STAFF ARTICLE

Building a Canadian holiday calendar for long-term care

Updated October 2025

Recreation therapists in Saskatchewan told us the same story last winter. A new aide hung a November calendar that listed US Thanksgiving. Residents noticed before lunch service ended. Your wall calendar is a promise about whose stories belong in the home. This article is for activity leads who want one master plan that respects Canadian dates, provincial variation, and the quiet tone memory care needs.

Anchor dates that belong on every Canadian wall calendar

Start with civic days that shape mail, news, and family visits. New Year’s Day sets the tone for gentle goal cards and soft welcomes. In February, Family Day appears on different Mondays depending on province. Black History Month belongs on the staff planning sheet even when the public board stays simple.

March can hold International Women’s Day and optional St. Patrick’s Day tea, depending on your community. May brings Victoria Day and Mother’s Day close together. Plan rest days between them on busy units. June is National Indigenous History Month, Father’s Day, and the moment when outdoor programs need a heat and rain backup.

July is Canada Day. September holds Terry Fox runs and Labour Day, which already passed but deserves a line on next year’s template. October is Canadian Thanksgiving, then Halloween with dementia-safe lighting rules. November is Remembrance Day at 11:00, with US Veterans Day noted only when residents raise it. December needs multicultural winter language. Welcome every tradition in the room with light, music, and family visit cards.

Print one month at a time. Label legacy US-only sheets as archive in the cupboard so float staff reach for Canadian masters first.

Provincial flavour from one national wall chart

Homes in New Brunswick may want kitchen party language in March. Alberta teams often ask for Heritage Day in August. British Columbia marks BC Day.

Quebec teams may prefer French welcome lines on cards when families request them. One master list with toggles beats four separate wall charts.

BetterCare packs use plain prompts: Prairie fair and harvest talk, BC rain-week indoor plans, Ontario cottage porch memories, Atlantic lighthouse photos with calm captions. When you post the calendar, add a one-line note in the margin: **Prairie harvest wording this week.** Aides then know why the word search says elevator instead of subway.

Memory care and multifaith respect

Holiday calendars in secure units should favour surprise-free days. Fireworks language belongs on a risk sheet, separate from hallway posters. Remembrance programming stays gentle. Orange Shirt Day on 30 September is reflection, a listening pace. National Indigenous Peoples Day on 21 June invites listening and licensed music with approved partners.

Ask spiritual care and local Indigenous partners how your home acknowledges the land before you print new headings. Use their approved wording only.

Working with dietary, maintenance, and volunteers

Share the calendar draft with dietary two weeks before heavy food days. Thanksgiving and Christmas buffets need texture modifications named early. Maintenance may need time to hang wreaths or store folding chairs. Volunteers read the calendar on the fridge. If Tuesday says **room cards only**, they will arrive with cards instead of a karaoke machine.

Colour-code entries: green for group programs, blue for room delivery, grey for quiet reflection days. Aides scan faster than they read paragraphs.

Audit your library once a quarter

Pull every PDF you printed last season. Circle any US date, any battle scene, any infantilizing clip art. Replace those slots with Canadian sources your team already trusts. CTRA colleagues and provincial Alzheimer Society chapters often share vetted lists.

Sample month at a glance (October)

Use this skeleton when you build your first Canadian-first month. Adjust names to match your home.

Week	Public board theme	Room card focus	Notes
Week 1	Harvest table photos	Apple scent jar	Low ink, one page

Week 2	Thanksgiving gratitude circle	Postcard to family	Dietary textures flagged
Week 3	Halloween gentle décor	Costume optional sign	Soft lighting in halls
Week 4	Remembrance preview	Poppy colour sheet	Quiet tone, calm images

Post the table in the staff room. Cross off items if outbreak rules change. The calendar still shows intent even when delivery shifts to doorways.

Francophone and newcomer communities

In bilingual towns, families may ask for French on welcome lines. Add them when communications approves. Keep English body text until your pack is fully translated. Lunar New Year, Diwali, Eid, and Hanukkah may matter deeply to residents even when the civic wall chart stays small. List them on an internal diversity sheet so aides have a shared reference.

Newcomer residents sometimes teach staff about holidays Canada skips on post office posters. Invite them to share food stories when kitchen can support safe samples. Record only with consent.

Common mistakes we see in audits

US Thanksgiving in November on the same poster as Canadian Thanksgiving in October. Easter egg hunts with a quiet room sign posted beside them. Christmas assumed for every room. Victoria Day called May two-four with a note that some residents prefer juice or tea. Halloween costumes that infantilize adults.

Fix one mistake per week rather than waiting for a full rebrand. Staff notice steady improvement.

Linking the calendar to BetterCare packs

When your digital pack lists a theme, write the pack name on the calendar square. **Week of 12 Oct: national-thanksgiving pack.** Aides can open HTML on a tablet if print is paused. PDFs sit in the same folder for batch Monday printing.

Your next step: print October only, mark Canadian Thanksgiving on the second Monday, and pencil one provincial flavour note your residents would recognize. Bring that sheet to your next recreation huddle.

BetterCare printable recreation resources for Canadian long-term care, personal care homes, and retirement residences. Share with your team. Adapt for local policy and clinical direction.