario COVID-19 visitor restrictions.

Ledden had tested negative for COVID-19, but could not feed herself as she had dementia.

Ledden's private PSW would visit daily to help her.

"It takes 40 minutes to feed her half a sandwich," Ledden-Cusson said. "The staff couldn't do it. Julia was only with her two hours a day. But it was lifesaving. It was food and affection and attention."

Without that daily care, Ledden's declined quickly.

"We were allowed to see her and say goodbye," Ledden-Cusson, 55, said. "Without her carer, we knew it would come. These COVID rules are having an impact we just don't realize."

While 50 per cent of Canada's COVID-19 deaths have been linked to long-term care homes, there are no statistics for those whose death was hastened by a virus they didn't even have.



Wilda Ledden, 90, died on April 2 after her private personal support worker could no longer enter her long-term care home in Etobicoke to feed her under COVID-19 visitor restrictions. Carol Ledden-Cusson photo

Ledden-Cusson said she, her sister Cathy Ledden and her brother, Bradley Ledden, do not hold Lakeshore Lodge administration or staff responsible for their mother's death.

"I made peace with it quite a while ago because my mom had dementia for quite a while," she said. "We had no choice. I can't be mad about that. It's just the reality of the situation."

The family has decided to delay their mother's funeral until after the pandemic because Bradley is immunocompromised.

City spokesperson Bruce Hawkins confirmed Lakeshore Lodge was following Ontario's chief medical officer of health's directive that only visitors of people "very ill" or receiving end-of-life care may enter long-term care homes.

"This directive has impacted the families and residents in all long-term care homes in Ontario," Hawkins said in an email.

"Although the city does not comment on specific cases, the city does extend its deepest condolences to all families who have lost loved ones during this challenging time."

Bernard Dickens, [University of Toronto](#) professor emeritus with an expertise in medical ethics, said Ledden's death "illustrates the reciprocal hardships of the pandemic." "The home had ethical responsibilities to protect the aged woman from risk to her, and to other residents and staff of the home, against any infection brought in by the visitor, and to protect the visitor from any infection the home was liable to contain," Dickens said in an email.

Dickens said Lakeshore Lodge "cannot be ethically faulted for following the medical officer of health's strong recommendation" as Ledden's health was stable at the time.

"The home had no ethical responsibility to provide more than the usually expected standard of care to its aged demented residents under the exceptional circumstance of pandemic infection," Dickens said.



Bob Cusson, 76, died on Jan. 21 following a stroke. Three months later his wife, Carol Ledden-Cusson, lost her mom, Wilda Ledden, 90, whose death was COVID-19-related. Now, she must grieve in self-isolation during the pandemic. Carol Ledden-Cusson photo

In January, Ledden-Cusson's husband, Robert "Bob" Cusson, 76, died following a stroke.

Days before her mother's death, Ledden-Cusson posted on YouTube a [video](#) she'd created, titled "What Grief Looks Like... COVID-19 Complications."

"Being alone in grief is so debilitating," she said. "So many people have lost the person they love most in the world and then they're told to be alone and isolate when they're already feeling so, so isolated. It's a lot.

"You just really need people; people you love and a physical connection. I can't have it right now."

Ledden-Cusson has found support in a [Dorothy Ley Hospice](#) online grief support group for widows, and with a life-death coach.

"Generally, our groups are for people grieving the loss of a loved one who died of a life-threatening illness," said Dipti Purbhoo, Dorothy Ley Hospice's executive director.

"During this time, that could also be someone who died of COVID-19."



Carol Ledden-Cusson lost her mom, Wilda Ledden, on April 2 and her husband, Robert "Bob" Cusson on Jan. 21. The Etobicoke woman is raising awareness of COVID-19-related deaths and the complications of grieving, isolated, during the pandemic. Dan Pearce/Torstar

Ledden-Cusson said she wants to “make it okay to talk about grief.”

“I’d like talking about grief to be more common, so we have better language and more knowledge about what to say and do,” she said.

She is also raising \$12,000 on Kickstarter to develop the [“I’m OK”](#) personal safety check-in app for people who live alone or who are self-isolating alone during the pandemic.

“We are just one story,” Ledden-Cusson said. “There are many ways COVID-19 will cause ‘related’ deaths.”

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: When Carol Ledden-Cusson reached out about her mom’s COVID-19-related death, reporter Tamara Shephard wanted to learn more about the circumstances and how the pandemic is affecting her grief process.



by [Tamara Shephard](#)

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