

Media Release

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The Time Is Now to Make Sure Seniors Are In Charge of Their Own Housing and Care Canadian Seniors Living Associations Respond to National Housing Strategy Consultations

By 2041, seniors will comprise nearly a quarter of Canada's population, compared to just under 15% today. Much is made of the challenges associated with this demographic shift, and they are real. In light of federal government priorities, there is an historic opportunity to innovate housing and health care by building a system that puts seniors and families at the center of decision-making for all aspects of their well-being. We should not miss this chance to align these federal policy priorities to produce better social, financial and health outcomes for a generation that helped to build this country.

In theory, there are many housing and support options for seniors. These include: staying in ones' own home; congregate (or group) living that offers communal hospitality services; supportive living that provides higher degrees of services; and memory care.

Seniors want to age well in their community of choice, but face barriers to doing so. This is because services and programs are usually organized around inconsistent and complex governmental, regulatory and organizational imperatives rather than the needs of seniors.

Public and social costs of the *status quo* can be numerous and high. Financially, some seniors are forced into expensive hospital-like settings when less institutional and more home-like environments are more appropriate. Socially, a growing number of middle class families struggle to look after aging parents and children at the same time, and seniors in smaller communities are often forced to move away from friends and family to find adequate housing. There may also be implications for other segments of the housing market, as seniors without suitable alternatives become isolated in large single family homes for too long.

Canada's seniors deserve better. This can be achieved through more effective and coherent policy and programming, at all levels. More specifically, the best way to encourage diverse housing and care options that meet the varied needs of aging Canadians is through a framework that redirects control for senior's housing, supports and care to seniors and their families in a measured and responsible way. France, Germany and Australia have implemented self-directed models of care delivery, while addressing quality control. These models should be explored, adapted and piloted in Canada.

To propose action now is not mere whim. Properly integrated, three of the federal government's key priorities – developing a National Housing Strategy, creating an Innovation Agenda and a National Health Accord with billions of dollars in new funding for home care are aligned to support such a shift.

Other jurisdictions are moving ahead and putting seniors at the center of decision-making in care and living choices. If, as a society, we believe that seniors should have maximum choice and flexibility to choose where to live; be able to live as independently as possible; and retain full rights to manage their lives as they see fit irrespective of whether they require assistance and support, then Canada must take action also. The time to start is today.

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Alberta Seniors Communities & Housing Association (ASCHA), BC Seniors Living Association (BCSLA), Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA), and Regroupement Québécois des Résidence Pour Aînés (RQRA), represent members that employ over 78,000 Canadians. Their member residences are home to more than 220,000 Canadian seniors. In 2009, they formed the Canadian Alliance for Seniors Living (CASL), through which they collaborate within the context of a national organization.