

Development of Acute Care of the Elderly Units in Newfoundland and Labrador

Objective

To describe the early impact of Acute Care of the Elderly (ACE) units on patients and inform further expansion of the program in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL).

Background

Health Accord NL recommended that Centres of Excellence in Aging be established across the province. These centres will use a geriatric-informed approach to care for older adults, including ACE units. ACE units take an interdisciplinary team approach to address the health care needs of older adults.

The ACE model is a proven, patient-centered approach for older adults. The interdisciplinary team works to identify frailty, prevent functional decline, and support return of patients to the community. Older adults with age-related issues, frailty, and acute conditions are most likely to benefit from the support of an ACE unit. In NL, ACE units are currently established at St. Clare's Mercy Hospital in St. John's and Western Memorial Regional Hospital in Corner Brook.

Practice Points

1. Early mobilization of older adults in hospital can prevent functional decline.
2. An interdisciplinary team approach is an effective way of supporting older adults in acute care to return to the community.
3. Quality care for older adults requires an understanding of frailty and older adult care.
4. Enhanced education and training on older adult care is an essential component of the ACE model.

Methods

1. From 18 Nov 2024 to 22 May 2025, 58 ACE-appropriate patients at Western Memorial Regional Hospital completed a patient experience survey prior to their discharge regarding their experiences on the unit.
2. As of 26 May 2025, 31 discharged patients completed a follow-up interview 1–3 months after leaving the ACE unit.

3. All data and information was provided by NL Health Services.

Results

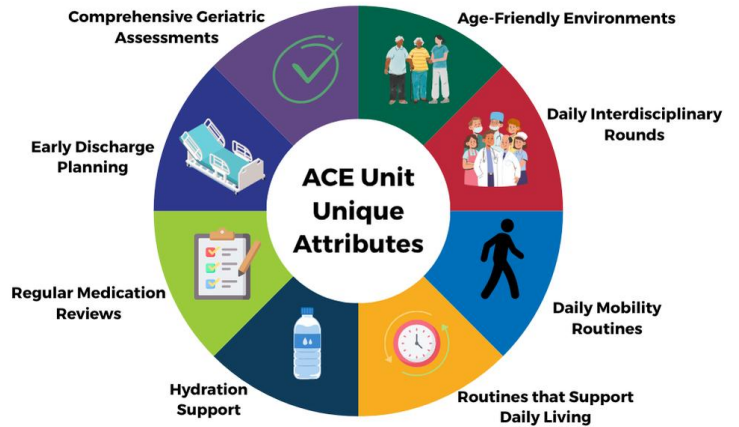


Figure 1. Leading Practices on ACE Units

Goals of the ACE Program
Enhancing staff capacity in age-friendly care through education and training
Creating/promoting age-friendly environments
Promoting/delivering patient-centered care
Optimizing transitions of care
Optimizing care outcomes for older adults

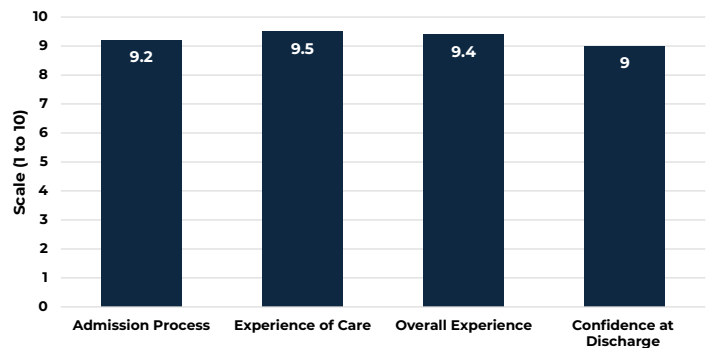


Figure 1. Average Patient Ratings Based on Patient Experience Survey

- Patients reported very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of care and overall experience on the ACE unit, with average ratings above 9 out of 10 and over 90% agreement across most measures.

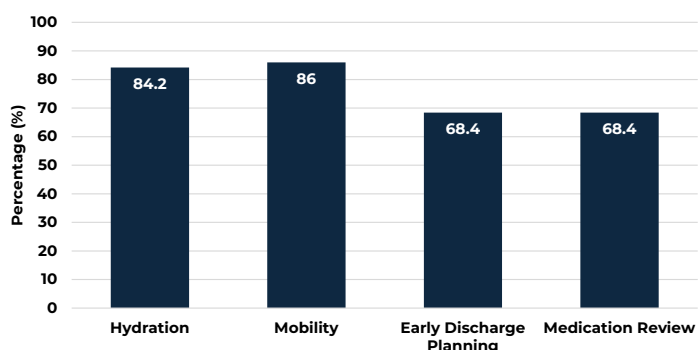


Figure 2. Percentage of Patients Who Rated Elements “Very Good” or “Excellent” Based on Pre-discharge Survey

- ACE units meet the unique needs of older adults with safe spaces that minimize risks and support independence.

Table 1. Themes and Quotes on ACE Unit Patient Experiences Based on Follow-up Interviews

Theme	Quote
Improving Patients' Quality of Life	"...with the way my life has changed, I'm confident I'll be home for at least 12 more months. I'm doing 100% better. I wasn't looking after myself before going to the hospital, but now I got a real-ity check."
Helping Patients Return Home	"They showed me how to do things that if they didn't show me how to do them, I probably wouldn't have been able to come home."
Supporting Recovery and Independence	"I gotta say, the care was excellent and the nurses were like angels. I loved every one of them... The first four days I was in the bed, but after that, they put extensions on the tubes so I could get up, move around, sit up."
Demonstrating Excellence in Care	"The doctor was able to diagnose what was really wrong with me, he saved my life. The occupational therapist came in and saw how I was progressing and whether I could walk and do the things they wanted me to do. They made sure I was well enough to manage on my own."

- 73% of patients said ACE impacted their ability to return to the community.
- 84% said ACE positively impacted their quality of life.
- Patients generally felt confident and well-supported at discharge and reported high satisfaction with their transition from the ACE unit.

Conclusions

1. The findings show that the ACE model of care provides meaningful support to older adults when regaining their sense of independence, especially after the discharge process.
2. It is crucial to expand ACE to more sites while continuously monitoring and evaluating current units for further improvement.