

KEY TALKING POINT: Appropriate Supports for Seniors

March, 2020

Issue Statement

Seniors' overall wellness is at risk due to a lack of shared approaches between the various systems and programs that provide supports for those living within the housing sector. The needs of some seniors are not appropriately addressed due to a lack of integrated service delivery, inadequate funding, and inconsistencies in the availability of options in Alberta's communities.

Key Considerations

- A wellness approach focuses on all the social determinants of health, and when wellness is supported, seniors are able to better maintain and flourish within their current housing environment, alleviating pressures and demands on the healthcare system.
- Issues exist where the resident's physician/health care team, other support and service providers, and seniors' housing administrators do not have the appropriate information or communication channels to assist an individual as their needs change. These issues range from a lack of understanding of roles and abilities, to a lack of understanding of available services and resources with regards to a resident's health status, to inconsistencies in how seniors are assessed and referred to various programs and services. This must be resolved to ensure appropriate services are in place for the resident.
- Education is needed on the options available to seniors and the settings that can best support them. When incorrect housing and support options are recommended, it exacerbates resident and family confusion, creating situations where residents are discharged with misinformation and misaligned resources.
- Residents that are without appropriate supports are at risk, as are the other seniors that reside in the same building. Considerations must be given for safety and mental health of all those living and working in a seniors housing community, so that a wellness approach can be maintained for all at-risk seniors.
- Seniors housing can alleviate pressures on the healthcare system. Providing appropriate supports in a housing environment can lead to shorter hospital stays, reduces non-emergency ambulance services, provides cost savings, can address vacancies in rural areas, and allows individuals to rehabilitate and retain as much independence as possible.
- Individuals supported through the housing continuum have a higher success rate of aging well in community and have fewer health incidents, emergency room visits, and require less crisis intervention. It is crucial that a person have the appropriate supports to rehabilitate, heal, and maintain their current level of care without having to move frequently.
- Many seniors across the province are unable to remain in their community of choice, or reside with their spouse, as consistent and predictable services are unavailable, and differing needs of couples cannot be accommodated.
- There is a lack of addictions, behavioural and mental health supports for seniors. Housing staff do not have the professional designations and are ill-equipped to provide services for more profound mental illnesses and responsive behaviours.
- Seniors faced with a traumatic physical diagnosis (e.g., cancer, heart failure, immobility) or a significant life event (e.g., loss, grief, dementia, abuse), often experience mental health issues that need to be addressed in addition to their physical health issues.

Our Asks

- **A clear navigational pathway is needed to guide seniors through their housing and support options.**
- **A tenant supporter worker program must be defined, supported by government and Alberta Health Services, and implemented through community partnerships to provide support to seniors living in government-regulated settings.**
- **24/7 homecare/health care aide support must be available to seniors living in congregate supportive living settings without AHS contracts. This support must be based on an integrated health and housing model where a single basket of services is available across the province, regardless of where a senior chooses to live.**



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Noble Cause: Seniors are empowered to have choice and a life of purpose, wherein they are honoured, valued and respected.